“You’re Tellin’ Me You Didn’t See”
Hitchcock’s Rear Window and Antonioni’s Blow-Up

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Alfred Hitchcock’s influence on international culture and especially on other film directors has been enormous. Whether the filmmaker perceived trends ahead of his time or the contemporary zeitgeist just happened to catch up with his feverish fantasies (perhaps because of the popularity of his paranoid movies) is somewhat irrelevant. What is important is that the “Age of Anxiety” proclaimed by poet W. H. Auden and composer Leonard Bernstein found its cinematic “Artist of Anxiety” in Alfred Hitchcock. Critic Richard Schickel summed it up in the title of an article in the New York Times: “We’re Living in a Hitchcock World, All Right.” If Schickel meant that over the past century mankind has become as anxious, paranoid, and obsessed as the characters in (and the director of) Hitchcock’s films, there is probably no denying that world wars, massacres, nuclear weapons, and the Holocaust have become part and parcel of the cruelty of life on our planet in the twentieth century and beyond (the director was born in 1899).

Whether Hitchcock’s morbid vision actually changed the course of human events and made the world a scarier place is open to debate. What is less debatable is that Hitchcock’s oeuvre has had a profound impact on the world of international cinema. Some of the diverse films and film directors influenced by Hitchcock include: Francis Ford Coppola (The Conversation), Alain Resnais (Murier, Last Year At Marienbad’), Roman Polanski (Repulsion), Stanley Donen (Arabesque, Charade), François Truffaut (The Bride Wore Black, Fahrenheit 451, Mississippi Mermaid, Finally Sunday’), Orson Welles (The Stranger), Henri Clouzot (Diabolique), Akira Kurosawa (High and Low), Mcl Brooks (High Anxiety), Colin Higgins (Foul Play), Paul Verhoeven (Basic Instinct), Martin Scorsese (Cape Fear), Goran Marković (Déjà Vu),
Adrian Lyne (*Unfaithful*), Slobodan Šijan (*Strangler vs. Stranger*), Richard Marquand (*Jagged Edge*), Jerzy Skolimowski (*The Lightship*), Anthony Perkins (*Psycho III*), Claude Miller (*Alias Betty*), and, of course, the James Bond series, Claude Chabrol (*Leda, Les Cousins, The Third Lover, Le Boucher, La Femme infidèle, La Cérémonie, L’Enfer*), and Brian De Palma (*Sisters, Obsession, Dressed to Kill, Body Double, Blow Out*). The list could go on and on. The plots, characters, and cinematic style of Hitchcock’s films have been borrowed, plagiarized, spoofed, incorporated into, and used as intertext in many of the world’s best (and some of its worst) movies.

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Consider the following scenario, for instance: An isolated and alienated male protagonist, a professional photographer, comes to believe that he has witnessed or uncovered a murder in a major metropolis. Despite conflicting evidence, he investigates the alleged crime using the tools of his trade, only to discover that the corpus delicti has been removed from the scene. The hero’s relationship with fashion models is an important part of the plot, as is his identity crisis. Indeed, his personal problems exhibit themselves primarily in his contemptuous and sexist treatment of women. In the end, the murder is revealed to have taken place, but many other issues remain unresolved.

In style, the color film is strikingly visual and frequently uses the gaze-object-gaze editing regime and a fairly rigid (albeit complex) point-of-view camera perspective to establish identification with the protagonist, whose chief preoccupation is looking intently at the world for clues to its significance. We are stuck, for the most part, in the consciousness of the main character for most of the film’s 112-minute running time. A meticulous, yet minimalist, soundtrack emphasizes natural and urban sounds to comment on the action and create suspense. The music track, which consists of both instrumental and vocal renditions, comments subtly on the action, theme, and characters.

In theme, the movie provides a subtle and self-reflexive metacommentary on the art and process of cinema itself by foregrounding the voyeuristic viewing of the photographer-protagonist (a surrogate filmmaker), his attempts to impose a narrative on the events he witnesses through his camera lens (the usual province of a film director), and the activity of the spectator in the theater watching the film. The anomic, alienation, and ambiguity of modern life are important subjects. Despite these abstruse and serious themes, there are light, humorous moments in the film, which provide enjoyment and entertainment value to a mass audience. The movie goes on to become the most
commercially successful release of the auteur filmmaker, who was raised in a restrictive Roman Catholic environment.

In a book devoted to the films of Alfred Hitchcock, the plot, characters, themes, and director described above would be assumed to be those of *Rear Window* (1954). Yet these same elements are also present in *Blow-Up* (1966), directed by Michelangelo Antonioni.

Both Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* and Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* are about isolated male photographers who come to believe that they witnessed a murder. While the former movie can be classified as a relatively conventional and easy-to-follow Hollywood thriller and the latter as a “difficult” modernist European art film, the two films have more in common than their protagonists' occupation and that there may have been homicides. Although both films were based on separate short stories by internationally known authors—Cornell Woolrich’s “Rear Window” and Julio Cortázar’s “Las babas del diablo” (The Devil's Drool), respectively—they share remarkable characterological, narratological, cinematic, and thematic similarities.²

**Character**

In both *Rear Window* and *Blow-Up*, the protagonists—L. B. Jefferies (James Stewart) and Thomas (David Hemmings)³—are professional photographers who come to question their own vision (mediated and unmediated) during epistemological quests for certainty in an ambiguous world of sense perceptions. They both seem to cross the line between fantasy and reality, imagining murders where evidence beyond a “shadow of a doubt” is lacking. Furthermore, both men suffer “identity crises,” especially with regard to their masculinity and their relationships with women. In *Rear Window*, Jeff’s broken leg (or “swollen foot,” the English translation of the name “Oedipus”) confines him to a wheelchair, but it also causes him to question his long-time “engagement” to fashion model Lisa Carol Fremont (Gracce Kelly).⁴ Thomas, the high-fashion photographer in *Blow-Up*, is also involved with female models, and treats them with the same sexist disdain and negativity displayed in Jefferies’ framed photographic “negative” of a female model for the cover of a *Life*-like magazine. At a haute-couture modeling session at his studio, Thomas shouts rudely at the au naturale women, roughly positioning their limbs into static poses, and strutts smugly around the set like a martinet.⁵ Thomas whistles loudly to get the attention of his models and refers to them contemptuously as his “birds.” He keeps Veruschka, one of the world’s leading fashion models, waiting for almost an hour. Two teenyboppers, who come to have
The sidelined cameraman in Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* becomes a law-enforcing Peeping Tom.

their pictures taken, end up having sex with him, and are dismissed without any photos. In short, he bullies and disrespects women and cannot seem to relate to Janie (Vanessa Redgrave) unless he is posing her. Antonioni himself has said that “in *Blow-Up*, eroticism occupies a very important place, although the focus is often placed on a cold, calculated sensuality. Exhibitionism and voyeuristic trends are particularly underlined” (“It Was Born” 90). Thus, in both movies, modern masculinity is in crisis.

That male crisis is figured through the use of phallic icons and objects in both films. In *Rear Window*, for instance, Jefferies is unable to pop the cork on a bottle of wine, and his repeated attempts to scratch under his leg cast with a back scratcher can be likened to masturbation. Jeff’s long 400mm telephoto lens is another instance of a phallic substitute, especially when it is seen resting in his lap. In *Blow-Up*, Thomas is attracted to mechanical phallic symbols, such as a propeller (“I must have it!”) and a guitar neck (an icon of castration). In London’s Maryon Park, Thomas passes a mannish-looking woman in male work clothes who picks up refuse with a pointed spear; here, the female has the phallus again—and a job other than modeling.
Jeffries also has “issues” with women. Stella the nurse (Thelma Ritter) explicitly states that Jeff must have “a hormone deficiency” because “those bathing beauties you’ve been watching haven’t raised your temperature in a month.” Even when his girlfriend, Lisa, plans to stay overnight, the photographer is forced to say “I won’t be able to give you any . . . pajamas.” When Lisa becomes the sexual aggressor and kisses Jeff repeatedly, he virtually ignores her and talks incessantly about the Thorwald case. There are so many verbal and nonverbal clues in Rear Window about Jeff’s “abnormal” aversion to marriage (Stella’s phrase) or his “problem” (Lisa’s phrase) that Robert Samuels contends that “Jeffries looks at women but he doesn’t get turned on by them” (118). Whether or not Rear Window is a repressed homosexual text, L. B. Jeffries is no 1950s John Wayne icon of masculinity.

Unlike Jeffries, on the surface, Thomas appears to possess the macho swagger of the “real man.” Beneath his gruff exterior, however, there is evidence that Antonioni’s photographer only plays at sex but cannot sustain a meaningful relationship with a woman. Like Jeffries in Rear Window, Antonioni’s photographer often seems preoccupied with other things and virtually ignores the women who throw themselves at him throughout Blow-Up—Veruschka, Jane, the teenyboppers, the antique-store owner, and his neighbor, Patricia (Sarah Miles). This is seen most clearly in the ersatz sex scene between Thomas and the model Veruschka. After mounting the model and stimulating her verbally and physically to perform for his camera lens, he finally screams out bis pleasure (“Yes! Yes!”), then nonchalantly dismounts the woman and walks away. The cut is to a view of Veruschka sprawled out on the floor, as the photographer lies collapsed on the sofa in the background. A phallic wooden beam appears to emerge from the woman’s crotch, suggesting the impersonal, “wooden,” and unconsummated nature of their make-believe “intercourse,” as well as that bugaboo of the male psyche, the phallic woman. Here, Antonioni’s subtle mise-en-scène reveals Thomas’s career-driven, locked-up ego, as well as his male anxiety in the face of modern female sexuality.

In addition to treating women badly, the photographer makes disparaging remarks about two gay men he spots walking their dogs (“Already there are queers and poodles in the area”). If, as Wilhelm Reich suggests, repressed homosexuality is the etiology of the phallic narcissist—proving to himself that he is not gay by acting the part of a macho man—then Thomas may fit that description. In a way, both he and Jeffries seem to prefer their women at a distance and through a camera lens. Ultimately, both characters are ciphers, men whose personas contain ambivalent and contradictory traits and motivations.

Thomas, of course, is even more of a “man without qualities” than Jeff.
Silent through much of *Blow-Up*, the photographer expresses his narcissistic worldview mainly through sneers, dismissive gestures, and occasional curt remarks to the human beings who pass through his visual field. Jeffries, at least, quips and talks to a variety of friends, acquaintances, and associates. Several contrasting examples will illustrate this difference, all involving telephone conversations.

Thomas speaks several times on his car phone (a relatively new technology in 1967). He always identifies himself as “Blue 4-3-9,” his code name and number, rather than by his given name, a device that both conceals his identity from the audience and makes him appear to be part of a dehumanized technological society that devalues real communication. Although these carphone calls are usually professional messages, Thomas’s personal telephone “conversation” with the woman he calls his wife betrays the same “failure to communicate” evident in all his telephone (and face-to-face) interactions. Furthermore, Jane, whom he is about to seduce, is physically present in his loft, so he addresses her as well.

The scene begins with Thomas and Jane seated in his loft. The telephone rings. At first, Thomas coolly ignores the persistent sound; then, suddenly, after a half-dozen double rings, he suddenly becomes animated and scrambles all over the floor looking for its source. After he locates the telephone and picks up the receiver, he hands it to Jane without a word. The following incoherent exchange ensues:

*Jane:* Is it for me?
*Thomas:* It’s my wife.

*Jane:* Why should I speak to her?
*Thomas* (into phone): Sorry, love, the bird I’m with won’t talk to you.

(He hangs up.)
(to Jane) She isn’t my wife really. We just have some kids… No, no kids… Sometimes, though, it feels as if we had kids. She isn’t beautiful; she’s… easy to live with. [pause] No she isn’t. That’s why I don’t live with her.

Jeffries’ phone conversations are more direct and focused, but, like Thomas’s, they do not bring any clarity to the issues at hand. Jeff’s dialogues with his friend, police detective Tom Doyle (Wendell Corey), for example, mainly consist of him strenuously trying to persuade the expert criminologist that a murder has taken place, while Doyle calmly presents the facts he has uncovered (train tickets, postcards, etc.) and the accumulated wisdom of years of criminal investigations. Jeff even calls Thorwald at one point to create a ruse
that will get the murderer out of his flat, but the plan backfires when Thorwald returns unexpectedly and catches Lisa snooping in his apartment.

Beyond the depiction of the male protagonists, both films share a similar vision of women, although not necessarily the misogynistic tendencies both directors have been accused of exhibiting. The evidence on-screen suggests a more complex attitude toward women. To the extent that Hitchcock's views about women can be equated with Jeffries’ troubling and viscous dialogue and male fantasies (like so many other male leads in Hitchcock’s oeuvre) and Antonioni’s intentions are derived from the obnoxious and macho behavior of his “hero,” then maybe there is reason to criticize both directors’ representations. But, as Tania Modleski so persuasively argues in The Women Who Knew Too Much, Hitchcock’s depictions of women also reveal their oppression under patriarchy, as well as their wisdom and tolerance; furthermore, his portrayals of men are hardly pasms to the male psyche but, rather, sharp and incisive critiques of male scopophilia, fetishism, and sexual insecurity. Modleski argues that in Rear Window, Lisa is the stronger and more dominant figure: “It is the man who is motionless and the woman active and animate . . . she towers over Jeff in nearly every shot” (76–77). Stella is also a very strong character; she lectures Jeff and even participates in the potentially dangerous investigation of Thorwald.

Similarly, Antonioni’s pre-Blow-Up films were often hailed as proto-women’s liberation movies; indeed, one female film critic referred to the director as “the poet of matriarchy” (Fernandez 138–60). Whereas those earlier films often followed feminine protagonists, in Blow-Up, Antonioni chose to explore the male psyche. In short, both Jeffries and Thomas may not be the positive role models they were perceived to be when Rear Window and Blow-Up were initially released; in fact, in retrospect, they may both have been offered as negative images of men at a time when assertive and domineering males tended to be valorized.

In Rear Window, Jeffries frequently ogles a neighbor across the courtyard whom he has named “Miss Torso” based primarily on her shapely physical attributes and her scanty attire. Hitchcock treats the photographer’s peeping ambiguously. On the one hand, there are sexy views of Miss Torso and, for that matter, of Lisa. On the other hand, this indulgent voyeurism on the part of the diegetic protagonist, as well as the heterosexual male viewer, is punished repeatedly. Jeff wins the verbal scorn of Stella (who tells him that “we’ve become a race of Peeping Toms” and that “in the old days, they used to put your eyes out with a red hot poker”7) and Lisa for his prurient peccadilloes, and ends up with two broken legs for his sins.

This objectification of the female body sees its match in Blow-Up when
Thomas leads the teenyboppers up the stairs to his studio and Antonioni’s camera (from Thomas’s point of view) leers up their skirts at their leotarded legs. Later, as the photographer tussles playfully with the would-be models, pubic hair can be seen for a fleeting second—a prohibited sight in mid-sixties cinema. But although Antonioni clearly shows the female body here as the object of the male gaze, he is also critiquing that gaze in the process. As in Rear Window, the director’s camera both participates in the male gaze (of the diegetic character and of the straight male spectator) and simultaneously provides a “cold shower” by showing that the unsatisfied protagonist is a sexist reprobate and vicarious voyeur.

Apart from the visual portrayal of the male gaze of these characters, their words and actions censure the retrograde stance of the male chauvinist. As Fawell observes, Jefferies “spouts a great deal of sexist diatribe that we might . . . identify with Hitchcock” (16). For example, when Stella the nurse opines that “one day maybe [Miss Lonelyhearts] will find her happiness,” Jeff cynically responds, “Yeah, and some man will lose his.” Like many of the director’s other heroes, Jeff is “cruel to women, stereotypic[s] and pigeonhole[s] the woman who loves him, underestimate[s] and judge[s] them unfairly” (Fawell 11). His negative and sexist comments are mainly directed at Lisa (“She’s too perfect . . . too talented, too sophisticated”) but many apply to the female gender in general. Likewise, in Blow-Up, Thomas’s gaze is often affixed on Veruschka, the other beautiful models in his studio, the teenyboppers, his neighbor, the antique-store owner, and Jane. These “admiring” looks are in sharp conflict with his physical and psychological treatment of and cutting comments about women (“I’m fed up with those bloody bitches”).

Another interesting parallel between the two protagonists is that initially both men believe they are witnessing romance and love instead of murder. Thomas even assumes that his voyeuristic “snaps” (taken from behind fences, hedges, and trees) of Jane and her older male companion hugging and frolicking in the park represent something “very—peaceful, very still,” when what he is actually documenting is a murder scene. Similarly, Jefferies initially views the honeymoon couple across the way as engaging in a loving and tender scene of marital bliss; later, he thinks that same couple is argumentative and quarrelsome and the Thorwald marriage is murderous.

In addition to all the personality traits noted above, both films proffer unrelenting depictions of their respective protagonists’ points of view. There are few scenes (or even moments) in either film that do not take place in the presence or visual field of the male hero. This physically claustrophobic restriction is justified in the case of Rear Window by Jeff’s literal confinement
to a wheelchair; in Blow-Up, Thomas is highly mobile—he drives and romps around London without physical restraint—yet he is psychologically confined by his congenital narcissism. In both cases, the viewer spends almost two hours “in the mocassins” of the main character, thus providing a strong basis for emotional identification and empathy—even with basically flawed and weak individuals.

Needless to say, most films depict more than the trials and tribulations of one or two main characters; as social documents, movies tend to address cultural issues by personifying those larger themes in stories of a few individuals. Thus, L. B. Jeffries and Thomas stand in for and represent a much larger subset of men—those of the postwar generation who have yet to adjust adequately to the changing gender dynamics of their era. As such, the protagonists of both Rear Window and Blow-Up, although from different epochs, personify an age-old conundrum—the eternal crisis of masculinity—yet they also signify variations on that universal dilemma in the specificity of the 1950s and the 1960s.

**Narrative**

In both Rear Window and Blow-Up, the crisis of masculinity is intimately bound up with a mysterious murder plot and its resolution. Both men believe that they have witnessed or uncovered a murder. Both rely on their cameras to try to solve the hermeneutic but find that they cannot trust the mechanical apparatus of vision—the camera—to resolve their doubts, or their personal identity crises. (In fact, in Rear Window, the hero’s crisis of masculinity, his impotence and symbolic castration, is signified by both his broken leg and his smashed camera.) Ultimately, Hitchcock seems to resolve the murder narrative—Jeffries exposes the murderer figuratively and photographically (with the help of his girlfriend and his flashbulbs), and the police arrest the culprit. Toward the end of Blow-Up, Antonioni shows us a dead body, but the real closure takes place on a more metaphysical plane—Thomas capitulates to the postmodern world of the simulacrum, represented by his increasingly abstract blow-ups and imaginary tennis ball in the finale. Both films have “open” endings: Rear Window concludes with both of Jeff’s legs in plaster casts and Lisa, now in male attire, reading fashion magazines; Blow-Up ends with Thomas putting down his camera and putting more trust in his imagination. That said, with the exception of its ambiguous conclusion, Blow-Up is clearly Antonioni’s most carefully and traditionally structured film (with the possible exception of Il Mistero di Oberwald, 1980). Indeed, Blow-Up is somewhat
anomalous in Antonioni’s work because it follows an almost classical narrative trajectory of exposition (in which the protagonist’s occupation and character are introduced), point of attack (what happened in that park?), discovery (the grainy blow-ups seem to reveal a gun and a dead body), reversal (the blow-ups are stolen), and falling action (the corpse is gone and the photographer plays with the mimes). The one difference from the Aristotelian, Scribean, and Syd Fieldesian dramatic norms is that there is no catharsis or resolution step at the end. This uncustomary faithfulness to narrative norms may be the result of the genre—the mystery film or thriller—in which Antonioni chose to work. But despite what appears to be a relatively conventional plotline (until the end), the director himself seemed to think that he was breaking all the rules: “I don’t believe that the old laws of drama have validity any more. Today, stories are what they are, with neither a beginning nor an end necessarily, without key scenes, without a dramatic arc, without catharsis. They can be made up of tatters, of fragments, as unbalanced as life itself” (Billard 5).

Rear Window follows the traditional pattern even more closely, although somewhat less than the average Hitchcock thriller. Indeed, John Fawell concludes that “Rear Window [is not] too immaculate, so highly unified and tightly constructed as to be lifeless . . . . The viewer’s mind has more free play [because] Rear Window operates so fluidly on so many different levels—as psychological study, treatise on modern alienation, rumination on the nature of film going, and autobiographical statement” (7). (In this latter regard, it is worth noting that Antonioni has explicitly stated that Blow-Up “is [his] most autobiographical film” [qtd. in Brunette 111]).

One other subtle narrative connection between Hitchcock and Blow-Up involves the street address of Thomas’s studio in London. At one point, the photographer pulls up to the building in his Rolls-Royce and the camera holds on the entrance door for some time, much longer than necessary to establish that the photographer has reached his destination. As the static shot remains on the screen, the viewer tries to make sense of the numeral that fills the frame: 39. William Arrowsmith once suggested that this number had both spiritual connotations and historical significance. The number three has important meaning in the Roman Catholic religion (the Holy Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the Holy Family—Jesus, Mary, and Joseph; the three domains of the afterlife depicted in Dante’s Commedia—Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory; etc.). Three squared (nine) would thus have even more import in that cosmology. Thirty-nine would combine two already symbolic numbers, three and nine, and add up to another mystical integer, twelve (as in the twelve apostles of Christ). Arrowsmith’s primary interpretation of the number
39, though, was a bit idiosyncratic. He claimed that Antonioni was trying to communicate that he was “a 39er,” that is, an individual whose worldview was dramatically shaped by the experiences of living in Europe in the fateful year 1939 and, subsequently, during World War II (Arrowsmith 1982). In the context of this essay, though, another equally idiosyncratic reading is possible: the 39 may refer to Hitchcock’s early British film *The 39 Steps* (1935). After all, Hitchcock’s film, like Antonioni’s, is a thriller about a murder in London witnessed by an innocent protagonist who has nothing to do with the intrigue but who is drawn into the affair by a mysterious woman and feels compelled to solve the riddle.

**Theme**

In a sense, both films share the metatheme of self-reflexivity; indeed, they can both be called meditations on the movies, commentaries on the camera. In *Rear Window*, Jeffries stares at the many (thirty-one) rear-window views of his neighbors and sees a variety of screens across the courtyard. He projects film plots (love stories, comedies, murder mysteries) and characters (the Newlyweds, Miss Torso, Miss Lonelyheart) onto the mindscreens of his imagination. As Hitchcock himself once observed, “What he sees is a mental process *blown up* in his mind” (“*Rear Window*” 18, emphasis added). All are projections of Jeff’s own possible future: an unsatisfying marriage, loneliness, despair, and maybe even a homicide. Similarly, in *Blow-Up*, Thomas’s still camera is a metaphor for the motion picture apparatus. He “edits” his *blown-up* photographs in his mind to tell a story—one in which he is the hero who has prevented a murder. Indeed, the cuts from one enlarged image to another follow the montage regime of classical Hollywood (and classical Hitchcockian) cinema in that we follow Jane’s gaze to the bushes and then to the victim and in both cases see what she sees: a hidden revolver in the foliage and a dead victim under the tree.

Just as Jeffries sees a projection of a possibly unsatisfying marriage to Lisa as he observes the Thorwald household through his camera, Thomas sees a reflection of his own views on love and marriage in his blow-ups; he believes they are the invention of duplicitous females, such as his (maybe) ex-wife, who lead men on only to destroy them. (He sees Jane literally leading her victim to his death by pulling him up a hill and toward the tree.)

Both films, then, are self-reflexive in two important ways: as metacommentary on the voyeuristic/scopophilic act of watching films as a spectator and as metadiscourse on the process of filmmaking from the point of view of the
cinematographer-director-editor. Like film viewers, who must always perform hermeneutic work to interpret the events before them, both protagonists are forced to actively engage with the text of the events they are witnessing. Jeff is clearly a surrogate for a film viewer, as has been pointed out in much of the scholarly literature on Rear Window, with the windows across the way being the movie screens he watches (Belton, Doucher, Fawell, Modleski, Palmer, Sharff, Wood, et al.). The much-discussed opening shot shows the bamboo curtains being raised, like the curtains in a theater, as the credits appear; those same shades are lowered at the conclusion of the film as the end credits roll. No human agency is in evidence as these shades go up and down.

In Rear Window, Jefferies "sits behind his camera, weaving fantasies with the people on the other end of the lens" (Fawell 135). He even gives them stage directions ("Go ahead, Thorwald, answer it" [the phone]). As such, Jeff functions like a film director, who tells a story primarily through visual images. More than that, because of his injury-imposed isolation, Jeffries lives through his camera (like Alfred Hitchcock) and does not have much contact with the real world.

In Blow-Up, Thomas is also a filmmaker figure, if not an explicit avatar for Antonioni. This is, of course, most evident in the scenes in which the photographer takes pictures in his studio or on location (functioning like a cinematographer); when he poses and coaches his models, Jane, and the teenyboppers (acting as film director, acting coach, and casting agent); and when he arranges his blown-up images to tell a story (performing the work of an editor/auteur). The scene in which Thomas has an encounter with Jane (Vanessa Redgrave), the mystery woman from Maryon Park, in his loft epitomizes this idea that he is acting as a film director. At the beginning of the scene, the photographer treats Jane in the only way he knows how to relate to a female—as a model. He wants to see "how she sits," poses her against a mauve backdrop, and directs her to "keep still" and to move "slowly, slowly, against the beat" of the mood-enhancing music playing on his stereo. In this sense, Thomas orchestrates the scene like a cinema director; indeed, he orchestrates the scene like Michelangelo Antonioni, who in many respects treats his performers like models (if not mannequins). In addition, Thomas's schizoid photographic work in two ostensibly antithetical genres—documentary (the dosshouse and park pictures) and illusionism (the high-fashion work)—replicates the early history of the cinema, when Lumière and Méliès vied for the attention of audiences around the world.10

Both Rear Window and Blow-Up derive from source stories that are dark meditations on contemporary city life, as seen through the eyes and lenses of
bored still photographers. Woolrich and Cortázar both created claustrophobic settings and situations and obsessive protagonists who insist on solving the riddles they photographed. Thus, both stories evince, albeit in very different ways, a sort of “urban spectatorship” (Brand 124), especially when their city views are given plastic form on film. Although Hitchcock’s immobilized hero does his obsessive urban spectating from a wheelchair and Antonioni’s flaneur does his Benjaminian exploring on foot or from behind the wheel of a Rolls-Royce, they share an ennui about “civilized,” “cosmopolitan” life in the modern metropolis and find excitement only in the ambiguous possibilities of a murder mystery.

Cinematic Style

One of the most consistent connections between Rear Window and Blow-Up is their cinematic style, especially the film’s all-but-eclectic use of a single character’s perspective on the action. Not only do Hitchcock and Antonioni show Jeffries and Thomas throughout most of their respective movies, but the action that is depicted is literally seen through their eyes for most of the screen time. In particular, the point-of-view shot and the gaze-object-gaze editing regime—pioneered and developed by Alfred Hitchcock—is on display as the visual armature of characterological identification throughout both films. As a prototypical modernist film, Blow-Up ambiguates that point of view in several instances. However, Hitchcock also deviates from the classical paradigm in some key moments, thus creating a tense and uncertain situation for the spectator that is as problematical as that found in Blow-Up.

One of the first instances of an ambiguoused POV occurs at the beginning of Blow-Up. Thomas moves toward the door of his studio, ostensibly to photograph supermodel Veruschka. Framed in a tight close-up, Thomas looks into the studio through the narrow doorway. By all the codes and conventions of traditional (e.g., Hitchcockian) editing structures, this “gaze” shot would be followed by an “object” shot showing the attention of the photographer’s look—presumably the inside of the studio. And at first glance, that is what we appear to get: a view of a bored Veruschka seated on the floor near a large sheet of Plexiglas. However, after a few seconds, Thomas enters the shot from the background, retrospectively changing the ostensible subjectivity of the view to a more objective one. What we thought was the protagonist’s perspective now turns out to be a more impersonal view. The conventional character-based gaze-object-gaze axis is thus elided in favor of a frame-breaking autonomous camera regime. Beyond that, Antonioni plays even further with
the viewer’s sense perceptions. What appears to be Veruschka’s body is actually her reflection in the Plexiglas, a point that is made obvious when Thomas snaps his fingers on the sheet, causing it (and her image on it) to vibrate.

Although the commercial “master of suspense” generally follows most of the accepted POV protocols in order to guide the attention of his viewers, Hitchcock himself is not above confusing his audience at times. The opening images of Rear Window, for instance, beg the question of who is watching this scene. The camera pans right to left around the Greenwich Village courtyard in the daylight, seemingly from the perspective of the rear-window view of our hero.11 When the pan finally concludes, the camera settles on the sleeping figure of L. B. Jeffries, whose back is to the courtyard and whose name is inscribed on his leg cast. So, not only could he not be the point of origination of the panning shot because he is asleep, but by showing him facing away from the window, he cannot be the source of the gaze. As in Blow-Up, the assumed POV is retrospectively changed from an ostensibly subjective view to a more detached regard. This happens again later in Rear Window when, once again, the camera pans around the courtyard (this time at night) only to reveal that Jeff is asleep, facing away from his window. A detached and omniscient authorial camera seems to be the source of these images, a different perspective from what we expect in a Hitchcock opus.

Antonioni’s set design also manifests the Hitchcock influence. Generally speaking, Hitchcock’s films use minimalist, utilitarian décor, probably to focus attention on the interactions of characters. A white shower stall (Psycho), a bare-bones telephone booth (The Birds), a nondescript flat that becomes the site of murder (The 39 Steps), an unadorned train compartment (The Lady Vanishes), a lifeboat (Lifeboat), a middle-class dinner table (Shadow of a Doubt), an austere British courtroom (The Paradine Case), a tidy three-room New York apartment (Rope), Scottie Ferguson’s functional home and hearth (Vertigo), and many more examples illustrate Hitchcock’s penchant for stark environments that serve as mere backdrops for desperate human dramas. For Hitchcock, sets round out the picture of his characters and situations but do not generally contribute directly to the thematic histrionics of his films. His characters are often trapped and isolated by their environments but their surroundings are rarely metaphors for or commentaries on the characters’ predicaments. Indeed, the director often selected especially prosaic settings so that when evil broke out in them the contrast would be especially telling.

In Rear Window, the courtyard is considerably more expressionistic than the sets in other Hitchcock works.12 The sky is an unnatural and unrealistic orange, the alleyway and tavern across the street look like a studio set, and the
unlikely coincidences that occur behind the many apartment windows in the
courtyard all suggest that the setting is unrealistic. Taken in toto, the many
boxlike windows function as visual correlatives by which to convey the theme
of urban isolation and alienation. Add to this the diegetic soundtrack, which
consists of “incidental” sounds that all bear obvious reference to the plot and
characters, and we can see the artistry of Hitchcock at work.

In Blow-Up, Antonioni takes similar care with his set design and soundtrack,
although for this filmmaker, environment is no mere backdrop to the main
action and characters; in many ways, environment (rather than character) is
destiny. The director even went to the extreme length of painting the grass
in Maryon Park green to create just the right artistic atmosphere and mood.
Throughout the film, though, the desaturated color scheme comments on the
restricted personality of its protagonist. As a case in point, the mannequins in
the shop window wear relatively colorless clothes and their stiff appearance
reflects Thomas’s dead-in-life lifestyle. In addition, even though Thomas is
“out and about” London through most of the film, he is often alone in his car,
alone in his studio, alone in a crowd. Antonioni’s mise-en-scène and set design
portray his anomic by isolating him in the frame.

The odd neon sign seen in the park when Thomas investigates the corpse is
another example of how Antonioni uses the environment to create ambiguity.
The sign looms over Thomas, but its precise meaning and signification remain
vague. (Is it FOA or TOA? Is it an advertisement? A corporate logo? A work of
modern art?) The sign is reminiscent of the “Eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg” bill-
board in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby that presides over a symbolic
ash heap like the gaze of a Deus ex machina, a dumb commercial god without
pity or remorse surveying its “ash-gray” subjects. Such metaphysical specula-
tions are apt in that both Hitchcock and Antonioni can be seen as post-deist
authors who were raised in the Roman Catholic liturgy but created fictive
universes in which God is dead.

Barrier images are used throughout both films to portray the alienation of
characters from each other. The bank of separated windows in Rear Window is
the most obvious visual device used to convey the loneliness of the residents.
But even within those individual apartments, Hitchcock separates cohabitants.
Thorwald and his wife, for instance, are frequently shown in the same film
frame but through separate windowpanes.13 Similarly, after Miss Lonelyhearts
evicts her “gentleman caller” for “getting fresh,” he is seen in the hallway
sadly rubbing his slapped cheek while Miss Lonelyheart weeps poignantly on
the other side of the door frame.

Antonioni is, of course, a master of using barrier images and constricted
frames to illustrate his grand theme of modern alienation. Ted Perry has traced such "barrier-isolation" motifs in *Eclipse* (1962), but they are also found in *Blow-Up* ("A Contextual Study" 256–62). Whether or not such compositions are directly attributable to the influence of Hitchcock remains an open question. However, the similarities in visual architecture and theme point to a convergence between him and Antonioni that has not been mentioned in the scholarly literature. Examples of Antonioni's use of barrier images in *Blow-Up* include door frames that frequently delimit the space of his characters (e.g., the doorway through which Thomas observes Patricia and Bill having sex), the clear and smoked Plexiglas sheets in the photographer's studios, the windshield of the Rolls-Royce, the fence and trees used to conceal Thomas's surreptitious photography in the park, the fence around the tennis court at the film's coda, and the wardrobe rack that comes between the protagonist and the teenyboppers.

The soundtrack of *Rear Window* is almost entirely diegetic—composed of "incidental sounds," as Fawell notes (25). There is some music, but it emanates mainly from the composer's piano across the courtyard or from radio broadcasts and phonograph recordings ("That's Amore," "To See You Is to Love You," "Lover," "Waiting for My True Love to Appear"). Although a non-diegetic jazz theme opens the film as the credits roll (as in *Blow-Up*) and while the camera pans around the complex, for the most part *Rear Window* depends on "natural" tones. This is not to say that these sounds are not highly selective and carefully chosen for their thematic relevance; quite the contrary. Hitchcock's artistic control over his scaled-off universe is never more evident than in the soundtrack of *Rear Window*. For example, the plaintive wail of a distant foghorn expresses the loneliness and sadness of most of the denizens of this Greenwich Village courtyard. (Fawell reads this soundtrack articulation as "the sad exhale of a distant god watching the pathetic struggles of humans" [29].) The patter of gently falling raindrops coursing down a gutter also conveys the pathos of Lars Thorwald's situation as he comes and goes, removing his wife's body parts from the scene of the crime. Thus, even "realistic" sounds that are justified by onscreen events convey meaning and mood. Elizabeth Weis notes Hitchcock's fondness for "asynchronous" and "contrapuntal" sounds that add "variety, denseness, tension, and . . . irony" to his visual images (109, 19).

Natural sounds also convey theme and meaning in *Blow-Up*. When Thomas first sees the corpse in the park, the rustle of wind through the trees adds to the ominous mood of the scene. The offscreen cracking of a twig causes Thomas to turn his head in the direction of the snap, but it is unclear whether
another human being (a Peeping Tom spying on Thomas, for instance) or a local squirrel made the noise.

Like Hitchcock, Antonioni also uses non-diegetic sound sparingly. The most obvious instance of its use is in the final moments, when Thomas “hears” the “ping” of an imaginary tennis ball (or is it the click of a camera’s shutter?). Although in many ways the moral of the entire film is summed up in that sound, its meaning is imprecise and ambivalent.

Antonioni also uses contrapuntal sound to comment on a situation and to expound on his theme. For example, as Thomas approaches the Riki-Tiki Club in search of Janie, whom he spotted on the street, we hear the anticipatory sound of a driving rock beat. However, when he enters the discotheque, the young patrons are inappropriately silent. In fact, they are rigidly immobile, except for one interracial couple who dance listlessly to the pounding beat. Although the young men’s clothes are visually “loud,” we cannot hear their voices. The music and lyrics of the Yardbirds seem to speak for the young men and seem to convey an apposite thematic message from the director—“You’re tellin’ me you didn’t see”—which exactly fits Thomas’s predicament vis-à-vis what he saw (or “didn’t see” in the park). But even the song is not communicated properly. A technological failure causes the rock group’s performance to go sour as an electric guitar malfunctions, producing annoying static. This failure of technology to create or improve the rapport between people mirrors the protagonist’s own over reliance on his ineffective camera apparatus.

It is only when the rock performer smashes his obstreperous instrument to bits and hurls the guitar neck into the statuelike crowd that the young men react. This direct frontal assault on their zombielike state provokes them to shout and scream loudly and to chase after the prop, which ends up in Thomas’s besieged hands. However, the noisy pandemonium and all the impassioned movements of the crowd do not communicate anything more than the mimes’ histrionic excess. They are still dead-in-life characters, like Thomas, who are stirred by ersatz phallic symbols (the propeller, the guitar neck) to move or shout inarticulately, but they do not share authentic intimacies or joy with their fellow human beings. Thus, the overwrought soundtrack in this scene suggests that despite all the ostensible Sturm und Drang, human beings still experience “failure t’ communicate.”

Both directors also utilize silence in artistic ways, in contrast to the talkathon dialogue in most mainstream movies. Indeed, both filmmakers have commented in interviews on this aspect of their work. Hitchcock once said that “silence is often very effective and its effect is heightened by the proper handling of music before and after” (Gottlieb 242). Similarly, Antonioni once
said, “My aim is to achieve the suppression of outward physical action... and, where possible, eliminate dialogue” (qtd. in Gessner 396). Hitchcock’s influence on Antonioni’s soundtracks can be noticed throughout his œuvre, but it is especially evident in *Blow-Up*.

It has been estimated that 35 percent of *Rear Window* contains no dialogue (Sharif 2). The opening is a classic example of Hitchcock’s ability to convey information to the viewer without resorting to verbal communication. Visual clues and images predominate as the director sets the stage, establishes the “backstory,” and reveals details about the lifestyle and situation of the protagonist. After the camera pans the entire outer courtyard, Hitchcock continues the camera movement into Jefferies’ apartment. The shot holds in tight close-up on a bead of perspiration on Jeff’s forehead before revealing his leg cast (“Here lie the broken bones of L. B. Jefferies”), his smashed camera, photographs of the race car crash that immobilized him, and other shots—including one of a nuclear mushroom cloud—that establish his dangerous occupation. A wall thermometer indicating a ninety-four-degree day and a framed negative of a model alongside the positive print on the cover of a magazine tell us more about the protagonist than just the temperature and his profession; they suggest the superheated nature of his confinement and foreshadow his “negative” attitude about Lisa, who happens to be a model. There is no dialogue throughout this expository shot, although the voice of a radio announcer is heard: “Men, are you over forty? When you wake up... do you have that listless feeling?” This advertisement bears directly on Jeff’s status in the world and, as in *Blow-Up*, establishes a commercialized consumer culture that impinges on people from the outside.

The very first sequence in *Blow-Up* also establishes a conflict between sound and silence, as Antonioni crosscuts between a group of youthful, noisy Rag Week students who look like mimes and a group of older, quiet derelicts exiting a doss-house. The Rag Week students are not, technically speaking, mimes since they are rather boisterous—kinetically and aurally—especially in the opening scene. They run through the streets and shout exuberantly. Their shouts, however, do not communicate much more than their excitement and passion within said, stiff-upper-lip British society (epitomized by the Royal Guard, African nuns, and other solemn people they pass on the streets). In the opening, the nummers “converse” with Thomas exclusively through gestural synecdoche and other unspoken means. Nonetheless, their shared gazes—their imploring requests for a donation and Thomas’s lackadaisical facial response—establish a silent, ambiguous link between them that convinces the photographer to give them some cash at the beginning of the
film and to retrieve their invisible tennis ball at the end. Like Antonioni, who uses atypical “wires” to communicate meaning and character, the mimes use atypical channels to convey information about themselves.

Finally, screen performance, or acting style, must be considered as part of a film’s overall style. This is one of the clearest connections between Hitchcock and Antonioni, since both directors eschew histrionics and “Method” acting. Hitchcock, of course, is equally famous for saying that “actors are like cattle” and then for amending that statement by stating that he meant to say that “actors should be treated like cattle.” In seeking a neutral, minimalist performance style that was conducive to his cinematic vision, the director often instructed performers to “drain their faces of all expression” (“The Dark Side,” Spoto 291) so that he could create emotion using camera, editing, music, or mise-en-scène. As the director put it, “The screen actor . . . has to submit himself to be used by the director and the camera . . . The best screen actor is the man who can do nothing extremely well” (“Direction” 35). In interviews, Hitchcock often invoked his notion of “pure cinema,” which relied on Kuleshovian montage and restrained acting, especially in facial close-ups, so that when the cut was made to what the character was looking at, the viewer would experience the emotion directly, through identification, rather than by observing the actor’s artifice of sentiment. Both classical actors, like John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier, and Gregory Peck, and so-called Methodists, like Montgomery Clift and Paul Newman, complained that Hitchcock wanted to destroy their craft by insisting that they unlearn their carefully honed techniques and deliver a “less-is-more” performance. Hitchcock admitted this tendency to François Truffaut: “[Paul Newman] is a ‘method’ actor, and he found it hard to just give me one of those neutral looks I needed to cut from his point of view” (“Direction” 313).

Antonioni also relies on a combination of mise-en-scène, découpage, camera angles, color, lighting, set design, soundtrack articulations, music, and pared-down performances to construct his singular cinematic language of characterization. As he once put it, “Only one person fuses in his mind the various elements involved in a film . . . the director. The actor is one of those elements, and sometimes not even the most important” (“A Talk with Antonioni,” Antonioni 144). Most naturalistic film directors exploit the theatrical codes of their actors’ facial expressions, gestures, and vocal intonation in dialogue to effectuate audience understanding and empathy. In contrast, Antonioni uses a cinematic syntax that problematizes such clarity. For him, “It is much more cinematographic to try to catch a character’s thoughts by showing his reactions, whatever they may be, than to wrap the whole thing up in a speech, than
to resort to what practically amounts to an explanation" (Leprohon 96). The viewer is thus presented with a paradoxical modernist morphology, a minimalism that ultimately underplays his characters' individuality and "personality." Indeed, an Antonioni character is often just a small part of a larger visual and social field, a "figure in a landscape" as Ted Perry called it ("Men and Landscapes" 3).

A basic tenet of Stanislavskian/Method acting is that the actor is the auteur (Carnicke 80), or, as Tony Barr has said in discussing screen acting, "The actor's primary function is to communicate ideas and emotion to an audience" (3). However, in the work of Antonioni, the communication of ideas and emotion has become the job of the filmmaker, not the performer. Antonioni has stated this directly: "Actors feel somewhat uncomfortable with me; they have the feeling that they've been excluded from my work. And, as a matter of fact, they have been" (Blow-Up 8). This may be because the director believes that his actors are only one part of a larger composition: "I regard [the performer] as I regard a tree, a wall, or a cloud, that is, as just one element in the overall scene" ("A Talk with Antonioni," Antonioni 36). Antonioni has explained his work methods on the set as follows: "The film actor ought not to understand, he ought to be... The director owes the actor no explanations except general ones about the character and the film. It is dangerous to go into details" (Leprohon 101-03).

Examples of Antonioni's use of subdued, nonverbal gestures abound in Blow-Up ("Sounds of Silence," Tomasulo 94-123). At the start of the Veruschka photo session, for instance, Thomas gestures with a shrug of his head for Reg, his assistant, to open the blinds and let in some light, not even deigning to speak to the hired help. Throughout much of the film, Hemmings' face remains expressionless and deadpan, neutral in the Hitchcock-Kuleshov manner. As just one example, when he goes back to the park at night to search for the corpse, he slowly and deliberately approaches the tree where he saw the corpse. The camera tilts down to reveal the dead body. When Thomas kneels down and gently touches the cadaver, the photographer is mute and his face is impassive—as impassive as the dead man's. Thomas is equally emotionless when he stares at the enlargements hung about his loft like the stations of the cross. Hemmings' face at this point expresses at most slight curiosity, conveyed by his slightly knit brow; the shot composition communicates the character's situation more directly. Thomas's face is trapped between two of the blow-ups, which impinge on his "personal space" and occupy most of the frame. As such, his entrapment by the mystery in Maryon Park is presented in a graphic visual manner, rather than through any overt techniques in David
Hemmings’ performance. Although it would be difficult to prove a direct influence from Hitchcock, both directors certainly appear to be “working in the same idiom” of cinematic performance codes. They clearly share, in both their public pronouncements and their films, a resolute exteriorization of emotion and a de-emphasis on verbal communication. Even when there is dialogue, Antonioni’s methods of working with actors are such that “they appear to recite their lines with the monotonous detachment of non-performers who have no involvement with what they are saying” (Scott 88), as evinced in the exchange between Thomas and Patricia cited above.

**Differences between Hitchcock and Antonioni**

In an interview with me, Antonioni said, “Hitchcock’s films are completely false, especially the endings. . . . Life is inconclusive” (“Life Is Inconclusive,” Tomasulo 64). Although many scholars have argued that the ending of *Rear Window* is less definitive than that of many other Hitchcock films, it is still rather different from the conclusion of *Blow-Up*. As *Rear Window* concludes, the murderer has been captured and the protagonist is chastened by his experience; after falling from the window ledge, Jeff is surrounded by Lisa, Stella, and Doyle in a composition reminiscent of a pictä tableau. Furthermore, the fates of all the other apartment dwellers are revealed. The future of the romance between Jeff and Lisa is the only plot line that remains somewhat unresolved: although Lisa seems to be Jeff’s dutiful wife or companion as she reads a travel book on the Himalayas, she conceals a copy of *Harper’s Bazaar*, the fashion magazine, indicating that her transformation is not entirely complete and that her relationship with Jeff may be on a rocky foundation. Nonetheless, the epistemological quest embodied in the murder mystery is resolved and Jeff can return to life as usual—once his *two* broken legs heal.

In contrast, the last scene of *Blow-Up* is a classic modernist stopping. None of the ravelings and unravelings of the plot have been resolved, and narrative closure is avoided so much that it has come to represent (along with Truffaut’s final freeze-frame in *The Four Hundred Blows*) the inconclusiveness of the European art cinema. Of course, this pattern of anticlosure has been a hallmark of Antonioni’s oeuvre throughout his career; the director has even commented on it by quoting Anton Chekhov: “Give me new endings and I will reinvent literature!” (“Life Is Inconclusive,” Tomasulo 64). In particular, Thomas’s ambiguous facial expression has been interpreted as indicating either negative capitulation to the delusional forces (represented by the mimes and marijuana) eating away at his grasp of reality or his positive revelation that he must
give up observing life through his camera and make contact with other human beings. Between these antipodes, the Antonioni literature is filled with differing interpretations about what the imaginary tennis ball signifies and what Thomas is thinking about after he "returns" it to the mimes.

In Blow-Up, neither the murder subplot nor Thomas's epistemological questions are resolved. We know there was a murder (and a corpse), but the evidence (the dead body and the blow-ups) disappear without a hint of who the victim was or what the motive for the crime might have been. Hitchcock, of course, could not end a commercial American genre film made in the 1950s without fulfilling his audience's expectation of who committed the murder and why. By the late 1960s, though, Antonioni could provide an open-ended modernist finale so that in Blow-Up the classical anagnorisis of Greek drama is elided in favor of a polysemic metadiscourse on the nature of reality. One does not have to "make sense" of this in medias res ending, especially since the protagonist vanishes from the screen in an enigmatic fade-out. The modernist ending is, after all, usually more immanent than imminent, evoking a mood of epistemological despair rather than narrative closure and characterological certainty. Indeed, for Thomas and for the viewer, the final frame does not end the search for meaning.

In both films, the two protagonists' cameras figure prominently in the denouements, albeit in markedly different ways. Jeff picks up and uses his photographic apparatus, especially his flashbulbs, to stave off the menacing Lars Thorwald. As Thorwald approaches the wheelchair-bound Jeffries, the photographer triggers his flash attachments one by one, thus temporarily blinding and delaying his murderous attacker. Throughout the film, Jeff had used his camera as a means to distance himself from others and to observe life without participating in it. In contrast, at the end of Blow-Up Thomas puts down his camera to communicate with the mimes by tossing back their imaginary tennis ball. Of course, Thomas, like Jeff, had used his camera as an alienating device—to keep him at a remove from the people he encountered. Ironically, when he finally puts down his lens, he is able to make creative contact with the outside world and with other human beings, even if only on the level of a game. In both cases, the protagonists move on and are allowed to grow and overcome their alienation—one by using his camera in an imaginative way, the other by using his imagination and not his camera.

One of the chief differences between Rear Window and Blow-Up is in the depiction of the protagonist. Although L. B. Jeffries has a dark and disturbing side, as do many of the subsidiary characters in Rear Window, there is nonetheless "a warmth of characterization... a credibility and an emotional
wholeness, a heart and a humor" in the movie—"characteristics that other Hitchcock films ... conspicuously lack." ("Dark Side," Spoto 374). Donald Spoto attributes this light touch and generosity of spirit to Hitchcock's screenwriter, John Michael Hayes, who also wrote North by Northwest. Jeff may be a suspicious and sexist Peeping Tom, and he may declaim against his mate and his loving girlfriend through most of the narrative but, as personified by Hollywood Everyman James Stewart, he is likeable and agreeable. When he first asks Lisa to "shut up for a minute," it comes out of his frustration over not being able to get a word in edgewise and is spoken with a gentle mien; a few moments later, he raises his voice and tells her more directly: "Shut up!" Nonetheless, even his most cutting comments are tinged with sly wit, humor, and a delivery that indicates he is just teasing and not intentionally trying to be cruel.

The same cannot be said about Thomas. Although some spectators have apparently been taken in by his mod-ish "charm," rugged good looks, and glamorous occupation, he is clearly a boorish and egotistical workaholic who despises the people (especially the women) he works with, drives past, and encounters in the course of his daily routine. He calls his female Asian assistant (and most of the other women he meets) "love," in the patronizing idiom of the 1960s, but he mainly orders her around. Although Thomas never tells anyone to "shut up," he does tell his models to keep their eyes shut while he leaves the studio and verbally abuses them ("You, arm down!" "Terrible!" "Smile!"). Viewers may forgive Thomas (and David Hemmings) for his uncouth qualities and misogyny, but his dark side is clearly more visible (and more risible) than that of L. B. Jeffries.

Conclusion

The impact of Alfred Hitchcock's oeuvre has been enormous, both on international culture in general and on other filmmakers in particular. Scholars and critics have pointed out the most obvious examples of motion picture directors who have appropriated or satirized the Hitchcock legacy—De Palma, Charbol, Truffaut, Brooks, Higgins, et al.—especially when those auteurs have specifically acknowledged their debt to the master of suspense. Establishing a Hitchcock influence on other directors is a more difficult task, one that is made more complicated by differences in nationality, era, themes, and cinematic styles. Nonetheless, just as it is important to attempt to trace such patterns and document the "anxiety of influence" in poety and prose, there are rewards to be gained by studying the intertextual and self-reflexive "bor-
rowings” that are passed down from one generation of film auteurs to another (Bloom).

Without denying the clearly visible distinctions between a Classical Hollywood filmmaker like Hitchcock and a European modernist cineaste such as Antonioni, it is instructive to note the tangible textual (and subtextual) similarities in narrative, character, theme, and cinematic style that pervade their most commercial movies, *Rear Window* and *Blow-Up*. It would be wrongheaded to say that the latter is merely an artistic “remake” of the former; it would be just as wrongheaded to conclude that there is no connection between the two films. How that influence happened—whether it was intentional or unconscious, direct or indirect, productive or destructive—is open to debate and discussion. This study, along with the other chapters in this collection, has attempted to open the door to future research on “the Hitchcock factor” in world cinema. Furthermore, investigating the lineage of all the artistic inheritances in the historical evolution of the film medium is a worthy, albeit daunting, goal for scholars and critics alike.

Notes

1. There is even a humorous, though subtle, homage to the “master of suspense” in the otherwise dour *Last Year at Marienbad*: a shadowy cardboard figure of Hitchcock. No doubt Resnais was offering a tribute to a filmmaker who shared his aesthetic predilections for puzzling narratives and both long takes and montage editing.

2. Although I originally noticed the similarities between the two films when *Blow-Up* first came out in 1967 and even presented the comparison in various conference papers during the early 1980s, this is the first time I have published these ideas. While conducting final research for this chapter, I noticed that at least three authors had briefly called attention to the similarities: Thomas Harris (66–69), William J. Palmer (102), and Charles Derry (237–38). In addition, Francesco Casetti makes a comparison/contrast between Hitchcock’s “fruitful” use of narrational agency in *Stage Fright* (1950) and Antonioni’s “erratic” self-reflexivity in *Cronaca di un amore* (1950). See Casetti, especially 6.

3. One of the most common ways to convey character names—the proper name—is absent in *Blow-Up*. The two main characters are never identified by name within the diegesis, although their first names—Thomas and Jane—are noted in the film’s published screenplay and in most of the scholarly literature. The very absence of a cognomen provides symbolic inferences, just as it does in the modernist novels of Kafka (X in *The Trial*) or the plays of Samuel Beckett. Since one’s name is often associated with one’s identity (Who are you? John Doe), the failure to provide an appellation suggests a characterological anonymity or veritable nonexistence. This namelessness (also found in *The Passenger* [the Girl], *Il Mistero di Oberwall* [the Queen], and all the family names in *L’Avventura*, *L’Eclisse*, *Il Deserto Rosso*, and *Zabriskie Point*) bespeaks a lack of or loss of personal identity that Antonioni thematizes throughout his work.

By providing extratextual information about the characters’ names through the *Blow-Up* script and interviews, however, the director encourages individual associations that attach to
those designations: “doubting” Thomas, “peeping” Tom, or “plain” Jane, all of which have some resonance with the people in Blow-Up. In combination, however, Thomas and Jane are sexually charged names to readers of D. H. Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley’s Lover, in which Mellors, the groundskeeper, uses “John Thomas” and “Lady Jane” to designate, respectively, the male and female sex organs: “John Thomas! Dost want her? Does want Lady Jane?” (252). Neither the script nor the film, however, offers a surname for either character (or for any other character in the entire film), thus setting them apart from any roots, traditions, or family ties, and makes them modern tabula rasa.

4. Hitchcock has been quoted as saying that he modeled (pun intended) Lisa's character on supermodel and businesswoman Anita Colby (Samuels 118). Another report has the director basing the Jeff-Lisa romance on the real-life relationship between still photographer Robert Capa and actress Ingrid Bergman (Colben 2-7).

5. This was, of course, the era of the rail-thin British fashion model, with Twiggy and Jean Shrimpton being the most renowned exemplars of the Mod look. The Hemmings character was apparently based on a real-life British fashion photographer, David Bailey, who was notorious for his demanding persona.

6. Jeffries is not the only male in Rear Window prone to scopophilia. At the beginning of the film, some men in a helicopter hover over Jeff’s apartment complex, hoping to get a view of some sunbathing women—a scene that seems to have been “borrowed” by Federico Fellini for the opening of La Dolce Vita (1960). Later, even upright Lieutenant Doyle stares across the courtyard at Miss Torso until Jeffries asks “How’s your wife?”

7. It was, of course, the fate of Oedipus to have his eyes plucked out as punishment for his taboo activities.

8. This may partially explain the film’s international success at the box office, along with its daring (for the time) depiction of “sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll.”

9. Although the Thorwald marriage—with its constant bickering, physical separation, and eventual murder of the wife—is the most obvious example of a bad marriage, even the rapturous newlyweds end up quarreling over money by the end of the film. There are even hints that the older couple, who love their dog like a child, are sexually alienated from each other; they are introduced sleeping on their fire escape but facing in opposite directions—the bed positions assumed by another sexless couple: Leopold and Molly Bloom in James Joyce’s Ulysses (1922).

10. Indeed, Angelo Restivo has pointed out the similarity between the Lumière brothers’ Workers Leaving a Factory (1895) and the shot of Thomas and the derelicts exiting the dosshouse at the beginning of Blow-Up (106).

11. This right-to-left direction is “against the grain” of the natural movement of the eye in western societies, where reading is inculcated as a left-to-right activity. Robert Stam and Roberta Pearson point out that Hitchcock uses this “counterclockwise” pan around the courtyard no less than six times in Rear Window (199).

12. Although far from the extreme found in German Expressionist cinema of the 1920s, it is important to note that Hitchcock worked at UFA in the silent period and observed the dramatic set designs of that era.

13. They are, in fact, usually in separate rooms—Mr. Thorwald in the living room and his wife (an invalid like Jeffries) in the bedroom. The background walls in both rooms are painted in contrasting colors to further illustrate their differences.

14. Hitchcock introduces Lisa as a negative force, by showing her casting a deep shadow over Jeff’s sleeping countenance when she first enters his apartment.

15. “No Words” was painted on the stolen airplane in Antonioni’s L’Eclisse (1962), an apt expression for the director’s cinematic goals.

16. Jeffries’ ruminations to Lisa in this scene rhyme with Thorwald’s earlier injunction to the sculptress: “Why don’t you shut up!” Several commentators have pointed out the doppelgänger relationship between Jeff and Thorwald.
Works Consulted


