

A black and white photograph of Alfred Hitchcock, dressed in a dark suit and tie, standing in a library. He is holding a straight razor in his right hand, with the blade extended. The background is filled with bookshelves containing numerous books.

LESLIE H. ABRAMSON

# Hitchcock and the Anxiety of Authorship

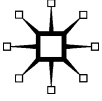


HITCHCOCK AND THE ANXIETY  
OF AUTHORSHIP

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Leslie H. Abramson

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For Arthur  
and  
for our sons, Gabriel and Benjamin  
with my deepest love

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## INTRODUCTION



### SELF-REFLEXIVITY IN HITCHCOCK'S CINEMA AND STRUGGLES OF AUTHORSHIP

In the climactic scene of *Blackmail*, the unsavory Tracy, pursued by the police as the presumed murderer of a painter, threads his way through the British Museum. Slinking past glass cases filled with antiquities, racing through galleries of statues and sarcophagi, he advances among the collections then lowers himself down a rope past an immense Egyptian sculpture of a pharaoh's head and proceeds to the library, where he slips between the crammed bookstacks. The shady figure emerges, at last, on the roof of this bastion of imperialist culture, scaling its dome until he reaches the apex, at which point a pane of glass collapses from under him and he plummets to his own ruin.

The landscape through which Hitchcock navigates in the course of bringing England's first talkie to its climax at the pinnacle of British civilization is a virtual travelogue of culture. *Blackmail* moves from conversation about current films to tours of an artist's studio and the British Museum, shifts its gaze from ancient statues to the recurrent image of a court jester, and in a single scene alchemizes the high arts of nude figure painting and ballet into pornography. Situating itself within and subsuming the broadest cultural spectrum, this 1929 film additionally alludes to vulgar jokes in its reworking of the one about the young woman invited up to an artist's studio—whereupon the naive yet coquettish protagonist is, in fact, sexually assaulted—and references theater through the casting of well-known stage actor Cyril Ritchard as the queerly lascivious painter with an uncontrollable urge to play piano and sing popular songs when aroused.

This geography of artistic self-consciousness is the terrain that Hitchcock's work—for all its tourism of such exotic locations as Saint Moritz, Rio de Janeiro, Monte Carlo, Marrakesh, and the foreheads of presidents atop Mt. Rushmore—never departed. From his earliest English silent films to his last Hollywood features, Hitchcock wove his plots through such venues of classical art and modern mass entertainment as concert halls, theaters, fairgrounds, museums, art galleries, music halls, and cinemas. His films are populated by playwrights, actors, singers, artists, songwriters, ballet dancers, circus troupes, chorus line kickers, variety performers,

and musicians. Set against the backdrop of the world of art and performance, Hitchcock's thrillers repeatedly demarcate and contemplate the cultural status of cinema and intensely scrutinize its practices and contexts, reflecting on the constellation of influences at work shaping and reshaping this medium that changed so perceptibly in the course of his 50-year career.

Taking as its ground of investigation Hitchcock's work from his original British films of the 1920s to his final American productions of the 1960s and 1970s, this book examines how the director's oeuvre constitutes an extended, ever-shifting meditation on the issues and conditions of authorship in cinema. The pages to follow explore how his films, situated repeatedly in literal and figurative sites of the art and enterprise of visual culture, articulate a vision of authorship that is elaborate and often intensely troubling. Through images of dramatic production, exhibition, and reception—in stage performances and behind-the-scenes machinations, the formulation and oversight of plots by those representing criminal and governmental organizations or private interests, the pretenses and enactment of schemes by role players on both sides of the law, the gazes and conjunctive interventions of beholders attending public entertainments or clandestinely peering through cameras and peepholes—Hitchcock's work delineates and examines the constellation of figures and forces wielding formative agency in cinema. Contemplating creative powers and contestations of dramatic authority, Hitchcock's films present recurrent figurations of those occupying the positions of director, actor, and audience. This book investigates how, through allegories of authorship, Hitchcock's work portrays the complicated, serially conflicting roles played by these key figures in continual reflections on the complex of dramatic agency from aesthetic, cultural, commercial, institutional, psychological, and moral perspectives. Tracing how these representations developed and changed through the course of his career, this study conjunctively distinguishes how Hitchcock's discourse locates cinema within the spectrum of fine art and mass entertainment, comments on shifting aesthetics and contextual conditions, and contributes to cultural, industrial, and social debates regarding the medium.

The chapters to follow not only coalesce and analyze the myriad images and allegories of cinema production, exhibition, and reception throughout Hitchcock's oeuvre; they reveal how Hitchcock's work challenges—even explodes—many long-held assumptions about the director. In actuality *contesting* his reputation as the exemplar of auteurism, self-reflexivity is a means by which Hitchcock's films much less assert than repeatedly deny the director's authorial power. Although Hitchcock's popular and critical reputation as the dominant creative force behind his films, originating during his English period with a great deal of help from publicity texts and formally established by *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics in the 1950s, has endured through myriad strains of criticism in the decades to follow, allegorically his work stridently refutes auteurist interpretations. As examined in Part I, his films present portraits of the director as a figure of contested empowerment or disempowerment embodied by numerous characters, such as Mr. Verloc in *Sabotage*, T. R. Devlin in *Notorious*, Scottie Ferguson in *Vertigo*, and Norman Bates in *Psycho*—all of whom are both victimizers and victims, serving the unsavory aims of larger institutions while thrusting distasteful parts or positions on role players. In turn, as discussed in Part II, the many actor-figures who populate his work—among whose

numbers include Richard Hannay in *The 39 Steps*, Roger Thornhill in *North by Northwest*, “Dr. Edwardes” in *Spellbound*, and Marnie Edgar in *Marnie*—are dangerously subversive individuals whose use of everything from scripted performance to improvisation not only allows them to construct, thwart, or advance transgressive plots, but threatens to sabotage everything from cultural, governmental, and domestic institutions to narrative conventions of classical cinema. Complicating the authorial ambitions of both, the audience, explored in Part III, is frequently represented as an aggressive, menacing entity and the site of dramatic agency from which emerges the force to create or manipulate plot and performance in such films as *The Ring*, both versions of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *Rear Window*, *Strangers on a Train*, and *The Birds*.

Within such paradigms of dramatic production as spy schemes and plots to otherwise formulate, enact, or solve crimes, authorship in Hitchcock’s films is allegorized as more than a struggle among those occupying the positions of director, role player, and audience. Creative agency is also represented as the province of contending contexts: institutions (theatrical, criminal, governmental, domestic, legal) specializing in plot construction, enactment, and resolution; long-standing and newly emergent practices of dramatization including genre manufacture, narrativization, and performance styles; and milieus of reception spanning venues of boisterous, intrusive, or distractive spectator behavior from the fairground to the theater. These competing forces and conditions repeatedly vie for authorial jurisdiction within Hitchcock’s thrillers.

Just as Hitchcock’s work locates issues of cinema authorship within the broad contexts of production, exhibition, and reception, so, too, does this book examine self-reflexivity in his cinema as both a product and expression of the schism between his doctrines of directing and the conditions in which his releases were created. From his voluminous offscreen discourse, a clear Hitchcockian ideal position of authorship can be distinguished—that of sovereign authority over film production, display, and spectatorship. This study will distinguish how, within his body of commentary, Hitchcock articulates not only the ideal position but its subjection to continual intervention. In his extensive interview with Francois Truffaut, Hitchcock commented, “In the fiction film the director is the god; he must create life. And in the process of that creation, there are lots of feelings, forms of expression, and viewpoints that have to be juxtaposed. We should have total freedom to do as we like” (102). As will be discussed in chapter 1, in formulating the ideal, Hitchcock was strongly influenced by the theories of Soviet director V. I. Pudovkin, who defined the role of the director as that of unmitigated jurisdiction over cinema production necessary to create an artwork exerting complete control over the audience. Yet, the understanding that numerous elements and perspectives “have to be juxtaposed” by a lexically undesignated entity, and the equivocal “should have total freedom,” is equally critical to Hitchcock’s discourse. The introductions to Parts I, II, and III delineate from his considerable body of nonfictive writings and interviews a distinct, multifaceted Hitchcockian concept of authorship, poetics of cinema artistry, and methodological approach addressing, respectively, the positions of the director, performer and performance, and audience. Collectively, this discourse articulates the tensions between the vision of absolute control over the aesthetics and operations of cinema production and the plethora of challenges that, in opposition to

his critical reputation, contest his singular authorship. Hitchcock's media discourse frequently bemoans the clout wielded by studios, actors, filmgoers, literal agencies of reception (e.g., censorship boards), and industry practices, among myriad forces associated with the commercial institution of cinema—together constituting the constraining and subversive cultural, historical, artistic, social, institutional, and industrial conditions of dramatic production.

The contexts within which Hitchcock's work was produced, and whose complexities and conflicts his films so distinctly articulate, changed dramatically in the course of his career. Reflecting the metamorphosis of the British and American film industries from the 1920s through the 1970s, the shifting allegories of Hitchcock's cinema comment on varying pressures of commercialism, producers, the studio system, classical Hollywood cinema, the star system, classical and emergent styles of performance including Method acting, and spectatorial agency including modern fan culture. Further, his work considers the critical impact of the changing geopolitical milieu, for example, conditions of war, its spectre and aftermath, rendering the entire world a domain of dramatic production. The dialectics between Hitchcock's idealist concept of creative autonomy and the serially acknowledged, ever-shifting confluence of conditions under which his work was produced and received formulates the backdrop for the book's analyses of Hitchcock's films as articulations of and commentaries on the creative struggles that constitute cinema authorship.

### HITCHCOCK AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AUTHORSHIP THEORY

The dilemma that presents itself with particular clarity in Hitchcock studies in the wake of auteurism's intentional fallacy and poststructuralism's denials of the filmmaker's authorship is how to theorize creative agency in such a way that accounts for the director's role while resisting overamplification of this figure's jurisdiction. Hitchcock's films constitute truly unique and fascinating sites from which to study this significant issue because they answer the challenge that his cinema so manifestly brings to film criticism. Problematizing theories that locate authorial power either almost entirely in the hands of the director or, conversely, in the grasp of the audience or institutional and industry structures and conventions, Hitchcock's work foregrounds the ubiquitous urges for unmitigated agency, explicit contestations, subversions and collaborations, and tangible determining and containing contexts constantly vying for authorship in cinema.

The problem of pinpointing the source of creative agency in cinema, addressed in such detail throughout Hitchcock's work, has continually troubled theories of authorship. The early genealogy of the concept of film authorship can be described as that of successive efforts to delineate and contain the power of signification within definitions constantly fracturing under the stress of their own rigidity, efforts that to some degree often cohered and ruptured around Hitchcock. Among the directors to surface in the original formulations of and deliberations on auteurism in the 1950s, Hitchcock subsequently remained a central figure of scrutiny and contention in the establishment and continuing reconceptions of cinema authorship theory.

For decades considered the archetypal auteur, Hitchcock was actually an early figure of debate among *Cahiers du Cinéma* editors and contributors as they

conceived auteurism and set out to delineate those directors who merited admission to what would later be called the “pantheon.” In his January 1954 essay “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema,” considered auteurism’s founding declaration, Francois Truffaut designated as “auteurs” those directors who conceived, wrote, and directed their own films, expressing a distinctive personal vision onscreen. Truffaut distinguished between this group and “metteurs-en-scène,” directors who adhered to the French cinema’s “Tradition of Quality” by producing faithful film versions of screenwriters’ scripts, which in themselves were adaptations of literary works by prominent authors. Although those designated by Truffaut as auteurs were French directors, the matter of Hitchcock’s authorial status and problems of the concept of cinema authorship surfaced in the pages of *Cahiers* later that same year. In the introduction to the October 1954 *Cahiers* issue devoted to Hitchcock, Eric Rohmer characterized the director as “the equal of the greatest creators in the history of the cinema,” acknowledging nonetheless, “It is well known that the *Cahiers* team is divided on the Hitchcock case.” Rohmer defends Hitchcock against criticisms challenging the depth of his clearly delineated vision:

I willingly concede to Hitchcock’s critics that our author is indeed a formalist. Even so, we still need to determine whether this appellation is as pejorative as they like to think it is. What, for example, is a formalist painting: a painting without a soul...? Does it mean...that the painter can express nothing except through the intermediary of spatial relations? I see nothing in that undertaking which is incompatible with the very essence of his art... In this sense, a film director could never be too formalist. (40)

At issue was not the coherency of his body of work, but rather whether what was distinctive in form was lacking in profundity.<sup>1</sup> Rohmer would later fill in these blanks when he (together with Claude Chabrol) wrote the first book on Hitchcock, wherein the director was declared a “Catholic auteur” whose work was preoccupied with guilt, moral conflict, and redemption. Rohmer and Chabrol’s *Hitchcock: The First Forty-Four Films*, published in 1957, set out to establish Hitchcock’s “indisputable” status as an auteur, reading his films as the work of “one of the greatest inventors of form in the history of cinema” by which he created a singular “moral universe” (152).

Although auteurism demarcated a space for creative agency in and against cinema’s industrial context, the project of determining the scope of the director’s authorship emerged as highly problematic. Much as the honorific “auteur” was conferred on a select group of directors because their work bore the stamp of a distinctive vision despite laboring under the conditions of studio production, critics soon began to acknowledge that a certain confluence of influences and forces, both internalized and external, must be factored into any discussion of signification in cinema. In his 1957 *Cahiers du Cinéma* essay “La Politique des Auteurs,” André Bazin issued his own clarification of the term, challenging the legitimacy of applying to directors the romantic notion of the artist as solitary progenitor of an artwork:

The individual transcends society, but society is also and above all *within* him. So there can be no definitive criticism of genius or talent which does not first take into consideration the social determinism, the historical combination of

circumstances, and the technical background which to a large extent determine it . . .

But *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *Europe 51*, and *Bigger than Life* are contemporary with the paintings of Picasso, Matisse, and Singier! Does it follow that one should see in them the same degree of individualization? I for one do not think so . . .

The cinema is an art which is both popular and industrial. These conditions, which are necessary to its existence, in no way constitute a collection of hindrances—no more than in architecture—they rather represent a group of positive and negative circumstances which have to be reckoned with. (22)

Singling out the work of Hitchcock (as well as that of Roberto Rossellini and Nicholas Ray), Bazin redefined cinema authorship as a site in which the director's creative agency takes place within, and evinces the influence of, a series of contexts that themselves generate meaning. Unlike Truffaut, who valorized auteurs because they articulated their unique visions on screen despite the homogenizing pressures of the industry, Bazin expressed an appreciation of the industry's authorial agency: "The American cinema is a classical art, but why not admire in it what is most admirable, i.e. not only the talent of this or that filmmaker, but the genius of the system, the richness of its ever-vigorous tradition, and its fertility when it comes into contact with new elements" (27).

Although Bazin acknowledged Hitchcock's mastery of form and virtuosic technical skills,<sup>2</sup> he found him to be a markedly commercial director, one whose work amounted to relatively insubstantial entertainment rather than penetrating art. Bazin's judgment of Hitchcock as a lesser director in earlier essays published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* and elsewhere was based not only on what he perceived to be the director's lack of depth but, in opposition to his "La Politique" claims, on the visible signature of the industry on his oeuvre. Paraphrasing the director in "Hitchcock vs. Hitchcock," his 1954 *Cahiers* account of their interview, Bazin pointedly recounts how Hitchcock acknowledged his capitulation to the capitalist enterprise of cinema: "it is still essential for a film to bring in more than it costs; the director is responsible for other peoples' money, a great deal of money, and he has a duty, in spite of everything, to be commercial. Hitchcock told me that his 'weakness' lies in being conscious of his responsibility for all this money" (148).

In "La Politique," Bazin invoked Hitchcock to express his concern about the implications of the term "auteur" as applied by *Cahiers* writers not only to designate an individual but as an unconditional valuation of the director's oeuvre: "So it is that Hitchcock, Renoir, Rossellini, Lang, Hawks, or Nicholas Ray, to judge from the pages of *Cahiers*, appear as almost infallible directors who could never make a bad film" (20). If Hitchcock and other favored *Cahiers* filmmakers were to be considered auteurs, according to Bazin, there must nonetheless be a way to objectively judge their individual releases. In his efforts to allow for the privileging of the agency of contexts and conditions that could explain the production of an inferior film by an auteur and exceptional film by a lesser talent, Bazin constructed a space for authorship that began to detach the director from his work.<sup>3</sup>

Even American critic Andrew Sarris, the chief advocate of auteurism in its purest form, grappled with the rigidity of the concept in his consideration of Hitchcock's

cinema. Much as he propagated the notion of the director's sole progenitorship and selected his pantheon of auteurs, which prominently included Hitchcock, on the basis of visible personal signatures on screen, Sarris nonetheless conceded that signification could not be attributed to an individual unmarked by external forces. In his 1962 reply to Bazin's "La Politique," Sarris admitted: "the artist does not spring from the idealized head of Zeus, free of the embryonic stains of history" ("Notes" 40). Sarris was, however, reluctant to identify the nature of these "stains" or to acknowledge their influence, claiming, "I still find it impossible to attribute X directors and Y films to any particular system of culture . . . If directors and other artists cannot be wrenched from their historical environments, aesthetics is reduced to a subordinate branch of ethnography" (40). Nonetheless, Sarris' account of his struggles with Hitchcock evinces the difficulties of theorizing authorship as the province of the filmmaker without accounting for context.

I have always felt a cultural inferiority complex about Hollywood. Just a few years ago, I would have thought it unthinkable to speak in the same breath of a "commercial" director like Hitchcock and a "pure" director like Bresson . . . After years of tortured reevaluation, I am now prepared to stake my critical reputation . . . on the proposition that Alfred Hitchcock is artistically superior to Robert Bresson by every criterion of excellence and, further, that, film for film, director for director, the American cinema has been consistently superior to that of the rest of the world. (41-2)

Distinguishing Hitchcock as an exemplar of the agency of the director within Hollywood cinema, Sarris acknowledges the industrial-commercial institution as a force of signification.

Specifying that which threatened to undermine Hitchcock's authorial status, Sarris and other auteurist critics implied the presence of yet another domain of influence exerting creative agency in the director's work. In his designation of Hitchcock as a "commercial" director and 1968 description of the filmmaker as one whose "reputation has suffered from the fact that he has given audiences more pleasure than is permissible for serious cinema" (*American Cinema* 58), Sarris suggested the pressures of the spectator. Sarris' work thereby (although not alone) points toward the theorization of the domain of reception as a creative force.

In his 1965 book *Hitchcock's Films*, Robin Wood attempted to put to rest the contentious issue of whether commercialism undermined critical claims of the director's auteurism by ambitiously comparing Hitchcock to Shakespeare. Wood argues that Hitchcock, like Shakespeare, is a popular artist, whose medium of Hollywood cinema, like the latter's Elizabethan drama, is inherently commercial. Wood considers the visible pressures of public appeal on Hitchcock's work to be less a vulgarizing condition of cinema production than a creatively invigorating conjunction between filmmaker and filmgoer: "what one does not want either Shakespeare or Hitchcock deprived of is precisely the richness their work derives from the sense of living contact with a wide popular audience" (58).<sup>4</sup> In his auteurist study of Hitchcock's films, Wood finds the "richness" of the director's work in a series of significant, yet often morally disturbing, themes that resonate with universal meaning and derive power through spectator identification with the protagonists.



In Peter Wollen's attempt to recast auteurism's romantic notions of the director-progenitor in the more objective, "scientific" terms of structuralism in the 1970s, Hitchcock resurfaced as both an exemplar of established authorship theory and a figure of rupture. Contending again with the potent context of the highly commercialized American film industry as that which poses the most serious challenge to the practice and theorization of cinema authorship, Wollen contended in his 1972 addendum to *Signs and Meanings in the Cinema*,

What the *auteur* theory argues is that any film, certainly a Hollywood film, is a network of different statements, crossing and contradicting each other, elaborated into a final "coherent" version . . . [In some] cases . . . it is possible to decipher, not a coherent message or world-view, but a structure which underlies the film . . .

The structure is associated with a single director, an individual, not because he has played the role of artist, expressing himself or his own vision in the film, but because it is through the force of his preoccupations that an unconscious, unintended meaning can be decoded in the film, usually to the surprise of the individual involved. The film is not a communication, but an artefact which is unconsciously structured in a certain way. (167–8)

In his reformulation of auteurism, Wollen finds himself struggling uncomfortably with Hitchcock and others as he theorizes that the director's unconscious (rather than willful determination) collaborates with the external, industrial context also barely within this individual's control, constituting authorship:

It is wrong, in the name of a denial of the traditional idea of creative subjectivity, to deny any status to individuals at all. But Fuller or Hawks or Hitchcock, the directors, are quite separate from "Fuller" or "Hawks" or "Hitchcock," the structures named after them, and should not be methodologically confused. There can be no doubt that the presence of a structure in the text can often be connected with the presence of a director on the set, but the situation in the cinema, where the director's primary task is often one of coordination and rationalisation, is very different from that in the other arts, where there is a much more direct relationship between artist and work. It is in this sense that it is possible to speak of a film auteur as an unconscious catalyst. (168)

The case of Hitchcock exemplified the fundamental contradiction of Wollen's auteur-structuralism. As many have argued, this theory, which attributed certain primary antinomies to the work of particular directors, simultaneously (by characterizing the binary oppositions as universal "unconscious" structures) denied the director's intentional agency. These strands—applying psychology to a structuralist study of authorship and disengaging the notion of individual control from the production of meaning in Hitchcock's cinema—recombined in the work of Raymond Bellour, proving additionally problematic.

Merging semiotics and structuralism with psychoanalysis, in the late 1960s through the 1970s, Raymond Bellour scrutinized Hitchcock's work through the lens of enunciation. Explaining his position in a 1979 interview with Janet Bergstrom, Bellour cited the influential structuralist-semiotic work of Christian Metz, who (drawing on Lacanian psychoanalytic theory) described the enunciativ

process of classical Hollywood cinema as complicity between the “seeing agency of the film itself as discourse, as the agency which *puts forward* the story and shows it to us” (Metz 96) and the spectator placed in the position of “seeing agency” by masked traces of film production<sup>5</sup>:

Metz... has shown that the fiction film is a film that always tends to disguise itself as story by effacing its own marks of enunciation. But I think it's important to point out that this effacement, which can be more or less strong (in the American cinema, it's probably least strong in the films of Hitchcock), is precisely the means... whereby a strongly marked process of enunciation manifests itself, which defines and structures a certain subject of desire. (Bergstrom 94)

Bellour's work consequently proves problematic because, as Sandy Flitterman-Lewis points out, “although he theorizes the place of cinematic enunciation as a *position*—not to be confused with the specific individual filmmaker—his most illuminating analyses are based on the work of that consummate auteur... Alfred Hitchcock” (15).

Grappling with issues of signification and the director's position, Bellour's Hitchcock criticism identifies and implies varying positions of enunciation. Shifting from consideration of Hitchcock's work as an exemplification of classical Hollywood cinema to indices (within and among those considerations) of the director's status as not only determined but individualistically determining, the theorist fluctuates between repressing and connoting the filmmaker's agency. Bellour indicates this predicament in the Bergstrom interview, as he flexes the definition of “enunciator” in opposite directions:

What I'm trying to do by insisting on enunciation is to show that a certain subject is speaking under certain conditions in particular films. This logic of enunciation can more or less correspond to the category designated by the name and the work of an author (it certainly corresponds perfectly in the case of Hitchcock and Lang). But it can also apply much more generally to a genre or to the production of a given company at a specific moment in history. (100)

Bellour explores the structuring operations of the conjoined phallogentric systems of classical Hollywood cinema and classic psychoanalytic dramas (the Oedipal journey) in which, as Judith Mayne notes, his work “demonstrate[s] that classical narrative produces a variety of ruptures, deviations, and crises only to recuperate them in the name of a hierarchical closure or resolution... [and displays] that the cinematic apparatus works with great efficiency to channel all desire into male, oedipal desire” (102).

Drawn to occasions of self-reflexivity in his extensive examinations of Hitchcock's cinema, Bellour delineates facsimiles of the filmmaker onscreen. He distinguishes characters who symbolically assume and echo the determined enterprise of the director as a “fetishistic operation” of scopie desire for the woman, and further turns to the more distinct authorial presence of Hitchcock marked by cameos. In “To Enunciate” (1977), Bellour examines Mark's first appearance in *Marnie* as a “relay” for the desiring operation of the director in “the trajectory of enunciation permitted by the camera-look” (222), wherein the character's recollective gaze

is followed by a shot of Marnie in which the attendant Hitchcock (watching the title character stride down a hotel corridor) “asserts himself as enunciator” (228). Studying this and other Hitchcock cameo appearances, Bellour finds a manifest “authorial signature” at precisely the moment in which the possessive “film-wish is condensed” (224), a signature that concurrently inscribes Hitchcock in the mechanism of masculine fantasy that constitutes cinema. Associated challenges with regard to constructions of authorship had been manifested in Laura Mulvey’s seminal 1975 feminist-psychoanalytic essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” The essay, as Kaja Silverman observes, “positions Hitchcock as the speaking subject of his films” (205); dually, Mulvey foregrounds his work as representative of the phallogentric authorship of classical Hollywood cinema, wherein the jurisdictional male gaze, transferred from the male protagonist to the audience, disempowers the woman, who bears the menace of castration.

A later approach to authorship that again problematically invoked Hitchcock with regard to spectatorial operations was posed by David Bordwell. In the 1980s, Bordwell advanced cognitivism, a shift described by D. N. Rodowick as “turn[ing] from psychoanalytic theories of the subject to the study of filmic comprehension as grounded in empirically delimitable mental and perceptual structures” (1113). Bordwell’s alternative was to study signification as a vigorous conjunction between spectator and spectacle. Outlining what he terms a “Constructivist theory of aesthetic activity” in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985), Bordwell asserts, “The artwork is necessarily incomplete, needing to be unified and fleshed out by the active participation of the perceiver” (32). According to Bordwell’s cognitive model, the spectator applies the schemata of narrative comprehension, physical perception, and life experience via prototype narratives to construct a “meaningful story” from the film. Although semantically repressing the director from his theoretical account of how meaning is created in cinema, Bordwell nonetheless acknowledges a coherent controlling consciousness imbuing each film with a particular meaning: “The artwork is made so as to encourage the application of certain schemata” on the part of the spectator (32).<sup>6</sup> Drawn, as so many of his predecessors, to Hitchcock (and, like Bellour and Mulvey, to self-reflexivity in Hitchcock’s work), Bordwell demonstrates his theory by analyzing *Rear Window*, wherein, noting the film’s manipulative power, he observes that the work “asks us to generate several distinct sorts of hypotheses” (41). These hypotheses, he observes, can be attributed to the spectator’s knowledge of particular Hitchcockian narrative schemata: “The murder hypothesis, however unlikely in real life, is highly likely in a Hitchcock film” (42). In the case of Hitchcock, Bordwell thereby suggests an association in which the role of the spectator is delineated as that of performing certain operations scripted by the director’s singular cinema.

The resistances of Hitchcock’s work to containment in authorship theory in essence mirrors its own representations of authorial intention, agents and agencies, disruptions, and thoroughgoing contraventions by which the narratives are continually unsettled. The “film wish” (to adapt Bellour’s term) is a desire for authorship literally and allegorically linked to the longing for, the struggle to achieve, and the failure and frustration in the pursuit of absolute jurisdiction over narrative production. This yearning is unrestrictedly (not limited by gender, social class, socioeconomic status, or profession) evinced by those occupying the positions of

directors, actors, and audiences (as well as producers) who operate in continual conflict, vying for dramatic agency.<sup>7</sup> The desire is manifested, for example, by the efforts of such director-figures as Sir John to shape a personally gratifying conclusion to the Baring case and fashion a play out of the experience in *Murder!* and Scottie Ferguson to gain control over character and plot in *Vertigo*, as well as by the literal producer Madame Sebastian, who constructs and oversees (in the wake of flawed directorial efforts by her son) a plot to murder secret agent Alicia Huberman in *Notorious*, prefiguring the singularly collaborative Mrs. Bates/Norman in *Psycho*. The authorial drive is also exhibited by those whose figurative status is not conventionally assumed to accord them narrative agency—specifically, self-directed and subversive imposters such as Richard Hannay in *The 39 Steps*, Roger Thornhill in *North by Northwest*, Marnie, as well as interventionary spectators including Bob and Jill Lawrence in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, Mrs. Danvers in *Rebecca*, Bruno Antony in *Strangers on a Train*, and L. B. Jefferies in *Rear Window*.

With regard to theories of authorship privileging reception, what gets lost is the relationship of antagonism rather than complicity or collaboration between Hitchcock's cinema and the audience. Beholders in Hitchcock's films are represented not only in an almost uniformly unfavorable light, but as threatening figures and forces of authorial agency harboring the power to generate, transform, or destroy schemes and exhibitions. Further, the suspense genre itself depends upon tension between film and audience. Such tension in Hitchcock's cinema is more than a fundamental requirement of the genre; it is also produced via onscreen marks of hostility. The condition of viewing Hitchcock's films entails subjection to an onslaught of strangulations, stabbings, raging birds, shootings, and pecked and desiccated corpses. Not only do audiences of Hitchcock films suffer visual shocks, but at times are directly assaulted from the screen. In *Spellbound*, Dr. Murchison commits suicide by pointing a gun toward the audience and then firing. The shower scene in *Psycho* is punctuated by close-ups of a hand thrusting a knife through the bottom of the frame, as if into the seats of the movie theater.

### SELF-PORTRAITURE: LINE DRAWINGS

The first writings specifically devoted to the abiding and vexed position of Hitchcockian authorship were the director's own published commentary. Widely acknowledged among scholars as a figure possessing what Thomas Leitch terms a "genius for self-promotion" ("Hitchcock and Company" 238), through the discourse of interviews, his own articles and essays, publicity, and even letters to the editor, Hitchcock in effect became curator of his own image and his oeuvre, furnishing select details of his life and work, describing his theories and methods of directing, and issuing authoritative versions of his films.<sup>8</sup> However, although Hitchcock's print texts and, later, taped interviews resulted in the establishment, propagation, and confirmation of his auteurist status among audiences, reviewers, studios, and film scholars, in actuality a significant measure of his nonfilmic "oeuvre" describes the process of authorship as highly contentious. As will be detailed, the director's press discourse is not nearly as monolithic as has been widely described. Hitchcock's commentary continually laments the incursions of producers, screenwriters, performers, audience expectations, industry conventions, and

myriad other circumventive figures and conditions of filmmaking. For example, Hitchcock's statements reveling in his power over audiences and detailing his strategies of spectator manipulation were counterbalanced by repeated expressions of resentment regarding filmgoers' authority over his work—necessitating, among other concessions, the vulgarization of that which he considered art and corseting him in the suspense genre.

Pulling back the curtain on unsavory realities of cinema production could be a self-serving practice. When his films were poorly received, or when he himself was dissatisfied with the production, Hitchcock specifically disclaimed responsibility and issued his own definitive versions. For example, Hitchcock distanced himself from *Suspicion*, which received a mixed critical response, by asserting that he was obligated to conclude the film with a flawed, incongruously happy ending in which Johnny Aysgarth (played by Cary Grant) is revealed to be innocent of intending to kill his wife. Hitchcock asserted that the mandates of the star system prevented him from concluding the film with Johnny poisoning his wife because the act would contravene Grant's star image (Truffaut 44, 142).<sup>9</sup> In this case, as in others to be discussed, Hitchcock reassigned authorship—to producers, actors, distributors, censors, the audience, industry practices, conventions of classical cinema—dodging the taint of failure and distributing a corrected text, describing the film he had (ostensibly) originally planned to produce.

The purpose of writing his own essays and appearing in interviews, articles, and advertisements—as well as on screen in his own films and trailers in conjunction with formulating a distinctive style—was also to gain power within the industry, a strategy critical to achieving his artistic goals. According to Ivor Montagu, British film editor, writer, director, critic, and consultant on *The Lodger* and other Hitchcock films, at a party in the mid-1920s of those involved in the film industry,

The question came up: "For whom, primarily, do we make films? Whom is it most important to please?" "The public" as an answer was far too simple. Equally obvious and unsatisfying was the alternative, "the boss" . . . Hitch's deeper answer, however, was that you must make pictures for the press. This, he explained quite frankly, was the reason for "the Hitchcock touches"—novel shots that the critics would pick out and comment upon—as well as the trademark he later made his own . . . of a momentary flash appearance in every film he directed . . .

He went on to explain that, if you made yourself publicly known as a director—and this you could only do by getting mention in the press *in connection with your directing*—this would be the only way you became free to do what you wanted. If your name were known to the public you would not be the prisoner of where you happened to be working—you could move on. ("Working" 190)

According to this approach, by gaining star status and positioning his work as an object of audience desire on the basis of its association with the designation "Hitchcock," the director would attain independent professional mobility. Although Hitchcock was able to parlay his celebrity into the ability to "move on" (with varying degrees of success when he arrived) and into contracts granting increasing control over his work, becoming a producer-director in the 1940s, his work and commentary continued to evince the anxiety of authorship.

## RESITUATING HITCHCOCK

Continually contending with issues of authorship, Hitchcock scholarship has both evinced and continued to encounter the challenges of what Miriam Hansen has designated as “the split between theoretical and historical-empirical directions in cinema studies” (*Babel* 6). The early auteurist and psychoanalytic Hitchcock criticism was later counterbalanced by scholarship investigating numerous respects in which Hitchcock’s films were heavily influenced by contextual conditions of English and American culture. One of the earliest and most important of these works is Tom Ryall’s *Alfred Hitchcock and the British Cinema* (1986). Ryall details the milieu of British intellectual film culture, the industry, the studios in which Hitchcock worked, generic tradition, and conventions of classical cinema, among other conditions of popular filmmaking in the 1920s and 1930s. In the introduction, Ryall contends, “In taking the basic terms of the study—a national cinema and a film author—and subdividing them into a range of connotations, my intention was to delineate the complexity of a field of determinations for any given film or body of films” (6). Indicating pitfalls for cultural studies approaches, however, Ryall’s emphasis on authorship as a merging of contexts and conditions leaves little room for the agency of the individual director. Works in the 1990s addressed other nationally allied cultural influences on Hitchcock’s cinema, such as Victorianism (Marantz Cohen) as well as Cold War culture (Corber) and other aspects of American life (Freedman and Millington), approaching Hitchcock more broadly as an importer, purveyor, decoder, and critic of culture.

A number of concurrent and subsequent books turned to empirical operations of authorship by examining Hitchcock’s specific production practices and the particular working conditions and circumstances under which individual films were created within British and, principally, American studios. Books of the late 1980s through the early 2000s—many presenting new archival research—distinguished Hitchcock’s collaborations with screenwriters (Barr on his English period and DeRosa on his association with John Michael Hayes), his working methods in the making of individual films during his American period (Krohn, Aulier), his dealings with producer David Selznick (Leff), and the production of *Psycho* (Rebello), among other subjects. These studies illuminating the creative operations and conditions of producing Hitchcock’s cinema in essence trace the extent to which Hitchcock’s work was conjunctive and contentious rather than as mythologized, monolithically dictatorial.

Most recently, historical/cultural Hitchcock studies exploring influences on his films have turned sustained attention to adaptation.<sup>10</sup> Unpacking the indebtedness of Hitchcock’s cinema to originary works and working processes, adaptation studies have delineated and explored the extent to which authorship of his cinema was based on source texts, collaborations with screenwriters, literature and literary and artistic movements informing his films (e.g., Poe, Dickens, romanticism), and other cases of transliteration. The process has been distinguished by R. Barton Palmer and David Boyd as that of excavating “connection[s] of these films with their written sources [that have] been quite deliberately occulted” (2) and examining Hitchcock’s role as a collaborator and adapter, as well as the degree to which his works have themselves become source texts and influenced subsequent works.

Taken together with the corpus of Hitchcock criticism, from these approaches have emerged, according to Leitch's masterful delineation, a plethora of Hitchcocks—among them, a self-proclaimed authority “in charge of the production,” a “brand name...the Master of Suspense,” “transmedial auteur” ala Disney, “celebrity director,” “cinematic auteur” “collaborative adapter,” a “physical director...and ‘Hitchcock,’ the group of semiotic structures critics assign to his films,” creator of a “canonical oeuvre,” and an instance of “auteurship [as] a performance...of the self-scripted role of the auteur” (“Hitchcock the Author” 4–11).

This study investigates authorship in Hitchcock's cinema, by the implied invitation and explicit representation within his collective fictive and nonfictive work, not as not fragmented but as a condition of constant mobility. The outlines of such an approach have been delineated by Flitterman-Lewis in suggesting an alternative method for conceiving authorship in her study of French feminist cinema.<sup>11</sup> Flitterman-Lewis proposed that authorship can be produced

as a tripartite structure, comprising 1) authorship as a historical phenomenon, suggesting the cultural context; 2) authorship as a desiring position, involving determinants of sexuality and gender; and 3) authorship as a textual moment, incorporating the specific stylistics and preoccupations of the filmmaker. At the same time, each of these components of authorship implies the other two, for they exist in a perpetually dynamic relation. (21–2)

Whereas I explore the “desiring position” of authorship expressed throughout Hitchcock's work as one associated with jurisdiction over dramatic production and not overdetermined or polarized by gender, and would add additional elements to Flitterman-Lewis' structure, the perception of components in continually dynamic association is extremely useful for conceiving Hitchcockian authorship. Taking the above paradigm a step farther, I find authorship in Hitchcock's cinema as that which is constituted by never-suspended animation, the ceaseless kinetics among multiple dramatic forces. In other words, the dynamics themselves constitute authorship because the text is not so much a “moment” but, as represented in Hitchcock's work, a series of wishful, jurisdictionary, contested, subversive, multiply-constructed moments of drama production. Hitchcock's work vividly delineate and evinces a kinetics of authorship in the continual creative conflicts among key figures and positions in dramatic production, exhibition, and reception and the contexts of cultural, historical, industrial, institutional, and aesthetic conditions and circumstances under which cinema is produced.

### FILLING THE GAP

By examining issues of authorship addressed in Hitchcock's cinema, this book fills a gap in Hitchcock studies. Although the self-reflexive dimension of his work has frequently been observed and explored on many occasions with regard to individual films—most frequently via psychoanalytic considerations—for example, voyeurism in such key later films as *Vertigo*, *Rear Window*, and *Psycho*—the considerable body of Hitchcock scholarship has thus far lacked a full-length study coalescing and examining the plethora of images and allegories of cinema production, exhibition,

and reception throughout his oeuvre and investigating these figurations in the context of his own concepts and methodological statements on authorship. Further, past analyses addressing self-reflexivity, albeit valuable contributions to Hitchcock criticism, have most often perceived his work as self-portraits of auteurism rather than, as presented here, constant contestations of individual authorship.

The earliest book to consider images and issues of self-reflexivity in Hitchcock's work on a sustained basis was Maurice Yacowar's 1977 *Hitchcock's British Films*. In the course of identifying and examining the social facets and implications of his work as well as Hitchcock's style, technique, and issues of morality, among other facets of his early cinema, Yacowar contemplates the films' reflections on the role of the artist, the place of art in culture, and cinema's status as an art form. In accord with Robin Wood's portrayal of Hitchcock as a commercial artist, Yacowar observes how the director's oeuvre depicts the beneficial possibilities of creating art within the context of popular culture and stresses the importance of maintaining a vigorous connection between art and life.

In an appendix devoted to Hitchcock's cameos, Yacowar carries his auteurist position to an extreme, stating, "his appearances depend upon our taking him as the creator of the world in film, the maker, the god" (271). William Rothman later took up just this thread in his 1982 book *Hitchcock—The Murderous Gaze*, describing Hitchcock as a divine authorial force whose controlling apparatus is the film camera: "it is the instrument of his presentation to us, his 'narration,' and manifests his godlike power over the world of the film, a world over which he presides" (7). Rothman examines five Hitchcock films as, in part, a struggle for dramatic agency between the fictive characters and the director; the characters attempt to take on authorial roles yet ultimately succumb to the power of Hitchcock, who continually reasserts his control over the film through the camera. Although Rothman acknowledges that issues of authorship are fully at stake in Hitchcock's films, he disregards the broader contexts and conditions in which they were produced and upon whose creative agency his work comments. Further, whereas Rothman argues that the diegetic struggles for agency are consistently won by the director as represented by the extratextual force of the camera, I find that director-figures within Hitchcock's allegories of authorship consistently lose this battle.<sup>12</sup>

Donald Spoto's valuable biography, *The Dark Side of Genius*, also addresses Hitchcockian self-reflexivity. Yet Spoto does so by assuming an unmitigatedly direct and intimate connection between the director's life and his work, often reading the filmmaker's personal history and private desires into his characters' conditions and longings. Although his work contains useful insights, such an interpretive method crosses into perilous spaces of presumption.<sup>13</sup> As opposed to such auteurist and autobiographical readings, Tom Cohen's work raises issues of reflexivity and authorship through a highly deconstructionist approach, identifying the "secret agents" of cryptonomies inscribed in "writing systems" throughout Hitchcock's cinema. Cohen delineates the myriad lexical and graphic figures and signs, repeated markings and fragmentations of phrases comprising "signature systems . . . that connect not only all of Hitchcock's works past or to come . . . but also the manner in which cinema intervenes, in Hitchcock's purview, in the teletechnic histories and global wiring to come" (*Hitchcock's Cryptonomies*, I xv). Such systems, referencing the production, practice, and cultural position of cinema in the broadest terms of



postmodernism, deny Hitchcock's authorship while registering his voice through an almost unwitting reflexivity. Cohen's enlightening work thus grapples with the challenges of reading self-referentiality without accounting for intention insofar as the systems "travers[ing] his work," those "recalling the experience of cinema to the conditions of its conjuring" are nonetheless designated as "Hitchcock's signature effects" (I xvi).

Ironically, of course, this study assumes a distinct measure of authorship on Hitchcock's part in order to make the case that his work articulates a decidedly antiauteurist perspective. As argued in the previous pages and those to come, I find a definite coherency of expression and preoccupation in his cinema's repeated allegorizations of the contexts and conditions of cinema production, exhibition, and reception, the consistent mimetic and analogical representations of the figures and entities endowed with dramatic authority, and the ongoing contestations among them. Hitchcock's work clearly and with palpable anxiety announces the presence of these myriad agents and agencies of authorship while recording the accents and tones of their authorship in his cinema.

Hitchcock's films thereby open up possibilities that have never completely been allowed Hitchcock: full admission of the complex of authorship and its dynamics. Hitchcock's work and his nonfictive discourse manifestly acknowledge its ubiquitous formative and fully mobilized signficatory presences. From the outset, his films candidly framed a space for yearnings, exertions, contraventions, disputations, and refutations of authorship never yet closed. Accordingly, Hitchcock's cinema not only extends an invitation but entreats us to continually consider the tensions of dramatic agency—that in which the subject of magnetizing suspense, the true thriller, is authorship itself.

PART I



COMPROMISING POSITIONS: THE DIRECTOR

# CHAPTER 1



## INTRODUCTION

In his essay “What Is an Author?” Michel Foucault observes,

An author’s name is not simply an element of speech . . . Its presence is functional in that it serves as a means of classification. A name can group together a number of texts and thus differentiate them from others . . . the fact that a number of texts [are] attached to a single name implies that relationships of homogeneity, filiation, reciprocal explanation, authentication, or of common utilization [are] established among them. Finally, the author’s name characterizes a particular manner of existence of discourse. Discourse that possesses an author’s name is not to be immediately consumed and forgotten . . . (284)

Perhaps no filmmaker more fully comprehended the value of this concept than Alfred Hitchcock. From the outset of his career, the director extended his nominal presence beyond the pictorial sites of title sequences, trailers, movie posters, and advertisements to the discursive spaces of newspapers, trade journals, magazines, and books, where his byline marked a profusion of articles and essays.<sup>1</sup> Circulated concurrently with Hitchcock’s films as early as the 1920s, this assemblage of autobiographical, commentative, and methodological texts—coupled with an unparalleled volume of publicity, interviews, and critical considerations—constituted what functioned, in effect, as the authorship of the auteur, an individual increasingly distinguished as a figure of creative origin, generic designation, and public fascination.

Similar to his cinema, Hitchcock was, during his lifetime, produced as a visual text, a construction of words and images that comprised its own continuity system. The corpus of filmwork bearing Hitchcock’s name was identified, synthesized, and embellished upon as the product of a singular source via its affiliation with not only an ever-expanding body of nonfictive discourse but with the body of the director himself, whose graphic image (including the witty pen-and-ink self-portrait)—exhibited in multiple venues of the media, from lobby displays and cameo appearances to photo spreads and television programs—amplified and mass-distributed his authorial presence.<sup>2</sup> Together with the filmmaker’s nearly monogamous attachment to the suspense genre, these figurations collectively endowed his cinema with

distinction and cohesion among popular and critical audiences, ensuring that the signifier “Hitchcock” would be associated with a unique oeuvre as progenitor, director, and star.

The dissemination of these signs, signatures, and signature images served the practical purposes of a filmmaker who sought both creative autonomy and mainstream success within the studio cultures of Great Britain and Hollywood, establishments often highly invested in his commodification as a unique authorial figure. Yet, the proliferation of Hitchcock’s presence and the multiplicity of texts to which it was attached functioned as something more than an absolute assertion of authorship, a symptom of self-aggrandizement, and a virtuosic display of publicity acumen. Rather than a certification of overarching control or a guarantee of his singular artistic vision, Hitchcock’s screen work and his print discourse constitute multifaceted examinations of the director’s position within the complex of cinema production, texts that recurrently contested his image as an auteur.

As early as 1927, when his first five silent films were released across Great Britain,<sup>3</sup> Hitchcock publicly registered the tension between his longing for authorial independence and the constriction of contextual forces, a dynamic that would preoccupy his cinema and print discourse manifestly and subtextually for the next 50 years. In a November *London Evening News* article, “Films We Could Make,” the young Hitchcock contended, “[Films] are [directors’] babies just as much as an author’s novel is the offspring of his imagination. And that seems to make it all the more certain that when moving pictures are really artistic they will be created entirely by one man. It often happens today that the author’s story is made into screen form on paper by one man, who may have been overseen by some important executive, filmed by another, cut by another, and edited by another. Suppose novels were produced in this way!” (167) Hitchcock’s vision of creative sovereignty, in which directing, authorship, and cinema’s status as an art (the latter then under cultural debate) are distinctly equated, is articulated as a desiring position and a form of nostalgia. According to his commentary, studio dispersion and compartmentalization of creative functions and jurisdiction undermined the singular authorial agency requisite for the filmmaker’s true artistry and the full actualization of cinema’s potential as an art form.<sup>4</sup>

In Hitchcock’s 1938 essay “Director’s Problems,” he attributed the subversion of the implicit and potential aestheticism of both the individually authored film and the medium to the industry’s commercialism and accordant mandates of strict adherence to conventions of classical narrative cinema.

And here we come to the biggest problem of the cinema—that its own power is automatically its own weakness. The power of universal appeal has been the most retarding force of the motion picture as an art. In the efforts of the maker to appeal to everyone, they have had to come down to the common simple story with the happy ending; the moment they begin to become imaginative, then they are segregating their audience. . . . The cost of making a picture is so great, and there are so many aspects of the business—world markets, American markets, and so on—that we find it difficult to get our money back, even for a successful film with a universal appeal, let alone in films that have experimented with the story or the artist. That is the thing that has kept the cinema back. I should say it has pretty well gone a long way to destroy it as an art. (190–1)