

Hitchcock and the Heterotopic

We might ask, to begin with, what has not already been said about the cinema of Alfred Hitchcock, about the biographical event of Hitchcock, about the critical contribution of the study of Hitchcock to cinema theory? To mention only the major ones is already to mention something significant: *Cahiers du Cinema's la métaphysique de Hitchcock* and Claude Chabrol's 1954 interview in *Cahiers*, followed by Chabrol and Rohmer's 1957 book *Hitchcock*, offering a theology of Hitchcock's search for God, and then Truffaut's more secular engagement with Hitch in his and H.G. Scott's *Hitchcock* (1968). There were also articles by Alexandre Astruc, Jacques Rivette and J.L. Godard. Contrasting with French 'theology' was Robin Wood's *Hitchcock's Films* (1965), approaching his subject under the influence of F.R. Leavis and a certain English moralism with respect to text analysis, asking as to Hitch's 'moral purpose'. There is also Jean Douchet's *Alfred Hitchcock* (1967) and Peter Bogdanovich's *The Cinema of Alfred Hitchcock* (1974). This is before psychoanalysis discovered cinema's gaze, and feminism discovered the Symbolic Order.

We then have an explosion of writings engaging the cinema of Hitchcock from some vantage point that assembles Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Zizek. The seminal text was Zizek's *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (1992). With more recent developments in cinema theory, particularly under the sway of, alternatively (or improbably though often together), a version (often peculiarly American) of phenomenology or the writings of Deleuze, we have a text such as Paul Elliott's 2011 *Hitchcock and the Cinema of Sensation: Embodied Film Theory and Cinematic Reception*. Elliott, though, is a Deleuzian and his work is a forensics via a triple register, a trinitarian embodiment of thinking flesh. He takes as themes those bodily rims so pronounced by Lacan as the locus of the drives, those openings: taste and digestion, smell, hearing, touching, the visceral thinking flesh in Hitchcock cinema. Neither a random choice nor singularly essential for the task, Hitch was for Elliott a robust body to examine.

So, what is to be done? Can anything more be said on this cinematic body? Are we raking coals? Scattering ashes? Applying yet another (latest or revived) theoretical frame, stuffing that portly carcass into another vehicle to ferry him for perhaps the last time across the Styx. Hitchcock famously said to Truffaut, concerning the film *Psycho* (1960), though the quote is often taken to more generally define his approach to all his films:

I don't care about the subject matter; I don't care about the acting; but I do care about pieces of film and the photography and the soundtrack and all the technical ingredients that made the audience scream ... it wasn't a message that stirred the audience, nor was it a great performance or their enjoyment of the novel. They were aroused by pure film.

Such talk of 'pure film' may well have turned those French commentators, who were also accomplished film directors (or soon to be film directors) to theology, to questioning God; just as that mention of 'pure cinema' turned Wood to question moral vehicles. 'Pure cinema' turns Elliott directly to question sensate flesh's openings to scream. No message, no performance, no subject matter but a kind of materialism

of perception. This is something interesting that I want to explore but by not having to choose between the idealism easily invoked by the term ‘pure’ cinema, nor, strictly, an empiricism we alternatively turn to by understanding that ‘pure’ to be a plane of consistency constituting the functions and affects of cinema. There are concepts that come out of the conventional doxa of Hitchcock ‘theory’ that I want to hold on to and try to reinvent, the antagonism and relay between suspense and surprise, how suspension and a peculiar notion of the void come into play, how suspense contaminates the locus of what we would conventionally call the ‘drama’ of a film, how captivation and fascination constitute an essential couplet around a continuous play between attention and negligence. I want to encounter these concepts from neither the vantage point of an absolute subject of cinema, an ideal figure by which the ‘pure’ of cinema would be pronounced. Nor do I want to invoke a psychology, a subjectivity of the cinematic persona, character, apparatus or spectator as so much writing on Hitchcock has done. But, then neither do I want to lean on a phenomenology that purports the folding of a flesh of the world and makes sense of sensation as so many ‘becoming’, the folds of *psyche* and *soma*. But nor do I have a recourse to a transcendental empiricism of pure affect, ‘machinic’ assemblages, desiring machines, as provocative as this might be for a Hitchcock who so emphasizes the apparatus and affect in the same breath. There is something else when all of these are exhausted, which would be the exhaustion of cinema, literally, the drawing out of ‘till voided depletion, of cinema.

There is thus a continual suspension between a doubling of locus, a doubling of the same that will always miss its rendezvous, how the place of the Other that forever settles and unsettles opens to the other place, that cinematic other place, doubled and redoubled, whether it be shot-reverse-shot, moving to another locale, folding of the cinematic itself and film narrative. The place of the Other and the other place never coincide: we are suspended between them, infinitely. Though, we are reconciled to this infinite suspension, void, precisely by the contamination of the locus of the drama: at no point do we mistake illusion for anything else. Illusion at all times and in every fold is presented as illusion. Hitchcock and us, we feign-the-feign in every move. Thus we have a progression that operates implacably: everything is a sign that may or may not escalate at any moment to a clue, hence every sign may be the sign of an enigma (or equally may not). The enigma is not in question but rather is in suspension. Then the clues multiply becoming (or not) proofs. The enigma’s suspension is thus itself unstable, the void an open arc of increasing contaminations that necessarily keep occupying the other place but precisely in order to miss the rendezvous with the place of the Other: always other times, other places.

The demand of the Other cannot be met. Better to fantasize the murder of the Other, produce the body and thereby coincide with the other place, than to murder the fantasy. However, the fantasy’s murder is our ultimate dread, enigma and the price we are willing to pay. At no time does a Hitchcock film not murder the fantasy while feigning that it is always the Other who ends up dead. He feigns-the-feign, illusion shown as illusion. Hence the key structural terms: exchange, transference, suspension and duality. The enigma, the secret, always at stake in the escalation of signs to proofs, is never at stake as that to be revealed. The secret stays withdrawn, concealed, radically outside. What we have encountered is not the secret’s interior. There is no interior. We encounter simply the outside to the outside. We encounter the secret qua

secret, that it is there, but forever outside. Pure cinema in this sense is not disclosive authenticity but a revealing of the outside of the outside, the contaminations upon contaminations that secrete and safeguard the enigma, the void. Hence a curious understanding of ‘pure cinema’ that I want to explore further via an engagement with Michel Foucault and his writing on the heterotopic.

We might title this section “Blanchot goes to Hollywood” or “Canguilhem and the threshold to a Science of Cinema.” But let’s introduce Foucault’s notion of the Heterotopia before we get too far ahead of ourselves. Heterotopia is a notion introduced by Foucault in 1966 in the “Introduction” to his *Les Mots et les Choses, The Order of Things*. In that same year he delivered a two-part radio broadcast on the topic of heterotopias that opened to a different space of encounter than that earlier mentioned. On the enthusiastic reception of this broadcast by a number of French architects, in 1967 Foucault delivered a talk on the topic, *Des Espaces Autre*, “Of Other Spaces.” It is not a notion that he hung on to. It does not feature again as an invented concept in his work, though what that concept invents, I would suggest, never leaves his preoccupations. In fact, he was a little reluctant to have that lecture from 1967 published, and it was only close to his death that he gave permission, the text first appearing in translation in *Diacritics* in 1987.

This notion was enthusiastically received once published and appears in a number of further publications, with two alternative English translations and under two titles, the other one being “Different Spaces.” Architects and Urban geographers, particularly from the 1990s engaged the notion enthusiastically. With resurgence in Foucault studies in the first decade of this century, the heterotopic has become more popular. There is a book-length study: *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, and numerous articles and references that attempt either to downplay the notion in light of it not being further deployed by Foucault, or to recognize its essential concern with Foucault’s work from beginning to end. It’s the popularity of the concept that attracts me, perhaps a bit like the popularity of Hitchcock. But, as with Hitch, I want to suggest a reading somewhat against the grain of popular activation of the text and in doing so find some uncanny resonances between Foucault’s understanding of the heterotopic and the disseminating play that constitutes Hitchcock’s cinema.

There’s a surface reading to be done, without a doubt, as with the collection of articles in *Heterotopia and the City*, that finds in every shopping mall, gated community, multiplex cinema, theme park, cemetery, gendered space an exemplary locus for pointing to the heterotopic. Foucault made this surface reading easy. He suggests that we have spatial arrangements that we encounter in an everyday and unproblematic way, whose laws, procedures, norms and disciplines are in a ready-to-hand way, forgotten though enacted. Then there are other spaces, real spaces of occupation and habitation, whose procedures, disciplines, borders and laws have valiancy in contradistinction to all of the other real spaces we might inhabit. Hence, Foucault proceeds to give exemplars of such heterotopias under headings that include a range of spaces of deviancy, transgression, risk and play, along with what he terms spaces of ‘other’ times. He emphasizes that heterotopias are not constants but vary from culture to culture and may emerge and vanish. Examples he gives are cemeteries, motels, military barracks, boarding schools, parks, ships, ports, brothels, libraries, and cultural theme villages. There is little wonder that spatial disciplines have enthusiastically

encountered the heterotopic proliferating as the urban itself. This is particularly so given that the laws by which we come to understand urban assemblage have been trembling in seismic registers, under the shock of cultural philosophy's deconstructing of foundations everywhere.

We can read off Hitchcock according to the surfaces of the heterotopic and heterochronic. We can do this with great enthusiasm and playfulness: running over the heads of American presidents in a national park that is also a national monument, having just come from a cross-roads caught in the void of some nowhere. All of those trains, hotels, motels, but also homes that are all concerned with not-being-at-home but elsewhere, every home has its rear window constituting the viewpoint of the reality of not-being-at-home. That is to say, within his filmic narrating we see the extent to which Hitchcock stitches nothing but heterotopic to heterotopic, real spaces of otherness, there being no space of the everyday whose normalcy would constitute the trans-ferrying other. That Other constitutes the locus of a having-been-seen. Our spectating constitutes that other site. Hitchcock would, then, live out the "dream" enigmatically cited by Foucault at the close of his text, that links the heterotopia *par excellence* (the ship) to the port and to the brothel, but also to pirates. Without pirates, there are no dreams. Hitch's ferry would be the pirate-vehicle exacting our fantasy, our dream world.

But this is precisely the reading I don't want to do, the doxa reading, as if Hitch and Foucault were waiting there patiently, all along, for that rendezvous. It strikes me that Foucault produces this text on the heterotopic at an interesting moment, one that encounters a heterogeneity in his own work, construing a *topos*, a spacing that deserves some attention. On the one hand, Foucault was close to a body of writing engaging the philosophico-literary figures of Klossowski, Roussel, Bataille but especially Blanchot. On the other hand, Foucault was deeply engaged in the enormous legacy, in France at least, of the thinking of Georges Canguilhem's *On the Normal and the Pathological*. "Of Other Spaces" construes a peculiar and difficult intersection of essential concerns of Blanchot and Canguilhem, concerns with an understanding of spatiality that comes from the most exhausting engagements we see with Blanchot's somewhat Heideggerian encounter with the space of writing, with the withdrawal of Being (the outside) and the locus of the outside of the outside. This is explored in Foucault's "Maurice Blanchot: Thought from Outside." But there is also concern with something essential to a question of life, the living, the true and error as Canguilhen engaged fundamentally a reversal of our approach to the normal and the pathological, explored in Foucault's "Georges Canguilhem, Philosopher of Error." In short, "Of Other Spaces" engages the fundamental pathologies of spatiality, out of which, and through constant errancy, we construe the normal.

Foucault emphasizes the placeless place in Blanchot's fictions: not showing the invisible but showing the extent to which the invisibility of the visible is invisible. One is irreducibly outside the outside. Attraction is precisely that signifying regime that makes clear the outside is there, open but inaccessible: hence, from sign to 'clue' to an enigma. The outside never yields its essence. But it is always distraction and error that carry the person forward. It would have been better to have-stayed-put. Foucault uses the notions of zeal and solicitude to suggest that attraction to not staying put, a kind of withdrawal of withdrawal, in finding ourselves on the outside of the outside. What we

think concealed we think is elsewhere. We repeat ourselves. There's carelessness to this, negligence, a constant errancy all the while we move with zeal and solicitude. Everything seems to be an intentional sign, secret dialogue, spying or entrapment. Yet negligence remains indifferent to what can manifest or conceal, in that any gesture takes on the value of a sign. This is Foucault on Blanchot. It could well be the tropes of Hitchcock's fictions. Narrative unfolds a placeless place between the narrator and an inseparable companion who does not accompany him, separating speaking "I" from the "he" he is in his spoken being. It speaks. Pure cinema.

As for Canguilhem, life is that which is capable of error, the question of anomaly traverses the whole of biology. Life concludes in man with a living being who never finds himself wholly in his place, a living being dedicated to err at the root of what makes human thought and its history: error intrinsic to life. Yet error is the permanent chance, tracing out the presence of value and the norm. It is that chance, in errancy, that we see played out in Foucault's discussion of the possibility of other spacings. It is that question of life as error that we find in the heterotopic spacings of Hitchcock.