Cinematic Logic and the Function of the Cut

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It is when you have found the word that concentrates around it the greatest number of threads

in the mycellum that you know it is the hidden centre of gravity of the desire in question [...];

the nodal point where discourse forms a hole.

- Jacques Lacan (2008, 28)

It's limitless, I would say, the power of cutting and the assembly of the images.

- Alfred Hitchcock (Bogdanovich and Hitchcock, n.pag)

It is almost as hackneyed as it is contentious to bring up the connection between cinema and psychoanalysis today: to point to their simultaneous birth at the end of the nineteenth century (as if this provided evidence of some primitive kinship); to call attention to their mutual fascination (obsession?) with all things 'Oedipal;' to highlight their shared concern with questions of identification, of ego-ideals and ideal-egos (as well as processes of signification and meaning-production in general)… Simply, the correlation has become – to employ one of Freud's favored terms – thoroughly overdetermined, with parallels and associations (as well as separations and distinctions) too numerous to account for.

Nowhere has this relationship been more vigorously contested than in the discipline of 'film theory' itself, where psychoanalysis – and in particular, *Lacanian* psychoanalysis – has historically exerted a profound influence, providing the 'science' behind many of its most famous texts and concepts (not least those that served to establish the area as a serious academic pursuit in the first place: Baudry's 'apparatus,' Metz's 'imaginary signifier,' Mulvey's 'visual pleasure,' etc.).[1] Indeed, so strong was this alliance that, for a long time (and for good or ill),

many within the discipline effectively understood 'Lacanian theory' and 'film theory' to function as synonyms.[2]

Arguably marking the 'theoretical' apex (or the nadir, depending on one's vantage point) of all of this cine-psychoanalytic scholarship is what has come to be known as the system or the 'logic' of *cinematic suture*. Drawing directly on Jacques-Alain Miller's influential development of Lacan's original concept of 'suture' – viz., "the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse;" or more broadly, "the general relation of lack to the structure" (1977, 25) – 'cinematic suture' essentially describes the process by which the film succeeds (via a series of identifications) in 'suturing,' on the one hand, the spectator to the text, and on the other, spatially or temporally disconnected images and sounds together.[3]

However, in addition to representing the culmination of so-called 'Lacanian film theory,' this oft-misunderstood concept arguably also marks the point at which film theorists came closest to identifying the 'real' intersection of cinema and psychoanalysis – their zero-degree point of commonality – as lying not with the image but rather its *absence*, the place in which the image is (literally) lacking, namely, the *cut itself*. For the whole 'point' of cinematic suture is – in a gesture so intensely Freudian as to appear almost caricatural – precisely to *disavow the cut* through a fetishization of the 'complete' image (where the cut alternatively figures as the 'edit,' the 'frame,' and the 'gap' between the spectator and the screen). In this sense, by adopting the process of suture, individual films actually work to conceal their very *being*, inasmuch as cinema – like psychoanalysis itself – operates, at its most elementary level, according to a 'logic of the cut.'[4] Whence the cinema-psychoanalysis relation can be said to be 'founded' not only *in*, but also *by* the cut.

Yet even if we take this structural co-incision as given, we cannot help but observe a key divergence concerning the relative disposition each area (cinema *and* psychoanalysis) has toward this fundamental concept. For while standard cinematic practice is to conceal the cut

(seeing it as a dangerous wound in need of 'suturing'), psychoanalysis for its part deliberately functions to call attention to it, even going so far as to orient its address around this constitutive scission. Or to put it in more explicitly Lacanian terms: whereas cinema works to construct and conserve the fantasy precisely by *disavowing* its real cuts (thereby maintaining the famous 'formula of fantasy': $\$ \diamond a$), psychoanalysis contrarily seeks to directly attain to the real by *traversing the fantasy along the lines of the cut* (hence: $\$ \diamond a$). So the cut really does mark the 'intersection' of these disciplines; the point where *the one (quite literally) cuts across the other*.

It is moreover to this end that – contrary to what might be reasonably expected – in examining the function of the cut in cinematic logic and its place in the cinema-psychoanalysis relationship, this paper is in fact not so much concerned with the conventional (and emblematically 'Hollywoodian') cinema of suture. Nor, however, do its interests lie with so-called 'arthouse' films that intentionally work to disrupt or even destroy suture (exemplary here being the already over-analyzed work of Jean-Luc Godard).[5] Rather, it takes as its 'object' a cinema that simultaneously traverses and 'cuts across' the thin line separating both camps, providing the comfort of 'imaginary resolution' (which is, after all, the ultimate function of both fantasy and cinematic 'reality' alike)[6] while at the same time undermining (undercutting?) this equilibrium by directly invoking the real in *the form and figure of the cut*.

This properly 'transversal' cinema (in the double sense that it straddles both sides of the suture/anti-suture divide, and that it equally cuts across the registers of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real) is finally provided by none other than the late, great Alfred Hitchcock, whose films not only go to painstaking lengths to stitch together an elaborate tapestry of fantasy (the threads of which are woven both *out of* and *around* a central void; an inner core or 'nodal point' that Hitchcock deliberately *cuts out*), but also, via the function of the cut (together with its Lacanian correlates: the void subject $\$$ and the real object *a*), work to coolly and calmly document its subsequent unravelling.

1. The Hitchcockian Cut Revisited

What is only too obvious is that the real is not an imperforate continuum; that the real is

undoubtedly composed of cuts, up to and far beyond the cuts of language.

- Jacques Lacan (27.5.1959, n.pag)

One can never know too much about Hitchcock.

- Slavoj Žižek (1991, 67)

The final chapter of Slavoj Žižek's acclaimed 'introduction' to Lacanian psychoanalysis through the lens of Hollywood cinema, *Enjoy Your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, begins with the question: "Is there a proper way to remake a Hitchcock film?" (2001a, 195) Žižek's response, which effectively takes up the remainder of the book (though one could reasonably argue that the entirety of his writings on and around film are really an attempt to answer this question), is finally that only two ways are possible, both of which involve a fundamental torsion or 'twist.' The first is essentially to maintain an absolute *formal* fidelity to the original in the manner of Gus van Sant's 1998 remake of *Psycho*, albeit on a stricter, more exhaustive level; one that grants zero concessions for 'artistic license.' The resulting film, Žižek claims, would "achieve the uncanny effect of the double" (2001a, 206), where everything would be "the same – same shots, angles, and dialogue – but nonetheless, on account of this very sameness we would all the more powerfully experience that we are dealing with a totally different film" (2001a, 206): a barely-perceptible but nonetheless unbridgeable gap would emerge, signaled by the numerous inevitable subtle differences locatable in the *mise-en-scène* (choice of actors and acting style, lighting and use of color, film stock, etc.). The second

possibility, according to Žižek, would be to effectively shift the locus of this fidelity from the level of form to that of *content*, expanding the Hitchcockian universe by contrarily staging one of the many alternative scenarios and possibilities that exist simultaneously alongside those enacted in his completed films (such as, for example, remaking 1946's *Notorious* where Ingrid Bergman's character Alicia survives alone; or allowing the truly unspeakable threat present in *Psycho*'s (1960) infamous shower scene – namely, that of the toilet, whose hidden contents in many ways constitute the real locus of the film's horror[7] – to not only materialize, but spill out uncontrollably across the screen, as Francis Ford Coppola did in his 1974 film *The Conversation*).

While we will return to the important question of the 'remake' toward the end of this paper, of immediate interest is the way that each of these procedures of fidelity to Hitchcock's cinema, which we might designate 'formal fidelity' and 'contextual fidelity,' rely on an ostensibly paradoxical logic – one that simultaneously encompasses rupture *and* continuity – namely, a *logic of the cut*. In both instances, a subtle (but no-less absolute) 'cut' is made in the fabric of the film world that both preserves the consistency of this world and radically separates it from its moorings, such that the resulting works are, quite literally, 'cut from' the original (in both the 'associative' and the 'seperative' senses of the term). These (re)constitutive cuts moreover maintain a fidelity to the very nature of cinema. Indeed, this same logic of dis/continuity is intimately, even *ontologically*, linked to film itself, whose mere existence relies, after all, on no less than four variations of the cut, whereby:

- the audio-visual image is first cut from the field of reality (thus providing its base material);[8]
- the act of framing cuts out sections of the visible and the audible while highlighting others (thereby orienting and focusing the spectator's attention);[9]
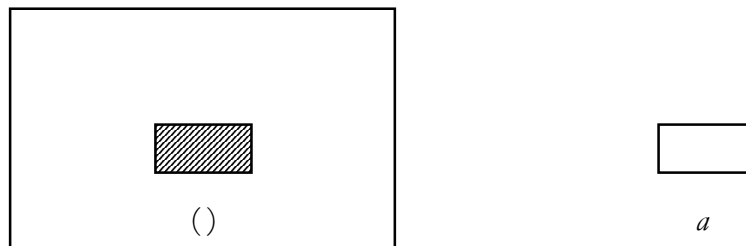
- these carefully curated images are then cut together to constitute a new, heretofore inexistent, continuity (ensuring an essentially *sensible* sequentiality, the generic name for which is 'montage');

- and the resulting work is only held together by virtue of a successive series of internal cuts, namely, by the sequence of gaps or 'interstices' separating each individual frame from the next (without which we would have no film *qua* moving image).

Given that all four of these fundamental cuts, each in their own way, profoundly affect the structure of the cinematic universe – indeed, they alone give rise to it (and to a large extent, *are* it) – yet at the same time they themselves have no 'place' in this universe, each can be said to be *real* in the classical Lacanian sense: radically *dis-placed*, their materiality "resists symbolization absolutely" (Lacan 1991, 66).[10] After all, this peculiar symbolic friction is part and parcel of the very nature of the cut, which is only signified insofar as it is *cut out*, being at once "constitutive of, and at the same time irremediably external to, the discourse which constitutes it" (Lacan 24.6.1959).

This productive excision is in fact common to all of the various terminological 'cuts' strewn throughout the Lacanian corpus, from the 'signifying cut' of language and the institution of the barred or 'split subject' (whose matheme, *$*, visually attests to this structural cleavage), to the unconscious itself – which, according to Lacan, literally *is* "a cut, a rupture that inscribes itself in a certain lack" (1998b, 153, trans. modified) – to the real impossibility of the sexual relation.[11] Indeed, while the cut takes on many different roles and functions over the course of Lacan's teaching, its basic structure (or lack thereof) remains the same, insofar as it always marks a moment of radical *re-orientation*; a point where the *real* makes its commanding presence felt.

The elementary matrix of the cut – or at any rate, the form which most concerns us here – can however be located in Lacan's well-known thesis regarding the infamous *objet petit a* – the 'impossible' object-cause of desire[12] – and its relation to the field of reality, according to which "this field is sustained only by the extraction of object *a*, which nevertheless gives it its frame" (Lacan 2006a, 487). As Jacques-Alain Miller explains (and Žižek quotes in his other early 'introductory' text, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Popular Culture through Jacques Lacan*):

> We understand that the covert setting aside of the object as real conditions the stabilization of reality, as 'a bit of reality'. But if the object *a* is absent, how can it still frame reality?

> It is precisely *because* the object *a* is removed from the field of reality that it frames it. If I withdraw from the surface of this picture the piece I represent by the shaded square, I get what we might call a frame: a frame for a hole, but also a frame for the rest of the surface. Such a frame could be created by any window. So object *a* is such a surface fragment, and it is its subtraction from reality that frames it (1984, 28-9).

Not only does this elementary matrix underlie each of the four cinematic 'cuts' outlined above (viz.: of the audio-visual; of the frame; of montage; and of the interstice), its internal

logic itself displays an undeniable cinematicity (that a tantalizing yet ultimately intangible and constantly receding object serves to frame the field of reality cannot help but call to mind the basic operation of a film).

It is moreover important to emphasize here the structural parallel of subject/object engendered by the cut; a fundamental non-relation which is perfectly encapsulated in Lacan's celebrated formula of fantasy $\$ \lozenge a$ (where the lozenge $\lozenge$ directly represents the cut).[13] As Lacan goes to considerable lengths to demonstrate, the "entire structure [of fantasy] is provided by this cut," insofar as it "isolates a Möbius strip in the field [of reality]" (2006a, 486) that simultaneously cleaves the subject *to* and *from* the object. In point of fact, it is precisely this cut that renders its möbial structure legible: "only the cut reveals the structure of the entire surface, because it is able to detach from it the following two heterogeneous elements [...] noted in my algorithm ($\$ \lozenge a$) of fantasy" (Lacan 2006a, 487), namely, the barred or void subject $\$$ and the real object *a*. Or to continue with Miller's earlier analogy, while cutting out the object *a* gives us 'a frame for a hole,' "the subject, as barred subject – as lack-of-being – *is this hole.* As being, it is nothing but the subtracted bit. Whence the equivalency of the subject and object *a*" (1984, 29; my emphasis). Divergent *and* equivalent, it is the cut which endows the subject/object pair with that most möbial of properties: homogenous heterogeneity.[14]

Returning then to the question which preoccupies us here – namely, that of *cinema* (and in particular, *Hitchcockian* cinema) – it is precisely in this möbial vein that Hitchcock is able to supplement a further foundational cut to the existing four (audio-visual, frame, montage, interstice); a cut that, like the others, is both constitutive and formative of the film itself, but which (unlike the others) simultaneously introduces a noticeable, and fundamentally *determinative* rift in this world, a point of radical *re-orientation* such that it establishes an opening around which everything – plot, image, dialogue, etc. – twists and turns, as though in thrall to some kind of cinematic reverse-singularity: an intra-filmic 'white hole.'[15] And at the

very center of this hole – even (as Miller says) constituting the hole itself – we find none other than the homogenously heterogeneous couple encountered above, namely, the real object (*a*) and the void subject (*$*).

While any number of Hitchcock's films can be shown to exhibit such a distinctive, determinative 'cut,' few have been so perfectly realized as his late masterpieces *Vertigo* (1958) and *Psycho* (1960), and it is for this reason that much of the following two sections will be given over to analyzing these works.

2. The Poetry of Motion (Pictures): Hitchcock with Mallarmé

"The subject encounters itself as a cut or an interval at the end-point of its interrogation. And it is principally in the form of the cut that the object a, *in all its generality, shows us its form."*

\- Jacques Lacan (20.5.1959,)

"To name an object is to suppress three-quarters of the enjoyment [...] which derives from the pleasure of step-by-step discovery; to suggest, *that is the dream."*

\- Stéphane Mallarmé (141)

Before examining these texts, however, it is important to recognize the way that Hitchcock's peculiar cinematic method draws upon the work of one of Lacan's own key references, the great 19th century symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé, whose poetry can equally be shown to be premised on the logic of the cut and its concomitant figures: the real object and the void subject.[16]

The philosopher Alain Badiou (who acknowledges Lacanian psychoanalysis as one of the foremost 'conditions' of his own work), possibly in response to Lacan's own suggestive line of enquiry (in particular in his 1957-8 seminar on 'The Formations of the Unconscious'),[17]

identifies Mallarmé's poetic procedure as constituting two distinct schemas of rupture, which he designates (again, in a likely nod to Lacan) *isolation* and *separation*.[18] In brief, while the former ('isolation') consists in "bringing forth a contour of nothingness that extirpates the given from any nearness to what it is not" – thereby allowing us to pass from the objective 'thing' to "a power of ontological purity" (namely, its underlying 'being') – the latter ('separation') contrarily involves "cutting out, from within the apparent spatial and temporal continuity of experience […] a sort of scene in which all that belongs to it can be inventoried and enumerated," thereby bringing about its "purified consciousness" (Badiou 2008, 60). Otherwise put, 'isolation' involves an *absolute purification* or 'de-relation' (all proximities and connections to the object are progressively suppressed or suspended until we arrive at the ideal purity of the thing-in-itself), whereas 'separation' performs an *absolute subtraction* (the thing itself is cut from its surroundings and gradually brought into heightened focus).[19] (Note that both processes anticipate the elementary Lacanian matrix of the cut as outlined above: in withdrawing the object from its surroundings – either by isolation or separation – we establish a bidirectional frame, or as Miller puts it, "a frame for a hole, but also a frame for the rest of the surface.")

So how exactly does Hitchcock's cinema put these ruptive schemas into play (and more to the point, how do these schemas relate to a supplemental cut that founds the narrative as a whole)? The answer, perhaps unsurprisingly, is to be found in the famous 'objects' that constitute "the very substance of his cinema" (Sarris, 59).[20] Indeed, it is by now standard practice to observe that Hitchcock's films revolve around two diametrically opposed objects:

- on the one hand, we have the famous 'McGuffin', the ostensibly crucial object which, as the director himself explains, turns out to be "nothing at all" (Truffaut and Hitchcock, 139), being little more than "a pure pretext whose sole role is to set the story in motion"

(Žižek 1992b, 6): the Pommard bottles filled with uranium in *Notorious*, the secret clause in *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), the microfilm in *North by Northwest* (1959), the stolen money in *Psycho*, etc.

- on the other hand, there is the apparently ordinary object which comes to attain a position of excessive, even *absolute* significance: the embossed lighter in *Strangers on a Train* (1951), the glass of milk in *Suspicion* (1941), the ring in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), the keys in both *Notorious* and *Dial M for Murder* (1954) …

This second, singular object undoubtedly constitutes the Hitchcockian reformulation of the Lacanian *objet petit a* (i.e. the object-cause of desire that 'frames' reality precisely by being extracted from it, and that sets narrative metonymy in motion): cut from the real and brought into such sharp focus that it threatens to overshadow the film itself, this "fascinating, captivating, bewitching, spellbinding object" (Dolar, 45) at once *transcends* the work and *brings it together* (something highlighted by its frequently serving as an object of exchange, passing from – and thereby *binding* – character to character). Indeed, not only do these objects 'shine' (literally as much as metaphorically) the brightest in his films – Hitchcock famously even went so far as to place a light inside the glass in *Suspicion* to ensure its complete luminosity – but they also effectively come to *determine the film itself*: Judy's pendant unmasks her *as* Madeleine; the lighter ensures that Bruno and Guy's murderous pact holds; if the 'suspicious' milk is poisoned then Jonnie is indeed trying to murder his wife…

Moreover, to return to our Mallarméan 'subplot,' it is precisely by virtue of this real object (*a*) that Hitchcock's films are able to establish a 'scene' (or, as Lacan would have it, a 'frame') wherein everything within it might be 'inventoried and enumerated' (*separation*), as much as one where all extraneous connections can be progressively purged or suppressed (*isolation*). For in the final analysis, there is nothing in the film that is left 'untouched' or

unaffected by this object, meaning its purview constitutes *the (w)hole of the film*, the entire field of its 'reality' (or more accurately: *fantasy*). Simply put, this real object functions as the locus of *all* relations, and is to this end determinative of the work itself: it is the very heart of the montage, its 'object-cause of (narrative) desire' *qua* "hidden centre of gravity" (Lacan 2008, 28), the eye of its metonymic whirl.

Let us take as an example one of, if not *the* most famous of Hitchcock's real objects: the jeweled pendant in *Vertigo* (Figure 1); a film which, to circle back prematurely to Žižek's initial question, is in essence an extended meditation on the idea of the 'remake.'[21] To come straight out with it: this pendant-object functions as a 'brute presence' that simultaneously dissolves the film's consistency (so much so that it momentarily sends its 'hero' mad) and provides its 'suturing' point, bringing the whole of the work into stark relief (finally all of the pieces 'fit').
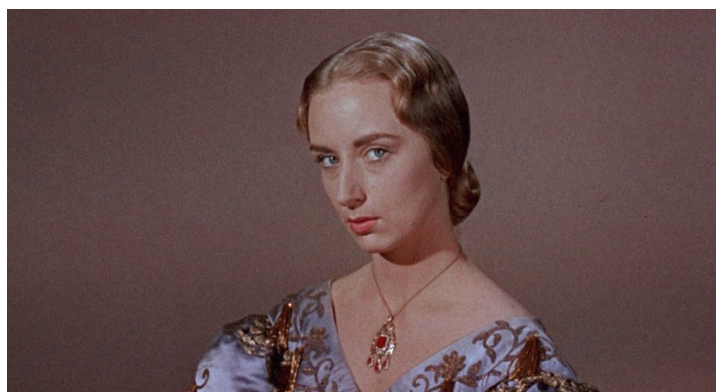

Figure 1. Carlotta Valdes models the jeweled pendent in *Vertigo*.

To properly appreciate this, however, we first need to observe how *Vertigo*'s narrative is itself sharply divided between two spiraling (and fundamentally Mallarméan) trajectories, the one centripetal (the inevitable downward spiral that ends in Madeleine's death and Scottie's coma), and the other centrifugal (the ensuing 'ascension' which culminates in the discovery of the pendant and Judy's final fall). Moreover, while they each operate on different levels and in opposite directions, both stories are at base investigations of the same 'woman,' Madeleine,

someone who *does not in fact exist* (as opposed to Judy, who does); someone who is, for all intents and purposes, *absent* (or more particularly, *void*). Reductively, while the former seeks to deconstruct Madeleine so as to uncover her 'essence,' the latter simply plucks her likeness from the world and gradually constructs her from scratch, bestowing imperfect form upon her perfect idea. Thus we find crystallized in figure of 'Madeleine' the dual Mallarméan themes of *isolation* and *separation*: while the one seeks to gradually unravel her so as to expose her in her purity, the other endeavors to separate her from the world and 'catalogue' her qualities so as to eventually "bring to light a state of the soul" (Mallarmé and Huret, 141).

Standing in the way of Madeleine's direct presentation (whether through Scottie's initial efforts to exorcise Carlotta from Madeleine, or his subsequent Svengali-like attempts to mold Judy into 'Madeleine,' or even Judy's own desire to 'be' Madeleine for him…) is however none other than the pendent *qua* real object (*a*). While in the first, 'isolatory' half of the film, this object metonymically figures Carlotta herself – the 'spirit' forever preventing Madeleine from 'being' Madeleine; the knot that cannot be unraveled, no matter how hard Scottie pulls at it – in the second, 'separative' section, this same object 'reveals' Madeleine (*as* Judy), whilst simultaneously *denying this very revelation* (Madeleine does not really exist; she is a form lacking substance). In both instances – and in strict accord with Lacan's understanding of the subject-object relation (and its basis in the cut)[22] – the pendant-object serves to *bar* Madeleine's true appearance, her final coming-to-be as a 'whole' subject, effectively rendering her, subjectively speaking, *null and void*.

To return then to our initial point, it is this last 'objective' cut – the one that, in stark contrast to standard Hollywood practice, definitively severs the film's real object from its void(ed) subject, effectively 'flipping' the fantasy along the axis of the cut (such that $\$ \diamond a$ becomes $a \diamond \$$) – that ultimately determines the structure of *Vertigo*, splitting it cleanly down the middle and setting in motion its dual narratives of isolation and separation (while

simultaneously ensuring their asymptoticity by condemning each process to endlessly spiral around its subject without ever directly encountering it).[23] Which is of course precisely why, regardless of the film's many attempts to define or contain her (by Judy, by Scottie, by Elster, by Midge, by Hitchcock…), Madeleine remains eternally elusive. And indeed, as if to ensure her absolute unattainability, she dies – twice, no less – falling into the very abyss that determines the text as a 'w/hole', the objectual 'white hole' at the center of the film around which everything revolves, namely, the foundational *cut* itself.

3. The Success(ive) Failure of Suture and the Topology of the Remake

> *"Some things in life are not that understandable, but when things in films are that way, people become worried. And yet they are, in* some *way, understandable."*
>
> - David Lynch (227-8)

> *"We spend our time dreaming; we do not dream only when we are asleep."*
>
> - Jacques Lacan (15.11.1977, n.pag)

All of which leads us to finally confront both the implicit and explicit questions we began this paper with, to wit: what becomes of suture when cinema, like psychoanalysis, truly acknowledges the cut and *traverses its own fantasy*; and is there really a 'proper' way to remake a Hitchcock film?

Beginning with the former, it is perhaps surprising that, given this paper's origins in the system of cinematic suture, we have not yet considered the method by which Hitchcock's films actively construct a 'space' for their audience. In addressing this, we need first look to a unique *subject* at work in his films; one that, in a manner wholly distinct from that of the real object,

denotes a kind of 'pure' presence (albeit one that is, in at least one crucial respect, *absent*). This subject can be said to represent the obverse or the 'counter-shot' of the 'McGuffin', being someone who, while assuredly *present*, does not necessarily *exist*. For even though these (literally) void subjects function to carry the film in one way or another, affecting its action and its appearance, they are at the same time *stricto sensu lacking*. Philosophically speaking, they are at once (phenomenologically) 'there' and (ontologically) 'not-there'. Or again, while they doubtless *appear*, it does not follow from this that they *are*.

Countless examples of such void subjects abound in Hitchcock's oeuvre: from the overbearing maternal presence of *Rebecca*'s (1940) Mrs. Danvers or *Notorious*' Mme. Sebastian – figures who occupy less a physical space than an (invariably punishing) *idea* (culminating of course in *Psycho*'s entirely absent Mrs. Bates)[24] – through to the empty subjective forms of *Vertigo*'s Madeleine (a figure less *in*voked than *e*voked) and *North by Northwest*'s George Kaplan, whose function as both a site of interpellation (Thornhill is 'called upon' *as* Kaplan) and of interpolation (Kaplan is 'introjected' by Thornhill) serves as a kind of perverse embodiment of Lacan's definition of the signifier as "what represents a subject for another signifier" (2006b, 18).[25]

Far from closing off the film, these literally void subjects in fact serve to 'open it up,' providing a de/suturing effect whereby the spectator at once sees the work for what it really is – namely, a *film*: a projected fantasy; itself a substance-less presence – while being simultaneously projected further *into* this fantasy (by providing a 'subjective' space devoid of identity, wherein one might, after a fashion, *place one's self*). The crucial point being that the method by which the viewer 'enters' the film does not involve any real *identification* – how, for example, can one possibly 'identify' with the void of George Kaplan or Mrs. Bates? – but is rather orchestrated through a radical *absence*: an intrafilmic 'cut' *qua* dis-placed space; a space *devoid of place*. Thus, contrary to orthodox suture's dependence on successive acts of

identification[26] – yet perfectly in line with the analytic experience[27] – Hitchcock's void subjects paradoxically function to 'suture' the viewer precisely by *disrupting* identification.

On this point *Psycho* is of course exemplary, involving as it does an effective identificatory 'drift,' insofar as after the filmic fantasy is thrown into turmoil with the unexpected death of Marion (introducing a hole in the text by literally cutting at its heart), the narrative focus is condemned to 'traverse' from one character to the next (Marion, Norman, Lila, Arbogast, Sam…) to the point that *the very question of identification is voided*.[28] Indeed, following the failed attempt by the psychiatrist – who Lacan himself sarcastically observes to be "endowed with all the features of the untouchable" (2017, 13) – to restore the smooth operation of fantasy (and thereby halt narrative metonymy by providing an 'answer' to the enigma of the Other's desire), the final locus of 'identification' turns out to be none other than 'Mother' herself, the void subject *par excellence*, whose impenetrable stare (superimposed over the figure of Norman in the film's penultimate shot) belies the very possibility of identification (Figure 2).
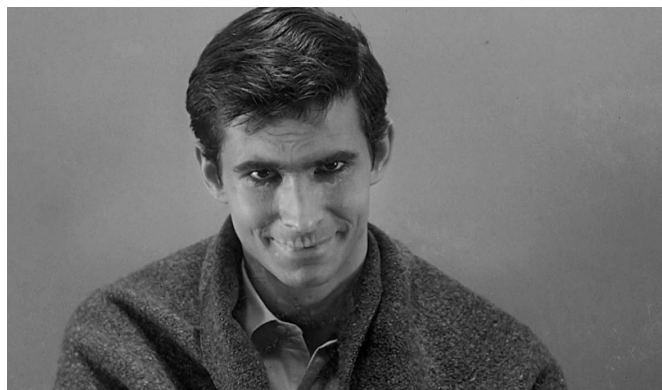

Figure 2. Norman/Mother returns the gaze in *Psycho*.

And so, in literally *traversing* the fantasy, *Psycho* effectively inverts the standard logic of cinematic suture inasmuch as its overall 'success' paradoxically relies on a series of identificatory *failures*, whereby the audience eventually finds its intratextual 'place' (*qua*

suturing point) not through identification with a *presence* (something promptly severed by Marion's murder, and subsequently reinforced by the death of Arbogast) but rather by virtue of a conspicuous *absence*, namely, the void subject/subjective void, 'Mother;' the ultimate embodiment of unknowable, unquenchable desire.[29] Thus *Psycho* affects a fundamental registral shift in the operation of cinematic suture, from the level of the *imaginary* (identification with the screen image) to that of the *real*: identification *with the cut itself*.

All of this brings us back, finally and conclusively, to Žižek's argument regarding the 'proper' way to remake a Hitchcock film. For when we consider the examples he puts forward (which we designated 'formal' and 'contextual' processes of fidelity), we cannot help but note that there is nothing *real* at work here. To the contrary, by restricting their field of operation entirely to the level of appearance (the one re-presenting appearance; the other re-imagining it), they remain fundamentally *imaginary* procedures (in the Lacanian sense). As such, neither can be said to constitute a true '*re-make*,' but might be better understood as '*re-visions*' of Hitchcock's work. For truly re-making something means attending first and foremost to its underlying *structure* (as distinct from its formal presentation), passing over the imaginary to instead focus on the formational levels of the symbolic and the real.[30]

Where van Sant failed, however, David Lynch succeeded with his 1997 film *Lost Highway*. Indeed, for all its apparent confusion and ambiguity, Lynch's film is arguably nothing other than a remake of *Psycho* through the lens of *Vertigo*. While we can easily register this on a narrative or *imaginary* level (*Lost Highway* proposing a scenario where Scottie/Norman actually *did* kill Madeline before succumbing to his psychosis, etc.), this does not address the *structural* question essential to the function of a remake. Of more immediate concern to us, then, is the way that *Lost Highway* consolidates the structural logic behind Hitchcock's original texts to produce something truly new: a *real remake*. Needless to say, the 'logic' in question is none other than that of the *cut*, which, as we have seen, determines *Vertigo*'s spiraling narratives

of isolation and separation and instigates *Psycho*'s identificatory drift. (Hence in *Lost Highway* the investigation of 'Madeline/Judy' becomes that of 'Renée/Alice,' while the traumatic switch 'Marion/Norman' is transferred to that of 'Fred/Pete'…)

This same logic however equally establishes the films' peculiar *topological* form, which in all three cases (and perfectly in keeping with the function of fantasy)[31] is none other than that of the Möbius strip, whose very structure, Lacan points out, "boils down – like the real with which we are concerned here – to the cut itself" (2006a, 487). Consider here the way that Žižek accounts for *Psycho*'s infamous 'shift' in worlds (from one of 'healthy' alienation to one of nightmarish psychosis):

> The relationship between these two worlds eludes the simple oppositions of surface and depth, reality and fantasy, and so on – the only topology that suits it is that of the two surfaces of the Moebius band: if we progress far enough on one surface, all of a sudden we find ourselves on its reverse (1992a, 227).

This same möbial structure is obviously at work in *Lost Highway* (albeit the split is now precisely that between reality and fantasy). Again, consider Žižek's contention that in directly confronting the 'reality' of desire with that of 'fantasy':

> Lynch decomposes the ordinary "sense of reality" sustained by fantasy into, on the one side, pure, aseptic reality and, on the other side, fantasy: reality and fantasy no longer relate vertically (fantasy beneath reality, sustaining it), but horizontally (side by side) (2000, 21).

While there are numerous key connections that arise here – the contrast between verticality and horizontality, for example, being equally central to both *Vertigo* and *Psycho* (see: Truffaut and Hitchcock, 269)[32] – given that our concerns lie with the question of structure, the most important relates to the *time and place of the cut itself*. To complete Žižek's original quote regarding *Psycho*:

> This moment of passage from one surface to its reverse […] can be located very precisely: the fade-in, after the murder of Marion, of the close-up of the drain which swallows water and blood, into the close-up of the dead eye. Here, the spiral first *enters* the drain, then *exits* the eye (1992a, 227-8).

This all-important passage – the traumatic intrusion of the real into the world of fantasy; the möbial 'cut' itself ('materialized', of course, not only in the form of the knife but also in the frenetic editing)[33] – occurs precisely forty-seven minutes into the film, and leaves the audience effectively 'lost,' struggling to find solid ground as they pass from one failed identification to the next. Yet it is also at this *precise forty-seven minute mark* that *Lost Highway*'s central character, Fred, suddenly and inexplicably transforms into an altogether different person, Pete, in an equally destabilizing move that wreaks havoc with audience expectations and leaves the viewer grasping for narrative coherence.[34] While this initially inexplicable 'switch' can be retroactively accounted for on an imaginary level (unable to deal with the fact that he murdered his wife, Fred 'escapes' into a fantasy world where he imagines himself as the young and virile 'Pete'…), its *structural* (i.e. symbolic/real) necessity on the other hand – together with its intertextual synchronicity (the forty-seven minute transfer) – can only be adequately explained through direct recourse to the *Hitchcockian logic of the cut* (i.e. the inclusion of a structurally determinative rift that radically re-orients and ultimately 'shapes' the film as a whole).[35]

In adopting this logic, however, Lynch gives it a crucial 'twist.' For while in revolving around a single, determinative cut, both *Psycho* and *Vertigo* essentially offer up 'straightforward' möbial narratives – *Vertigo* even going so far as to incorporate into its opening sequence (in a possible foreshadowing of *Psycho*) a series of möbial shapes emerging from a woman's eye (Figure 3) – *Lost Highway* on the other hand introduces a *second cut*: after Alice rejects Pete (thus dissolving the fantasy), Lynch *restages* the cut by having Pete morph back into Fred and return to his house – such that he is now on the 'outside', looking in – in order to speak the elliptical words that set the film in motion ("Dick Laurent is Dead"), ostensibly 'completing' his traversal of the fantasy by literally becoming the very *cause of his desire*, the object (*a*) itself. Only this time, Fred speeds off with the Law in pursuit, and the film ends with the metonymic structure of desire reasserting itself so forcefully that it shatters the very *fantasy of the fantasy* (of resolution): Fred begins to uncontrollably morph yet again before abruptly disappearing altogether, leaving the viewer, narrativistically speaking, stranded on a lost highway...

Far from registering a 'logical' departure, these additional möbial twists in fact highlight a final terminological and structural distinction Lacan makes regarding the cut during his topological excursions of the 1960s and 70s, whereby the cut alternatively takes the form of a continuous 'rim' or 'edge' (*bord*),[36] and a properly *dis*continuous *cut*. While the standard Möbius strip figures a continuous transformation insofar as it establishes a single surface and a single edge/rim, "where an ant walking along one side of the apparent faces will pass over to the other face without needing to go over the edge" (Lacan 2014, 96), Lacan points out that this same strip can equally be subject to *discontinuous* transformation when *cut down the middle*, producing "not a divided surface, but a continuous strip, which, in overlapping itself, has the property of being able to perfectly reproduce the shape of the first" (9.12.1964, n.pag).

It is in this precise manner that, in remaking *Psycho* through the lens of *Vertigo*, *Lost Highway* reflexively applies the 'method of Hitchcock' and *cuts the cut*, transforming the continuous into the discontinuous, and in doing so, attaining to something *real*: an *impossible fantasy*; a *mystery with no solution*.[37] This secondary möbial transformation is even iconically represented throughout the film in the central motif (that opens and closes the film) of a two-lane highway seen from the perspective a car speeding down the middle, as though cutting the strip latitudinally; the very same möbial strip from which Fred vanishes (or is 'discontinued') at the film's end (Figure 4).
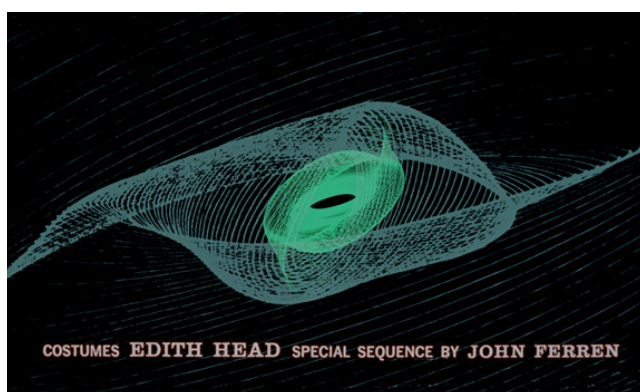

Figure 3. One of *Vertigo*'s mobial shapes.

Figure 4. *Lost Highway*'s discontinuous strip

Ultimately, by identifying and reapplying Hitchcock's peculiar cinematic logic and expanding the function of the cut such that the resulting structure not only 'overlaps' but moreover *intersects* itself, Lynch demonstrates that there is indeed a 'proper way to remake a Hitchcock film,' while at the same time reaffirming the deep connection between Lacanian psychoanalysis and cinema in general; a connection founded in and by the cut, and that not only traverses but moreover functions to structure the whole of Hitchcock's cinema.

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[1] See: Baudry; Metz; Mulvey.

[2] This was certainly the case for David Bordwell and Noël Carroll when they published their polemical collection *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, wherein they acknowledged that "the unifying principle in this book is that all the research included exemplifies the possibility of scholarship that is not reliant upon the psychoanalytic framework that dominates film academia" (xvi). This equation of theory with Lacanian psychoanalysis is of course highly contentious: as Slavoj Žižek noted shortly after *Post-Theory*'s original publication, "except for Joan Copjec, myself, and some of my Slovene colleagues, I know of no cinema theorist who effectively accepts Lacan as his or her ultimate background" (2001b, 2).

[3] In his original piece, Jean-Pierre Oudart writes that "suture represents the closure of the cinematic *énoncé* in line with its relationship with its subject (the filmic subject or rather the cinematic subject), which is recognized, and then put in its place as the spectator" (35).

[4] As Alain Badiou (for example) points out, "cinema is nothing but takes and editing. There is nothing else" (2005, 86).

[5] Both Oudart and Daniel Dayan (whose article 'The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema' introduced the concept of suture to Anglophone audiences) employ Godard as a counter-example in their original analyses (see: Oudart 36-7; Dayan 31).

[6] "Fantasy," as Žižek points out "functions as a construction, as an imaginary scenario filling out the void, the opening of the *desire of the Other* […] by giving us a definite answer to the question 'What does the Other want?' (1989, 128) Cinema, for its part, obviously operates in much the same way, offering up as its 'reality' any number of fantasy scenarios providing answers to the viewer's various social and individual problems and inadequacies.

[7] Much has been written on *Psycho*'s unprecedented depiction of the flushing toilet immediately prior to the shower murder, and how this act was (at the time) arguably more shocking than the murder itself. This 'horror' has both a historical and a psychological component. As Lacan points out, "unlike what happens at every level of the animal kingdom […] man is naturally characterized by the extraordinary embarrassment he feels about […] the evacuation of shit," which is precisely why "a great civilization is first and foremost a civilization that has a waste-disposal system" (Lacan 2008, 64-5). Fully aware of this 'civilizational' embargo on waste, Hitchcock anticipated the 'horrifying' toilet as being a major sticking point with the infamous Motion Picture Production Code – the prurient set of rules dictating what could and could not be depicted in a motion picture that was still in operation at the time (though *Psycho* is generally regarded as delivering its effective *coup de grâce*) – only securing its inclusion on the grounds that it constituted a critical plot link (Arbogast's discovery of the unflushed remnants of paper confirms Marion's earlier presence at the hotel…).

[8] Jacques Rancière goes one step further, arguing that in art (and cinema in particular) "even resemblance is a cut. An image of something that is not there, it is already a cut. There is therefore dissemblance even at the heart of resemblance" (148).

[9] This institution of a "constrained visibility" (Badiou 2005, 82) of course further denaturalizes and isolates the image, effectively severing its (already faint) ties with the world from which it is drawn. Or as Stanley Cavell notes, "when a photograph is cropped, the rest of the world is cut *out*" (24).

[10] The real, according to Lacan, is only 'discernible' retroactively on the basis of its resistance to symbolization: "the real must be conceived as the expulsion of meaning […] and also the repulsion of meaning into *anti*-meaning

or *ante*-meaning […]. It ek-sists with regard to the symbolic insofar as the symbolic revolves around an inviolable hole" (11.3.1975, n.pag).

[11] Lacan holds that "sexuality is distributed on one side or the other of our *rim* as a threshold of the unconscious" (2006a, 720). This quote moreover highlights a distinction Lacan makes in his later teachings (that we will return to later in the paper) wherein "what I first called the function of the cut […] is now articulated, in the development of my discourse, as the topological function of the rim" (1998b, 206).

[12] According to Lacan, "the object of desire is the cause of desire, and this object that is the cause of desire is the object of the drive – that is to say, the object around which the drive turns" (1998b, 243). That the *objet petit a* is moreover an "impossible object" (Leclaire, 95) is of course due to its relation to the perpetually deferred real, which Lacan comes to "define as the *impossible*, precisely because it never arrives" (20.11.1973, n.pag), being at base an excess or surplus, "a hole opened up to something" (2007, 19).

[13] As Lacan explains, "this little losange […] is a rim, a functioning rim" (1998b, 209). On 'rim' as 'cut', see: note 11 and section 3.

[14] This peculiar property ('homogenous heterogeneity') is further clarified in a discussion between Jacques-Alain Miller, Jean-Claude Milner and Serge Leclaire concerning the formula of fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$) and reproduced in the journal *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*:

> S. Leclaire: There is, according to this formula, homogeneity of the subject and the object.
>
> J.-A. Miller: This is the minimal homogeneity necessitated by the correlation.
>
> S. Leclaire: But this cancels out the no-less necessary heterogeneity of the terms.
>
> J.-C. Milner: One must then distinguish between terms and places. While the terms are heterogeneous, there is homogeneity attached to the places (Leclaire, 96).

[15] The hypothetical 'reverse' of a black hole (which can only be 'entered' from the outside, and from which nothing – neither matter nor light – can escape), *white holes* contrarily represent fundamentally *impenetrable* regions of spacetime that spew out matter and energy: what a black hole 'pulls in', a white hole 'pushes out.' This astrophysical metaphor obviously chimes with Lacan's own contention that "a hole is a vortex, or rather it engulfs things […], but there are also moments when it spits things out" (15.4.1975).

[16] Jean-Claude Milner in particular stresses Mallarmé's importance to Lacan, who, Milner argues, "associates Freud and Mallarmé under the heading of the signifier" (60).

[17] In this seminar (the delivery of which coincides with the release of Hitchcock's Mallarméan masterpiece, *Vertigo*), Lacan observes that "since no one has ever considered what poetry really is […] people try to explain the supposed lack of meaning in Mallarmé without realizing at all that there must be a way to define poetry as a function of relationships to the signifier; that a more rigorous formula might exist" (1998a, 55).

[18] One cannot fail to recognize the terminological (and, to an extent, conceptual) correspondence between these poetic procedures and the Lacanian operations of *alienation* (which, in announcing the fundamental 'split' of the subject – its being 'eclipsed' by language – designates an 'internal cut') and *separation* (which, in confronting the Other's lack and engendering the desiring subject, constitutes an 'external cut'). On these fundamental concepts see: Lacan 1998b.

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[19] Or as Mallarmé himself puts it, the duty of poetry is "to evoke an object little by little, so as to bring to light a state of the soul or, inversely, to choose an object and bring out of it a state of the soul through a series of unravelling" (141).

[20] Note that the following analysis represents a substantial revision of arguments I first made in my book, *Badiou and Cinema* (see: Ling).

[21] It was precisely this aspect of the original Boileau-Narcejac novel *D'Entre les Morts* (which had been purposefully written for Hitchcock) that appealed to the director: "I was intrigued by the hero's attempts to re-create the image of a dead woman through another one who's alive" (Truffaut and Hitchcock 243).

[22] As Lacan unequivocally states, "there is a causal element in this division [of the subject], and it is what I call the *objet petit a*" (2008, 53).

[23] Regarding this structural determination it is worth noting that François Regnault similarly identified a formal system at work in Hitchcock's films operating in accordance with two axioms, namely: that the "film tends to organize itself according to a principle geometric or dynamic form;" and that this principle form "tends to become *reflexive* of the film itself, from the point of view of its form" (22). This 'principal form,' Regnault argues, is frequently found in its 'pure state' in the opening credits of his films, e.g. "the spirals of *Vertigo*, the broken lines and the contrasting black and white structure of *Psycho*, the arrowing Cartesian coordinates of *North by Northwest*" (22).

[24] Hitchcock was careful to ensure, for example, that Mrs. Danvers "was almost never seen walking and was rarely shown in motion [...]. To have shown Mrs. Danvers walking about would have been to humanize her" (Truffaut and Hitchcock, 129-30).

[25] Just as Hitchcock claimed to have found in *North by Northwest*'s microfilm his "best McGuffin" – "the emptiest, the most nonexistent, and the most absurd" (Truffaut and Hitchcock, 139) – so too does he find in Kaplan his perfect empty subject, the void waiting to be filled out by Roger O. Thornhill (who, in a particularly suggestive aside, gleefully explains that the 'O' in his name "stands for nothing").

[26] Hence suture's elementary matrix being provided by the shot/reverse-shot system. Dayan's original article outlines this in the following way:

> the spectator's pleasure, dependent on his *identification with the visual field*, is interrupted when he perceives the frame [encompassing shot one]. From this perception he infers the presence of the absent-one and that other field from which the absent-one is looking. Shot two reveals a character who is presented as the owner of the glance corresponding to shot one. That is, the character in shot two occupies the place of the absent-one corresponding to shot one. This character retrospectively *transforms the absence emanating from shot one's other stage into a presence* (29-30; my emphasis).

[27] According to Lacan, the primary object(ive) of analysis is precisely to *avoid* identifying with the analyst. Or as he puts it: "the fundamental mainspring of the analytic operation is the maintenance of the distance between the *I* – identification – and the *a*" (1998b, 273).

[28] As Žižek flatly puts it, "after the death of Marion, identification with the personality who dominates the diegetic space becomes impossible" (1992a, 227). Hitchcock was himself absolutely insistent about this lack of identification: "I think that in *Psycho* there is no identification with the characters [...]. The audience goes through

the paroxysms in the film without consciousness of Vera Miles or John Gavin. They're just characters that *lead* the audience through the final part of the picture. I wasn't interested in them" (Bogdanovich and Hitchcock, n.pag).

[29] This final, fundamentally 'psychotic' identification perversely echoes Lacan's fundamental contention (after Freud) that "everyone is mad, that is, delusional" (Lacan 2013, 3) (a belief equally reflected in Norman's own observation that "we all go a little mad sometimes").

[30] That the real is *formational* derives from its ruptive relationship with the symbolic (much in the way our filmic 'white hole' radically affects or 're-orients' the text). Suffice to recall here Lacan's contention that the real "ek-sists with regard to the symbolic insofar as the symbolic revolves around an inviolable hole, without which the triple knot [of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary] would not be Borromean" (11.3.1975, n.pag).

[31] Recall that the entire structure of fantasy is provided by the cut insofar as it "isolates a Möbius strip in the field [of reality]" (Lacan 2006a, 486).

[32] This contrast is of course also key to the nature of film itself. Sergei Eisenstein, for example, in his early formal analysis of the difficulties posed by the introduction of sound to cinema, posited that "the solution to the combinational problem [of sound and image] lies in […] unit[ing] both strips *'vertically'* or *simultaneously*: matching each continuing musical phrase with *each phase* of the continuing parallel picture strips – our shots. This will be conditioned by our adherence to the letter of the law allowing us to *combine 'horizontally'* or continuously: shot after shot in the silent film – phrase after phrase of a developing theme in music" (157).

[33] It is worth adding that this scene's celebrated editing effectively repeats *Vertigo*'s spiraling structure by arranging the individual shots in such a way that they 'revolve' around Marion's already twisting form – a tortuous movement subsequently reinforced by the concluding shots of blood and water circling down the drawn followed by the camera spiraling out of Marion's lifeless eye – creating the sensation of falling uncontrollably into a filmic abyss (or passing from one side of the möbial strip to the other…).

[34] The present analysis is based on the 135-minute DVD released in Australia by Siren Visual Entertainment.

[35] There are of course countless other examples establishing the structural connection between *Lost Highway*, *Psycho*, and *Vertigo* (and, for that matter, Lacan) that deserve further examination: that the central events of Lynch's film take place in the 'Lost Highway Hotel' (clearly referencing the Bates Motel which, as Norman notes, 'lost its highway'); that the Renee/Alice pairing reflects *Psycho*'s origins in the real-life story of Ed Gein by referencing the infamous case of the Papin sisters, whose 'vertiginous' search for "the mystery of life" (Lacan 1972, 103) was so important to Lacan's own development as a psychoanalyst, etc.

[36] Cf. "What I first called the function of the cut […] is now articulated, in the development of my discourse, as the topological function of the rim (*bord*)" (Lacan 1998b, 206).

[37] This after all precisely how Lynch defines his film: "basically, it's a mystery. That's what it is. A mystery" (231).

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