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Puzzling Pictures: Game Structures and Playful Spectatorship in Hitchcock, Resnais and Tati

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By

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B.A., Florida State University, 2010

Advisor: Tanine Allison, Ph.D.

An abstract of
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Abstract

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By John William Roberts

This study seeks to examine the relationship between play activity and film spectatorship. Operating on the premise that all spectatorship is necessarily a subset of play activity, but that in certain cases film can solicit a mode of spectatorship more closely akin to game-playing, this study analyzes the ways in which particularly ludically oriented films and filmmakers rhetorically and aesthetically engage with the spectator's own strategic spectatorial activity. In doing so it also traces a discursive arc between the three filmmakers whose films comprise the primary objects of study. Chapter one discusses the Hitchcock cameo and its function in suggesting the existence of other secret images, and using *The Wrong* Man (1956) and *Vertigo* (1958) as primary examples, argues that the process of identifying the cameo and audiovisual rebuses incentivizes a resistance to classical viewing norms. Chapter two examines Alain Resnais and Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), looking specifically at how that film, following Hitchcock, renders the spectatorship as an agonistic game through its challenging spatiotemporal construction. Finally, an analysis of Jacques Tati's *Playtime* (1967) explores how the ludic strategies of both Hitchcock and Resnais are synthesized into one film, and how the interpretative anxieties implicit in those earlier strategies are transformed and redeemed as elements of a joyful and explicitly playful relationship between the spectator and the screen.

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Introduction

> *The terms analog and digital are invariably treated as if the relation between them was itself a digital one. This is a sign of the times.*
>
> —McKenzie Wark, *Gamer Theory*

> *Truth is, this has never been about the murders, not the killer nor his victims. It's about us. About our minds and how they dance.*
>
> —Alan Moore, *From Hell*

"We are entering an era of prolonged transition and transformation in the way media operates."[1] So declares Henry Jenkins in the introduction to his 2006 study *Convergence Culture*. For Jenkins, the contemporary media transformation is characterized by "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want."[2] While the technological delivery systems for media content continue to proliferate and diversify, the social and cultural practices of media consumption and production are consolidating, converging "as layers within an ever more complicated information and entertainment stratum."[3] Although the process of media convergence has accelerated rapidly in the last two decades or so with the development and commercialization of new digital technologies that outmode older analog ones, the history of convergence stretches back much further. In part, this essay is an exploration of a certain kind of 20th century media convergence.

In a different context, Jenkins describes a set of parallel issues of production and consumption common to cinema and video games. Arguing that game designers can learn from a comparison of similarities with older narrative media forms, Jenkins notes that the

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[1] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 24.
[2] *Ibid.*, 2.
[3] *Ibid.*, 14.

need to balance the tension between performance and exposition is shared between both the game and film industries. In cinema, this tension consists of the diverging demands for spectacle (song and dance numbers in musicals, action sequences, slapstick gags, et cetera) and for narrative exposition. In games, the conflict is between open-ended game play and story.[4] Although the material delivery technologies of cinema and video games have historically been quite distinct (even if the commercial obsoleteness of *film* as such and the increasing ubiquity of in-home digital video streaming and similar technologies are rapidly erasing this distinction), they share what Jenkins calls "a pleasure in process—in the experiences along the road—that can overwhelm any strong sense of goal or resolution" and reposition exposition as "an unwelcome interruption to the pleasure of performance."[5] The tension between performative spectacle and narrative exposition that obtains across both film and video games evidences the convergence of media forms, not only in technological but in cultural terms, in the kinds of entertainment that audiences and players consume and the complex dynamics that inform their production and structure. This essay is also essentially a study in the "pleasure in process" that strongly marks the experience both of producing and consuming screen media, and which is shared between media producers and consumers. Although the scope of this study is limited to film spectatorship, it is intended to expose a degree of porosity at the boundary between the consumer's cognitive experience of cinema and of video games.

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[4] Jon McKenzie's accompanying response to Jenkins includes the criticism that Jenkins' title "Game Design as Narrative Architecture" is biased toward a narratological perspective on video games, whereas a more properly ludological (and implicitly correct, according to McKenzie) title would have been "Narrative Architecture as Game Design." This essay might also be framed as an exploration of the play between these two titles, and as an attempt to understand what a cinematic sketch of the latter might look like.

[5] Henry Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture," in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, eds. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2004), 125-6.

The fundamental question guiding this study is this: how can watching a film be like playing a game? In other words, how can new research and new perspectives on user interactions with video games and other digital media inform and illuminate the cognitive processes of film spectatorship? Corollary to this question is another: how does film as an art form experience, engage, and index the historical and cultural transition from the analog early 20th Century media environment to the digital, contemporary climate of the late 20th and early 21st Century? In short, I propose to trace the trajectory of something like a conversation about the confluences and tensions between the audience's participation in narrative and activity of play taking place over the course of the late 1950s and into the 1960s in the films of Alfred Hitchcock, Alain Resnais, and Jacques Tati. Each of these filmmakers addresses the relationship between narrative cinema and the capacity for play, and taken together, the films that comprise the core of this study—*The Wrong Man* (Hitchcock, 1956), *Last Year at Marienbad* (Resnais, 1961), and *Playtime* (Tati, 1968)—index an acute awareness of the cultural and aesthetic change permeating their historical moment, which is also the historical moment of the birth of commercial computing and of video games as a media form.[6] This is not to claim that these filmmakers were directly aware of and consciously responding to the quiet and unnoticed birth of a medium that would exist mostly in private computer laboratories until the founding of Atari in 1972, but rather that these films both witness and reflect the same cultural milieu that gave birth to the video game. In this sense then, this study as

[6] The first commercial computer, the Ferranti Mark 1, as well as the UNIVAC I, were produced in 1951, the same year as Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*. One of the first pieces of software that may genuinely be called a video game, William Higginbotham's *Tennis for Two*, was produced, along with *Vertigo*, in 1958. *Spacewar!*, another historical landmark and the first video game to be disseminated broadly, was completed the same year as *Last Year at Marienbad*'s American theatrical release—1962. Both the founding of *Atari* and the release of the *Magnavox Odyssey*, two events that inaugurate the era of commercial video gaming, both occur in 1972—the same year that Tati's *Playtime* finally makes its American Premiere at the San Francisco International Film Festival.

also a kind of archaeology of the birth of video games through the indirect observation of parallel developments in filmmaking.

In order to understand how film spectatorship can be game-like, a prior question must be asked: what is play, and how then does it relate to spectatorship? In one straightforward sense, play represents the capacity to pretend. Cognitive film theorist Joseph D. Anderson locates this capacity as the access point for entering into cinematic diegesis:

> The short answer is that we enter [cinematic space and time] directly in a way that is neither abstract, nor intellectual, nor linguistically based. A motion picture engages our capacity to participate in the diegesis through its capacity to present surrogate arrays to our visual and auditory systems, and at another level but nested within the first, through its capacity to present characters interacting in a time and place…. Actually, both the capacity of the visual system to process a synthetic array of light as reality, and the capacity of the mind to pretend, allows access to the motion picture. The first allows direct access to the fictional *world* and the second direct access to the *fictional* [emphasis in original].[7]

On Anderson's account, access to cinematic diegesis is a two stage process consisting of the sensory capacity to perceive images and sound that represent events in space and time, as well as the capacity to suspend disbelief and pretend that the "synthetic array" of sensations is constitutive of a coherent fictional diegetic world. For Anderson, the spectator's capacity to pretend is a vital, necessary requirement for the construction of cinematic fiction. It is on this basis that Anderson concludes by strongly affirming that "A motion picture is a framed event, and we enter into its space and time by stepping through the frame, by playing "Let's Pretend." Watching a movie is not *like* play and it is not a metaphor for play; it *is* play [emphasis in original]."[8] Film spectatorship, or at least the spectatorship of any film that projects a diegesis, is therefore always a specific

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[7] Joseph D. Anderson, *The Reality of Illusion: An Ecological Approach to Cognitive Film Theory* (Carbondale and Edwarrdsville Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 111, 113.
[8] *Ibid.*, 126.

subtype of play activity. In this sense, watching a movie is closer to playing a video game than, say, using an ATM, despite the fact that the technological experience of interacting with an ATM is closer to the experience of playing a video game than sitting in a movie theater is. The relationship between the spectator and a narrative film is necessarily a playful relationship, an invitation that elicits an imaginative and creative interaction with the media object.

Anderson's conception of spectatorship as play can be bolstered by a more thoroughly formal explication of the concept of play. Anderson limits his definition of play to the capacity to pretend, and more precisely the voluntary primacy of assimilation over accommodation in Piaget's model of intelligence.[9] The more humanities oriented, if structuralist, model outlined by Roger Caillois in his 1958 treatise *Man, Play, and Games* provides a more detailed consideration of the nature of play activity.[10] Caillois offers a definition of play that features six criteria: freedom, separateness, uncertainty, unproductiveness, governance by rules, and make-believe.[11] All but one of these criteria applies to film spectatorship without controversy. Watching a film is free, by which Caillois means that it is an elective activity. It is separate, i.e. "circumscribed within limits of space and time, defined and fixed in advance." The spectatorial experience is, as Anderson notes above, one that is framed and demarcated as a special case of make-believe. Spectatorship is unproductive; a consumer might pay for a ticket to a film, but

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[9] *Ibid.*, 115-116.
[10] In French the word 'jeux,' as in the original title *Le Jeux et le Hommes*, does not distinguish between the distinct concepts in English of 'play' and 'games.' Following Caillois' translator, and because Caillois' examples of "jeux" more accurately describe play activities than games as such, I retain the word 'play' throughout when referring to Caillois' concept.
[11] Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 9.

the experience of watching it does not create "goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind."

Spectatorship is also crucially a rule-governed practice. Caillois defines rules as "conventions that suspend ordinary laws; and for the moment establish new legislation, which alone counts." This is true in the sense that by entering into a cinematic diegesis is fundamentally a matter of accepting certain conventions by suspending disbelief in them. Chief among these might be the convention that the two-dimensional images on the screen represent three-dimensional depth. The wide variety of other cinematic conventions that help to construct coherent diegeses, conventions of framing, lighting, editing, acting, sound, and so on need not be detailed here beyond the fact that they function in part by superseding ordinary perception. Although conventions of spectatorship are elective, rather than binding as game rules tend to be, the fact that the spectator's immersion into a diegetic representation is seemingly impossible without adherence to these conventions indicates that abiding by their "legislation" is rather strongly enforced, on pain of the cinematic illusion's rupture.

Caillois' criterion of uncertainty yields the most trouble when applied to spectatorship, but it too is a crucial part of the spectator's experience. Caillois defines an uncertain activity as one "the course of which cannot be determined, nor the result attained beforehand, and some latitude for innovations being left to the player's initiative." While a film typically does not change between projections, and is therefore always going to be the same sequence of images and sounds, does this mean that the spectator can determine the course of events before watching it? All films bear a degree of uncertainty for the spectator on initial viewing. Even a canny viewer who possesses

thorough knowledge of genre and other conventions and might therefore be able to surmise the general course of narrative events before watching a film cannot *determine* the course of the film, only guess at it. Moreover, many films retain a replay value precisely because they yield surprising experiences even after a viewer has seen them. Among their many connections, all of the films in this study are linked by their continuing capacity to reveal previously unnoticed information, to provide novel experiences even after many viewings.

As for the second feature of uncertainty, the latitude left to the player's initiative, David Bordwell's account of the spectator's activity of narrative comprehension suggests a great deal is left to the spectator's initiative. According to Bordwell "The viewer must take as a central cognitive goal the construction of a more or less intelligible story," a goal which the spectator attempts to achieve by "making assumptions, erecting expectations, and confirm[ing] or disconfirm[ing] hypotheses."[12] It is perhaps worth noting here that Caillois considers reading detectives stories while attempting to solve the crime, as well as reading "obscure poetry," to be in the same class of highly formalized puzzles as chess problems and crossword puzzles.[13] On Bordwell's account narrative comprehension is a form of problem-solving, and is both uncertain and demands an active initiative on the part of the spectator. He writes,

> To sum up, in our culture, the perceiver of a narrative film comes armed and active to the task. She or he takes as a central goal the carving out of an intelligible story. To do this, the perceiver applies narrative schemata which define narrative events in time and space. Prototypical story components and the structural schema of the "canonical story" assist in this effort to organize the material presented. In the course of constructing the story the perceiver uses

[12] David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 32-33.
[13] Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 30.

schemata and incoming cues to make assumptions, draw inferences about current story events, and frame and test hypotheses about prior and upcoming events.[14]

Bordwell's account of the spectator's activity describes not a passive spectator, unproblematically receiving a narrative that emanates from the screen, but an active viewer engaged in a goal-oriented process of narrative configuration, in which she or he applies specific strategies in the form of schemata and prior knowledge in order to configure a coherent fabula out of syuzhet patterns. That the spectator is not a passive vessel for the reception of narrative information is made obvious by the fact that spectators can, and in some instances such as the art film or mystery genre often do, hold incorrect narrative hypotheses. This is not a matter simply of ambiguous interpretation, but also of the challenge of configuration that accompanies spectatorship. Narrative comprehension is always a "task," not a given; there is always a risk of failure. In a classical Hollywood film, this risk is typically minimized through, for instance, the redundant repetition of important information, and the subservience of systems of time and space to narrative causality.[15] In the sense that film spectatorship is a kind of play activity similar to the playing of a game, the classical film, barring the generic peculiarity of the mystery film, is often trivially easy. Art and experimental films on the other hand might be more challenging and more self-consciously and explicitly game-like. Such films can construct alternative and idiosyncratic formal and aesthetic logics—inviting the spectator to determine the internal rules by which they operate as coherent texts.

Caillois establishes a continuum on which different forms of play may be placed. At one pole is undisciplined, carefree, exuberant and improvisatory play, which Caillois

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[14] Bordwell, *Narration and the Fiction Film*, 39.
[15] David Bordwell,, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 31, 6.

terms *paidia*. The other pole, which he calls *ludus*, is characterized by controlled effort, skill, discipline, and ingenuity.[16] Caillois also constructs the *paidia-ludus* spectrum through a binary opposition between make-believe and rule-oriented play. Caillois claims that playing "as if," that is, taking part in the generation of a fiction, is diametrically opposed to rules, since when one is playing chess or some other rule-based game, one plays *for real*.[17] When Caillois describes detective stories and puzzling poetry as kinds of games, he considers them to be highly ludic. Spectatorship might also then exist across this spectrum. Anderson's "Let's pretend" model of the spectator's access to diegesis can be characterized as more closely aligned with *paidia*, whereas narrative comprehension according to Bordwell implies that the spectator really is problem-solving as he or she views a film.

If the constructivist model of narrative comprehension does indeed imply game-like problem solving activity on the part of the spectator, then a tension necessarily arises between the *paidia* of diegesis as make-believe and the *ludus* of narrative comprehension. If Caillois is correct in asserting that these two phenomena are antithetical to each other, then spectatorship appears to contain a tension between two different kinds of play: the willful suspension of disbelief that enables the spectator to make-believe in diegetic representation, and the very real activity of testing narrative hypotheses and making inferences about them. The question arises at this point which (or whether one) kind of play is more primal in constituting the cinematic experience as such, whether the capacity to suspend disbelief and go along with the perceptual illusion of the image or the capacity to interrogate that image for clues presupposes the other. A definitive answer is beyond

[16] Caillois, *Man Play and Games*, 13.
[17] *Ibid.*, 8.

the scope of this study, but as we shall see the relationship between the *paidia* of make-believe as a point of entry into cinematic diegesis on the one hand and the *ludus* of extradiegetic cognitive problem-solving on the other is deeply seated at the core of the ludic aspects of all the films in this study. They are perhaps not so much in a destructive tension as in a mutually generative relation wherein each impels the other.

Before discussing how Caillois' concept of play relates to an even more formally rigorous definition of games, a slight digression is necessary to discuss what is perhaps the most common and conventionally understood model of play within film studies. That model is Roland Barthes' delineation of the relationships between the signifier, the text, and play in two central works, *The Pleasure of the Text* and "From Work to Text." Across these two writings, Barthes traces a semiotic theory of textuality that adds to the physical, tangible object (the "work") the "text… a methodological field… a process of demonstration [that] speaks according to certain rules… [and] *is experienced only in an activity of production* [emphasis in original]."[18] To summarize and compartmentalize Barthes in a few lines seems a futile and indeed sacrilegious task, since his "practice of writing" is as much experienced only in its production and demonstration as the concept of Text is, but Barthes' concerns about signification and the construction of meaning relate to both Anderson's concept of spectatorship as playful cognitive practice, and with Bordwell's theory of narration as problem-solving.[19]

Barthes writes variously that "the pleasure of the text is not the pleasure of the corporeal striptease or of narrative suspense,"[20] that "the Text is very much a score of a

[18] Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text", in *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 157.
[19] Anderson, *The Reality of Illusion*, 116.
[20] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 10.

new kind: it asks of the reader a practical collaboration,"[21] that "the infinity of the signifier refers not to some idea of the ineffable (the unnameable signified) but to that of a *playing*,"[22] and of the sentence, that "we are playing with an exceptional object, whose paradox has been articulated by linguistics: immutably structured and yet indefinitely renewable: something like chess."[23] For Barthes, playfulness describes both the act of 'collaborative' reading as well as the practice of writing, of "playing with an exceptional object." For Barthes, the pleasure engaging with a text as either a writer or a reader is derived from the play of signification. Despite his suggestive analogy between constructing a sentence and playing chess, as well as his broader imagination of reading and writing as a continuous ludic collaboration between reader and writer that takes place on the methodological 'field' of the text, Barthes is more concerned with the relationship between signification and interpretation than he is with any literalization of reading or writing as a play activity.[24] While these two spheres of diegetic comprehension as play and critical interpretation as play are never totally distinct from each other, and in *Last Year at Marienbad* seem thoroughly entangled indeed, it is important to highlight the general distinction between these two spectatorial processes.

Is there a limit to the literalization of spectatorship as game-play? Film spectatorship may uncontroversially be a play activity in either an Andersonian or Bordwellian sense, be structured by adopted conventions and uncertain to a degree, but there is a limit to how far the concept of play may reasonably be taken. Recent

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[21] Barthes, "From Work to Text," 163.
[22] *Ibid.*, 158.
[23] Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 51.
[24] As a writerly text itself, Barthes' use of the terms 'play' and 'field' are also themselves subject to a play of signification. Although they invite an interpretation that makes an analogy to sport and games, this would be a limited attempt to close down the wealth of other meanings accruing around these terms. 'Play' may also refer equally, as Caillois notes, to the interpretative act of a performer or to the interconnected movement of parts of a machine. See Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 8.

scholarship on games has reassessed the value of Caillois' work on play in the context of more contemporary exigencies of video games. The most comprehensive among these is Jesper Juul's 2005 study. Criticizing Caillois for surveying a field broader than games including free-form play, and seeking to define games with greater conceptual clarity, Juul outlines his own six-point definition of games by synthesizing previous efforts, including Caillois.[25] According to Juul's definition, "A game is [1] a rule-based system with [2] a variable and quantifiable outcome, where [3] different outcomes are assigned different values, [4] the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, [5] the player feels emotionally attached to the outcome, and [6] the consequences of the activity are negotiable."[26] If it can be supposed that, as Bordwell claims, narrative comprehension is the goal of spectatorship, then viewing a narrative film might be considered to have two different, valorized outcomes to which the spectator is attached: success and failure. This is perhaps overstating the case for spectatorship as game-like activity to an extent, but the point here is to suggest that narrative comprehension, what Juul refers to as "storytelling" (a word that falsely imputes a sense of passivity), is not so totally different from game playing, that it can be what Juul describes as a borderline case—an activity that features some of the aspects of strict game playing without satisfying all the criteria. Juul argues that storytelling does not even qualify as a borderline case since it has a fixed outcome, the player exerts no effort in order to influence that outcome, and that the player is not personally attached to the outcome.[27]

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[25] Jesper Juul, *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 10.
[26] *Ibid.*, 36.
[27] *Ibid.*, 43.

While it is not clear whether Juul is referring only to the act of *telling* a story to others, or whether the domain of storytelling encompasses the consumer's comprehension of narrative as well, it shall be assumed that his argument is intended to disqualify the latter from being similar to game playing. As stated above, if narrative comprehension is a goal to be achieved, rather than a foregone conclusion to be automatically actualized by the very act of perceiving a motion picture, then it is at least *possible* for narrative to have at least two discreet outcomes. Likewise, on Bordwell's account the spectator is highly active in attempting to bring about that state of successful comprehension, particularly if the film in question is difficult (i.e. lacks redundant cues). Finally, it seems inexplicable that a spectator would have no emotional attachment to the outcome of his or her spectatorship. Different from emotional attachment to the outcome of the narrative itself, the capacity to construct a narrative from cues is an activity laden with emotional investment. Spectators react emotionally to the realization that they have been duped by a Hitchcock plot. Indeed, the special case of the Hitchcock cameo represents a facet of spectatorship that does seem to impinge upon the formal definition of a game. Identifying Hitchcock in his films satisfies all of Juul's criteria, and is simultaneously deeply embedded in the normal, commonplace frame-scanning aspect of spectatorship. This point is driven home even more forcefully by the gamification of Lars Von Trier's *The Boss of It All* (2006), in which real-life prizes were distributed to spectators who successfully identified objects hidden in the frame.[28] The point is not that the game in this case is unusual or unique—though it is—but rather that it depends essentially on practices that are native to the act of watching a film in the first place. The

[28] See Thomas Elsaesser, "The Mind-Game Film" in *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*, ed. Warren Buckland (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 13.

only difference between the Hitchcock cameo and Von Trier's gimmick is that the latter externalizes the reward as a physical object, whereas the reward of the Hitchcock cameo is psychical in nature.[29] To reiterate, all this is not to claim that spectatorship in the general sense constitutes a game under Juul's strict rubric; it is merely to assert that spectatorship is always ludic *to a degree*, and that narrative comprehension and game playing, as fundamentally play activities, share certain structures in common.[30] As Juul himself notes, video games are not successors of literature or cinema, but rather (or perhaps in addition to), are only (also) the most recent development in a history of games and game playing that predates these narrative forms by thousands of years.[31] Moreover as Anderson notes, the capacity to play is not only universal among humans but is also common to other mammals. It is endowed genetically, suggesting that the roots of play extend back into pre-human history.[32] Likewise, film spectatorship and the comprehension of visual narrative as a form of play in some sense also emerges from this older cultural lineage of games and play. Marcel Danesi describes the simultaneous emergence in ancient Greek culture of formalized mathematics and the mystery cults that prefigure the birth of narrative drama, suggesting that both forms appeal to humans through their capacity to provide suspense, mystery, and eventually catharsis.[33]

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[29] Unless the spectator identifying the cameo happens to be an academic researcher, in which case the act of identifying a new and previously unseen cameo can potentially yield external dividends in the form of publication and professional advancement. Undoubtedly, part of the appeal of an essay like D.A. Miller's "Hitchcock's Hidden Pictures" is the way in which it reveals previously unknown cameo images of Hitchcock.

[30] Janet Murray identifies the puzzle as just such a common structure. According to Murray, games and stories begin to resemble each other to the extent that they emphasize the puzzle structure. See Janet Murray, "From Game-Story to Cyberdrama" in *First Person*, 2.

[31] Juul, *Half-Real*, 3-4.

[32] Anderson, *The Reality of Illusion*, 113, 116-7.

[33] Marcel Danesi, *The Puzzle Instinct: The Meaning of Puzzles in Human Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 1-2.

As argued above, all film spectatorship is playful in at least some sense. Both as a play activity consisting of the willful suspension of disbelief and as a cognitive problem-solving activity, the process of watching a film is fundamentally a process of playing. Entrance into cinematic diegesis requires the spectator to make believe that certain specially-framed visual and auditory sensations are surrogates for normal, nonfictive sensory experience. Narrative comprehension—composed of the processes of scanning the frame visually and the sound track aurally, applying schemata and drawing inferences about narrative events, making and testing hypotheses on the basis of those inferences in order to construct a coherent story out of a defamiliarized aesthetic experience—is also a perpetual, perceptual guessing game with narrative comprehension as a goal rather than a given.

Most films, however, are trivially easy to comprehend; they are not designed to be challenging but to be maximally accessible to the audience. For these films, the ludic aspects of their construction are of little concern. Other films though—difficult and challenging ones that aesthetically or rhetorically engage the spectator directly at the level of viewing procedure—these kinds of films are of interest precisely for the ways in which they both solicit and manipulate the spectator's problem-solving capacities. In these kinds of films, the ludic aspects of spectatorship compete with, and in some cases override, the classical demands of narration for the sake of storytelling. The parallel here with Bordwell's concept of parametric narration is not coincidental. Bordwell defines parametric narration, which he also conspicuously posits as "permutational" and as "poetic" narration, as narration "in which the film's stylistic system creates patterns of

distinct from the demands of the syuzhet system [emphasis in original]."[34] Unlike the case of normal, classical narration, or even art-cinema narration, where the film' stylistic system functions more or less to support the syuzhet system, in the instance of parametric narration the film's stylistic system becomes unhinged from the demands of narrative comprehension and functions independently for its own ends. One side effect of parametric narration is to generate an especially ludic relationship between a film and its spectator. This is only to say that difficult films are difficult in the same way that difficult puzzles are difficult; they tax the spectator's cognitive problem-solving abilities more than usual, and in the case of parametric narration films solicit the spectator's problem-solving capacities, geared for narrative comprehension, for ends that are not explicitly narrative in kind. When a film solicits the spectator's problem-solving capacities specifically for the task of solving puzzles, it exhibits a particularly ludic form of narration, and to address the spectator in particularly ludic terms.

Such distinctly ludic parametric films are also distinctly procedural films in that in the absence of narrative comprehension as a motivating principle behind a film's stylistic organization, the spectator is forced to confront style on its own terms. This direct confrontation with form entails a reassessment of the significance of perceptual cues, and by proximity a reassessment of the spectator's viewing strategy. As Bordwell notes, thematic interpretation is neither a particularly effective nor appropriate response to a parametrically organized film.[35] One of the effects of parametric narration is to make the spectator conscious of his or her cognitive viewing procedures by flaunting their inability

[34] Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 275.
[35] *Ibid.*, 282-3.

to master the film in conventionally narrative or thematic modes of comprehension. Parametric films are often systems of self-consciously procedural representation.

As films that are concerned with the spectator's viewing procedural interaction with them, parametric films share an unlikely similarity with electronic media. Janet Murray writes that procedural authorship, in the context of hypertext fiction, "means writing the rules for the interactor's involvement, that is, the conditions under which things will happen in response to the participant's actions…. The procedural author creates not just a set of scenes but a world of narrative possibilities."[36] Building on Murray's work, video game scholar Ian Bogost defines procedural rhetoric as "a subdomain of procedural authorship; its arguments are made not through the construction of words or images, but through the authorship of rules of behavior, the construction of dynamic models."[37] Although Bogost differentiates procedural rhetoric from classical oratory and visual rhetoric by claiming that the construction of words or images is totally distinct from the authorship of dynamic systems, the relationship between words and images and their consumers is more complicated than to allow for a simple dismissal. Elsewhere, Bogost claims that "*Procedural inscription itself* requires inscription in a medium that actually enacts processes rather than merely describes them. Human behavior is one mode of procedural inscription [emphasis in original]."[38] The construction and ordering of images and sound in films, and parametric, exceptionally ludic films in particular, form part of a larger cinematic experience that can and does implicate the spectator in an aesthetically and rhetorically active procedural system of

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[36] Janet Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 152-3.
[37] Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 29.
[38] Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 9-10.

behavioral inscription. Anderson analogizes this relationship as one between processors and computer programs: "The motion picture can be thought of as a program… It is a very complex set of instructions utilizing images, actions, and sounds, a string of commands to attend to *this now*…. The program can "run" only in the mind of the viewer. The viewer can be thought of as a standard biological audio-visual processor. The central processing unit, the brain along with its sensory modules, is standard."[39] Although Anderson uses the digital computer as a metaphor for human cognition, it is a powerful metaphor precisely because it accurately captures the relations between the film, the spectator's sensory apparatus, and his or her cognitive activity.

This way of thinking about the interaction between spectators and cinema as distinctly dynamic and procedural is not new. It is implicit in, for instance, Paul Schrader's concept of "transcendental" style. The style of Bresson, Dreyer, and Ozu might seem to be the least likely place to look for overlaps between cinema and electronic media, but consider Schrader's analysis of Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959). Schrader identifies as a "decisive action" in Bresson's films the miraculous turn of events that appears to be arbitrary and unmotivated by prior narrative events. In *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951) it is the priest's death; in *A Man Escaped* (1956) it is the escape; in *Pickpocket* it is Michel's "inexplicable" love for Jeanne. Schrader writes that

> The decisive action has a unique effect on the viewer, which may be hypothesized thus: the viewer's feelings have been consistently shunned throughout the film (everyday), yet he still has "strange" undefined feelings (disparity). The decisive action then demands an emotional commitment which the viewer gives instinctively, naturally (he wants to share Hirayama's tears, Michel's love). But having given that commitment, the viewer must now do one of two things: he can reject his feelings and refuse to take the film seriously, or he can accommodate his thinking to his feelings. If he chooses the latter, he will, having been given no emotional constructs by the director, have constructed his own "screen…."

[39] Anderson, *The Reality of Illusion*, 12.

> Bresson uses the viewer's own natural defenses, his protective mechanism, to cause him, of his own free will, to come to the identical decision Bresson had predetermined for him.[40]

According to Schrader, transcendental style is a "form designed to express the transcendent," but one that does so by manipulating the spectator's own viewing procedures to press him or her to either reject the film or temporarily accept the validity of the miraculous.[41] On Schrader's view, transcendental style is a form of rhetorical, procedural representation, its processes inscribed directly on and in the viewer. Bresson's films function as models of the paradox between free will and predestination—not by depicting the paradox through imagery or narrative, but by simulating the experience directly in and for the audience. Schrader's seemingly tautological definition is crucial for defining transcendental style as a style that expresses the transcendent through a dynamic viewer interaction, as opposed to simply representing it for the spectator. It is therefore not coincidental that these films are also hallmarks of parametric narration—their stylistic systems are disinterested in syuzhet patterning and function in ways that escape recuperation through any simple narrative motivation.

James Peterson in his essay "Is a Cognitive Approach to the Avant-garde Cinema Perverse?" also offers a similarly procedure-oriented program for understanding avant-garde film practice. He argues that "we might usefully consider avant-garde film viewing to be a kind of problem solving."[42] More specifically, Peterson describes avant-garde film viewing as a kind of problem-solving that encourages the spectator to acquire "*procedural* knowledge [emphasis in original]," problem-solving heuristics that help

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[40] Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (Da Capo Press, 1972), 81-2.
[41] *Ibid.*, 8-9.
[42] James Peterson, "Is a Cognitive Approach to the Avant-garde Cinema Perverse?" in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, eds. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 109.

spectators make meaningful inferences about difficult films, in addition to more conventional "*declarative* knowledge [emphasis in original]," which constitutes the 'facts of the matter' about what a film depicts.[43] Peterson's approach suggests that avant-garde films might present puzzles, problems for the viewer to solve, rather than, or sometimes in addition to, coded messages for the viewer to decode and read. [44] Codes can be recognized as such and themselves function as heuristically to cue spectator responses, but Peterson's shift in emphasis from spectatorship as a process of 'reading' a film to a process of 'puzzling out' a film suggests a dramatic shift in theorizing how spectators interact with films, from legibility of representation to dynamic, procedural, and ludic interaction.

As a final theoretical consideration, the aesthetic theory of Viktor Schklovsky is crucial in helping to clarify the relationships between spectatorship, form, play, and aesthetics. Schklovsky, an influential precursor to Bordwell and his neoformalist approach, contends that the function of art is to resist the automation of experience and to renew one's perceptual self-awareness through a process of defamiliarization and estrangement ("*ostrannenie*"). As opposed to the ease and efficiency of normal perception, this process of defamiliarization "makes perception long and 'laborious;'" it 'impedes' and 'distorts' perception.[45] The concept of defamiliarization can be extended beyond Schklovsky's theory of aesthetic perception and into the realm of play activity. If playing is an intentional state that one can have, a manner of comporting oneself towards the phenomenal world that is defined by its hypothetical, "as if" nature—what Caillois refers to as "as special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real

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[43] *Ibid*., 110-1.
[44] *Ibid*., 112.
[45] Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. Ben Sher (Normal, Dalkey Archive Press, 1991), 6, 13.

life"[46]—then the act of play and the experience of art share fundamentally this defamiliarizing aspect. Whereas Schklovsky defines art in terms of an estranged perception, play may be conceived as a process of defamiliarized intentionality, of comportment, of decision-making and ultimately of action and behavior. Indeed, Bernard Suits' definition of game-playing as an activity that essentially involved the use of less efficient means to achieve a goal strongly echoes Shklovsky's 'making strange.'[47] Thus, art and play are mutually implicated: play activity is an aesthetic activity, an aestheticization *of activity*, and art is similarly may similarly be understood in terms of a making-playful of normal perception.

It is against this conceptualization of play as aesthetic decision-making and intentionality that games can be roughly distinguished: games are specially designed structures, composed of rules and which are designed particularly—to borrow a description of art from Shklovsky—as "a means of experiencing the process of creativity."[48] This is not to say that games and art are identical categories, but rather to claim that games are structures towards which players comport themselves aesthetically, and which are engineered expressly, through rules and goals that defamiliarize behavior, for the explicit purpose of that playful-aesthetic comportment. Not all art is a game, but both art and games are playful to a greater or lesser degree. By viewing art—specifically the films in this study—from the perspective of play, unique aspects of spectatorship can be brought to the fore.

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[46] Cailois, *Man, Play and Games*, 10.
[47] Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 34.
[48] Shklovsky, 6.

The rest of this study traces the development of a particularly ludic and procedural approach to filmmaking across three filmmakers. Alfred Hitchcock's films demonstrate one of the earliest and most thorough explorations of the relationship between spectatorship and play, as well and Hitchcock himself is perhaps the most thorough practitioner of a playful style of filmmaking. Building on Thomas Leitch's work on Hitchcock's games, as well as more recent scholarship by Tom Cohen and D.A. Miller, an explanation and understanding of the ludic functions of Hitchcock's films will provide a partial explanation for the ever-increasing volume of critical material written about Hitchcock and address some previous concerns about what Leitch, Cohen, and Miller perceive as anxious and disturbing phenomena in Hitchcock's films. This examination of Hitchcock's audiovisual rebuses will also open new avenues of comparison with Alain Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad*, a film that consistently cites Hitchcock, and has been underanalyzed in terms of both its relationship to Hitchcock and the explicitly playfulness of its own system of narration. Finally, Jacques Tati's *Playtime*, a film that by contrast has been thoroughly analyzed in terms of its playfulness, will be contextualized in relation both to Hitchcock and to Resnais. Tati's film can be understood as an attempt to resolve some of the anxieties of modernity present in both Hitchcock and *Marienbad* by recuperating play and ambiguity as joyful and liberating experiences, suggesting play as the appropriate response to the fracture and alienation of technological modernity.

Chapter One: *The Wrong Man*

Ten years ago John Belton argued that the academic study of Alfred Hitchcock has become an industry in its own right, that Hitchcock's films have increasingly become instrumentalized as illustrations of the utility of new critical methods, and that perhaps as a result scholarship on Hitchcock has been shaped more by the development of Film Studies than by qualities inhering in Hitchcock's body of work.[49] Although Belton suggests continuing vigilance as a way of safeguarding against the exploitation of Hitchcock's oeuvre against mercenary academics,[50] he offers little in the way of an explanation for *why* Hitchcock's films have become such a large target for scholars with something to prove. Belton suggests the director's own penchant for self-promotion as at least an initial source of the "Hitchcock Industry," but relatively little has been written about why Hitchcock has become the preeminent critical object of Film Studies,[51] why he has become what Tom Cohen describes—more favorably than Belton—as "the premier theoretical testing ground of critical insight."[52] A partial answer to this question, which will be answered more fully over the course of this chapter, is that part of why "Hitchcock" never seems to approach being an exhausted category of critical inquiry is that the very intratextual structure of Hitchcock's corpus, along with the eagerness of critics to locate significance in that structure, allow for a wide variety of novel critical approaches to be profitably applied and for an equally broad spectrum of critical

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[49] John Belton, "Can Hitchcock be Saved from Hitchcock Studies?" *Cineaste* 28:4 (2003): 16-21.
[50] A category, it should be emphatically noted, to which this author belongs as certainly as does anyone else.
[51] Some headway in addressing this issue has been made recently by Chris Dumas, who situates Hitchcock historically at the birth of academic film studies as a primary referent for both the auteurist and feminist-psychoanalytical theoretical schools. See Chris Dumas, *Un-American Psycho: Brian DePalma and the Political Invisible* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 26-33.
[52] Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies, Volume I: Secret Agents* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), *xii*.

conclusions to be drawn out of that structure. To some extent then, the promise to provide at least a partial explanation for why there continues to be such an inordinately large amount of Hitchcock scholarship produced serves as a justification for adding to that mountain of work.

In order to answer the larger question of how Hitchcock has become an instrument, a machine tool for the production of critical insight and knowledge, I submit that we must understand the particular nature of the fundamentally playful relationship that obtains between the spectator and Hitchcock's films. As Joseph D. Anderson notes, all fiction spectatorship *is* play in the sense that willingly entering into a diegesis requires an attitude of make-believe, but Hitchcock's films incentivize a particularly strategic spectatorship by offering discrete pleasures to the engaged spectator in the form of cameos, jokes, gags, and bits of extra knowledge embedded within their narrative fabric. The identification of these hidden secrets by the viewer constitutes a game that is played between the spectator and the film text. By encouraging a distinctly ludic form of active, strategic spectatorship, Hitchcock's films generate a kind of spectatorial apophany, defined as a state in which the viewer is conditioned to perceive unimportant or irrelevant information as potentially having narrative or thematic significance. The result is twofold: firstly the apophenic response produces a sense of paranoia in the spectator that reflects and is reflected in the characters in Hitchcock's films. Moreover, if any piece of sensory data—an object in the background of a shot, or a seemingly odd framing, or a musical cue, for instance—is potentially significant and not easily dismissed as meaningless, then the activity of narrative comprehension becomes affected by the cognitive pull toward such excess, and is altered as a result. Thus, I ascribe to

Hitchcock's games a significance in producing the specific affective response of paranoia, as well as in transforming the narrative experience though the encouragement of alternative viewing strategies. Although these effects pervade all of Hitchcock's films to a certain extent, *The Wrong Man* (1956) provides the clearest example of how this process operates. The ludic nature of Hitchcock's films and their significance as such is a topic that has been explored previously to some extent, by Thomas Leitch, Tom Cohen, and D.A. Miller, and while each of their approaches has contributed substantially to understanding the unique spectatorial situation involved with Hitchcock, each is also ultimately an incomplete picture. In order to situate and fully appreciate the playfulness of Hitchcock, it is therefore necessary to briefly survey these three approaches.

Leitch begins by arguing that the Hitchcock cameo offers an insoluble problem for then-leading theories of cinematic narration by disrupting the putatively clean distinction between diegesis and reality. Since Hitchcock is never a diegetically justifiable character in his cameo appearances, Leitch argues that Hitchcock is "someone whose mode of existence is different from that of every other character in the movie." He then argues that communications models of narration fail to explain the cameo on two accounts: firstly because Hitchcock's image cannot be decoded as such without adopting an extradiegetic perspective on the image, and secondly, citing Edward Branigan, because a diegesis cannot communicate the fact of the author's existence without that message becoming subsumed into that very diegesis. Psychoanalytic models of narration fail, according to Leitch, because the cameo engages the viewer on an active, conscious, and elective basis, and not on the passive and subconscious basis ascribed to the spectator by such theories. Finally, although he acknowledges that Bordwell's constructivist theory

of narration is more promising than other models, it too fails to adequately account for the cameo's power because Bordwell is "at such pains to banish the storyteller from his narrative theory, which 'presupposes a perceiver, but not any sender, of a message,' that he breaks the tie between the represented Hitchcock—the fat Cockney onscreen—and the putative storyteller, denying the very source of the cameos' power."[53]

This last objection to the viability of the constructivist theory seems somewhat unconvincing however, at least on the grounds Leitch offers for it. Leitch gives an uncharitable reading of Bordwell's argument, which claims that we should not *pre*suppose an implied author, a statement that is quite different from claiming that there is never any such thing as an implied author of a narration. Although Bordwell applies Occam's razor overzealously at times—in fact the much better quotation for Leitch's purposes in Bordwell's previous paragraph, that "No trait we could assign to an implied author of a film could not be more simply be ascribed to the narration itself," definitely seems to miss the mark when applied to the Hitchcock cameo—that ought not invalidate the entire program.[54] There is still no reason to *pre*suppose an implied narrator for *every* film, but in the case of the Hitchcock cameo the simplest explanation actually is simply to acknowledge the presence of an author who demands such recognition. Leitch's criticism is a just but not damning one, and his game theoretical model of narration need not be in direct conflict with the constructivist theory so long as the constructivist theory maintains the flexibility of common sense.

Leitch proposes an alternative model of narration, based on "the conception of narration as a game between a storyteller and an audience." This model crucially

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[53] Thomas M. Leitch, *Find the Director and Other Hitchcock Games* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 2-7.
[54] Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 62.

considers films as objects of pleasure rather than knowledge, and therefore reassigns narrative comprehension from being the spectator's primary goal to being merely one goal among several, including for instance the pleasure of identifying Hitchcock's cameos. Moreover the goals of the spectator, the motivation and rationale for why audiences go to the movies, are always "contractual, rewarding, and elective."[55] As a result, the spectatorial contract between audience and Hitchcock is not static but subject to change over time, leading Leitch to analogize the diachronic experience of watching Hitchcock's films with a repeated series of two-player games between the viewer and Hitchcock, in which each player seeks a maximum reward of pleasure by varying his or her strategy based on an increasing body of information about the other player's strategy.[56]

Leitch's model is insightful in capturing the contingent and negotiable nature of the spectator's filmgoing experience, in which the experience proffered by the theater is one that is essentially free for the audience to make what they want of it, whether that entails the pleasure of an engrossing narrative experience, or of pure visual spectacle, or perhaps merely of the self-congratulation that accompanies the "witty recognition of [our] astuteness" in spotting Hitchcock's playful touches.[57] Yet Leitch seems to waver on the question of the relationship between Hitchcock's film and game playing activity. Leitch describes games variously as a "figure" or a "model" for narration and a "metaphor… for Hitchcock's cameos and the films in which they appear," but he also claims that "Hitchcock's films *constitute* a series of games according to the definition of

[55] Leitch, *Find the Director*, 7, 13.
[56] *Ibid.*, 16.
[57] *Ibid.*, 20.

Roger Caillois [emphasis added],"[58] and although he clearly states that the relationship between game theory strategies of reward maximization is *analogous* to the spectatorial situation, he seems to imply with equal conviction that spectators *really do* employ strategies in order to maximize pleasurable returns, which are themselves real, and not a figure for something else.

Leitch does not adequately distinguish mathematic game theory models from Caillois' sociological definition of games, the latter of which describes a far broader scope of activities than does the former, nor does he adequately distinguish between the Hitchcock cameo and his game of narration more broadly. He claims that the cameos are "quintessential examples of Hitchcock's ludic approach to storytelling," but in fact the activity of visually recognizing hidden objects within the frame (such as the cameo) is a substantially different activity from making long-scale hypotheses over the course of multiple films about, for instance, whether or not it is safe to closely identify with Hitchcock's protagonists. Leitch ultimately concludes his study with the argument that Hitchcock's films function dually and dialectically to reaffirm the audience's feeling of mastery over an unusually difficult, but still altogether manageable, terrain of discourse, and to simultaneously conduct an "assault on the audience's certitudes" by undermining the spectator's sense of personal psychological identity through discursive disruptions.[59] By subsuming heterogeneous aspects of Hitchcock's ludic enterprise under the single functional rubric of discursive play, Leitch undermines his earlier point about the importance of non-narrative pleasures by subordinating them under an umbrella of narrative discourse. As a result he is forced to read games and game-playing figuratively

[58] *Ibid.*, 10, 11, 16.
[59] *Ibid*, 260-1.

as a metaphor for the spectator's experience of narrative, consequently deemphasizing the spectator's real play activity.

In contrast to Leitch's broad view of the ludic nature of Hitchcock's films, Tom Cohen's more recent study of what he terms Hitchcock's signature system focuses largely on visual and aural minutiae at the expense of narrative. Cohen's study maps a sprawling array of "more or less "secret" visual elements, graphic riddles, letteration, and cryptonymies that traverse all of [Hitchcock's] works, linking each to each in perceptual if active interface."[60] For Cohen, this secret writing system greatly undermines the occularcentric premises that 'cinema' was supposed to safeguard and substantiate, functioning dramatically as a sabotage at the heart of the cinematic canon.[61] The prime example of this phenomenon is—counterintuitively—the Hitchcock cameo. It would seem that the cameo supports occularcentric, mimetic, auteurist assumptions about the reliability of visual recognition and optical confirmation, since the image of Hitchcock is made available for precisely such recognition and identification of the figure as, indeed, the director himself. Yet the director's unique ontological status as always beyond any possible diegetic recuperability, even as his image solicits optical validation and recognition from within the diegesis of the films, finally reveals the logic of mimesis to be unreliable. The cameo is "a rape of the mediatrix," (by which he means media + matrix, with a gendering rhetorical flourish) Cohen asserts, "A simulacrum, it destroys auteuriality and authority. Highlighting the promise of mimesis, it voids the mimetic logic."[62] Cohen finds a similar function at work in other visual and aural elements, from William Rothman's "preletteral" //// series, to the recurrence of Mar- names, to the arcane

[60] Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies*, xi.
[61] *Ibid.*, 1, xiv.
[62] *Ibid.*, 242.

significance of the numbers 1 and 3, which traverse a terrain that broadly includes The Avenger's iconic symbol in *The Lodger* (1927) (a triangle), the letter M (being the thirteenth letter of the English alphabet), and the 39 Steps (39=13x3), among numerous others.[63]

In a sense Cohen's project resembles a post-structurally spruced up version of Leitch's, despite the former's explicit renunciation of such auteurist impulses as having been metaphorically exploded by the de-auratic Hitchcock. Cohen's argument that the Hitchcock cameo voids the premise of visual mimesis reflects Leitch's assertion that the power, and the problem, of the cameo is due to the different "mode of existence" that Hitchcock's image possesses compared to the rest of the images in the film. While Leitch infers from this diegetic violation the contingent, contractual, and elective nature of film spectatorship as an activity that offers many pleasures, not all of which are necessarily mimetic (since the pleasure in identifying Hitchcock comes more from the self-satisfaction of having done so than from the particular representative vicissitudes of the image itself), Cohen draws the conclusion that the entire epistemo-political regime of 20th century modernism must go into default.[64] Both Leitch and Cohen identify impulses in Hitchcock that extend beyond the realm of narrative immersion and address the viewer in a-mimetic terms, one through games and the other through cryptographic writing systems.

Cohen's analysis however, is, for lack of a better term, far less fun than Leitch's, despite his keen observation of sometimes outrageous links spanning Hitchcock's films. Cohen suggests a significant relationship between the proliferation of 1s and 3s in

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[63] *Ibid.*, xvi, 58, 32-34.
[64] *Ibid.,* 244.

Hitchcock with the mathematical advances of John Napier in the 17th century to enhance the utility of the numeral 0, and also the usefulness of cosmological string theory as a figure for the anti-mimetic nature of the allomorphic citational network of signature systems.[65] Yet as D.A. Miller notes, the nature of the signature systems that Cohen describes as always-already deciphered within a totalizing and deterministic poststructuralist theoretical field leaves no room for pleasant surprises, only for Cohen's 'mediatric rape.'[66] As a result, Cohen's overdetermined theoretical interpretation of Hitchcock's secret writing systems precludes the possibility of play as a legitimate aspect of this system. In fact, even Cohen's insistence on framing such a system in terms of "writing," "reading," and "conflicting legibilities" seems to foreclose the possibility that an essential aspect of the phenomenon might sit beyond the conceptual territory of reading.[67]

Not only does Cohen suppress the inherent value of play through theoretical overdetermination, but he also infantilizes play, and in doing so ensures that whatever value it might have is delegitimized within his analysis. Discussing the role of "Mr. Memory" in *The 39 Steps* (1935), he writes: "one witnesses the mime of cognition's engenderment…. Mr. Memory can only give 'facts,' like a photographic still purportedly, that are recognized, that the questioner agrees he got right: it is a mindless game…. Yet while fallen on hard times entertaining the masses he is the key to a revolutionary assault in his almost new universe."[68] For Cohen, Mr. Memory represents "a front, a disguise, a child's game" whose photographic memory's mimetic power is only a distracting veneer,

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[65] *Ibid.*, 33, 48.
[66] D.A. Miller, "Hitchcock's Hidden Pictures," *Critical Inquiry* 37:1 (Autumn 2010): 127, fn. 16.
[67] Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies*, *xix-xx*.
[68] *Ibid.*, 113.

a role that obscures his true function as a revolutionary agent, a figure for anti-mimetic inscription as against mimetic representation.[69] In this analogy, Mr. Memory's "facts" represent so many Hitchcockian rebuses, puns, and cameos; hidden visual elements whose pleasure seems to stem from their very being known (or coming to be known), their facticity as such, but whose truly subversive function is to undermine any such epistemic regime grounded in optical observation and confirmation. Again, Cohen writes: "'The fact' is here a bauble to entertain the masses, dupe them by taking their money to hear what they think they know repeated and confirmed; render them besotted and inert through play and the chance to consult Mr. Memory even in the most tedious of vaudeville routines."[70] Cohen's portrait of Mr. Memory as a patronizing figure, and his association of facts, even obscure (that is, hidden) ones, with infantile play and a "tedious" mass entertainment that is beneath both Memory, and more importantly Hitchcock, suggests the intellectual and political inferiority of such pure play to the "reading" and "writing" that comprise Cohen's register of "conflicting legibilities." Play is relegated to the lowly function of distracting audiences (both those of Mr. Memory and Hitchcock) from the *truly* important, and truly threatening, planned destruction of the dominant episto-political regime of occularcentrism. While the entire network of signature systems Cohen identifies is founded on the tension between hiddenness and recognition, the playfulness involved in such recognitions (and in the hiding, as well) is denigrated and denied value, its only significance stemming precisely from its distracting lack of possible import.

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[69] *Ibid.*, 119.
[70] *Ibid.*, 116.

Interestingly, this is also the conclusion that D.A. Miller comes to regarding what he terms in his eponymous article "Hitchcock's hidden pictures." Miller also, following Leitch and Cohen, takes the cameo as the leading facet of Hitchcock's playful approach to filmmaking (even if, as for Cohen, such play is only a deception). Like his precursors, Miller hones in on the bizarre ontological status of the cameo version of Hitchcock, noting that Hitchcock never appears as anyone other than himself, yet paradoxically he, Hitchcock, is seemingly never recognized as the famous and iconic film director: "the fat man is nobody but Hitchcock, and yet Hitchcock is nobody but a fat man." This paradox becomes even more strange and explicit in *Strangers on a Train* (1951) when Guy Haines is shown reading a book edited by Hitchcock, the director.[71] According to Miller, this hidden second cameo, which works to reinforce the paradoxical logic of all Hitchcock cameos, also works to undermine the viewer's sense of pleasurable self-satisfaction—the same satisfaction that Leitch accepts unproblematically as central to the Hitchcockian spectatorial contract—by transforming the viewer's perceptual astuteness into inadequacy, thereby reversing the his or her presumed mastery over Hitchcock's cameo image, and by extension all other Hitchcock images (i.e. his films). The second cameo moreover raises the possibility of other hidden objects, other secrets as of yet undiscovered.[72]

Even more disturbing to Miller is the seeming meaninglessness of such hidden pictures, which in *Strangers* includes a third and even more obscure cameo, in the form of yet another of Hitchcock's books, photographed so as to be scarcely visible and hardly identifiable at all. Miller reflects Cohen in locating a distracting significance to these

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[71] D.A. Miller, "Hitchcock's Hidden Pictures," 108, 110.
[72] *Ibid.*, 113, 115.

hidden pictures in their seeming to be "curiously *beside the point* [emphasis in original]."[73] Miller's anecdote about solving hidden picture puzzles as a child, which he compares to the secret images in Hitchcock, similarly echoes Cohen:

> …when I was done finding everything, the original tableau—the "big picture" with its strong motivic unity—wasn't simply pockmarked with irrelevant spoons, paperclips, and catcher's mitts; it had dissolved into an infinite tracery of possible hiding places for objects that I had not discovered and could not be sure even existed. As a result, the game never felt over, especially—and creepily—when it was supposed to be.[74]

The way in which one hidden object implies any number of them, the way "simple facts pyramid themselves into wild fantasies,"[75] as it were, quotes the overdetermination of Cohen's analysis even as it similarly infantilizes both puzzle play and the paranoid anxiety engendered by such a viral network that, like the field of Hitchcock Studies, continues to "never feel over," even now, not merely ambulatory but still eerily virile, decades after Hitchcock's death.

Miller notes that with the apparently meaningless third *Strangers* cameo, "something thickens… and it's not the plot, which now begins racing forward like a train; it's the style, which… must put the plot on pause." Miller insists that the function of Hitchcock's hidden pictures, as a subdomain of film style, implies a different kind of authorship at work, one that "is not the same thing as—and may even be at cross-purposes with—the authorship of a narrative."[76] He describes a game of charades ("a riddling gesture or tableau covertly determined by a verbal expression that it is asking us

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[73] *Ibid.*, 117.
[74] *Ibid.*, 119.
[75] Miller, in fact, goes farther in paralleling Cohen by noting that finding Hitchcock everywhere in the text is the same as not finding him in it at all (Miller, "Hitchcock's Hidden Pictures," fn. 9.) One could read this point as implying exactly the kind of de-auratic and de-auterial cinema 'envisioned' by Cohen. Paradoxically, only by manifesting himself potentially everywhere is Hitchcock able to disappear from his text, to truly become the ghost of his cameo image that leaves only its trace on the image.
[76] *Ibid.*, 115.

to supply," e.g. a rebus) as one "that is played *un*announced in Hitchcock and whose secret riddles are posed *in secret*, hidden under narrative camouflage."[77] Such charades "flatten" diegesis, demoting it to a pretext for puzzles (in opposition to the constructivist theory of narrative, which suggests problem-solving literally as a pre-text for narrative), puzzles that communicate something distinctly irrelevant to the films' narratives, puzzles that look "disassociated," and finally seem to function "to make image and expression seem idiotic," an effect that recalls what Cohen designates as the entire project of Hitchcock's signature systems, which is to undermine assumptions of mimetic representation in cinema.[78]

The question Miller raises about the relationship between Hitchcock's ludostylistic hidden pictures and narrative deserves more attention, for it comes powerfully to bear on both the role of spectatorial paranoia in Hitchcock, as well as the structure of his oeuvre as a system that generates novel critical insight. One way to investigate this relationship between Hitchcock's games and his narratives is to consider the latter in relation to narrative excess. Kristin Thompson defines excess as "those aspects of the work which are not contained by its unifying forces." She distinguishes excess from style on the basis that excess "forms no specific patterns which we could say are characteristic of the work." She relates excess to Roland Barthes' concept of the third meaning, writing that "the choice of the term 'meaning' is a misleading one, since these elements of the work are precisely those which do not participate in the creation of narrative or symbolic meaning." Thompson conceptualizes excess in terms of systematicity, significance, and motivation, claiming that "[a]t the point where

[77] *Ibid.*, 122.
[78] *Ibid.*, 125.

motivation ends, excess begins."[79] Hitchcock's hidden pictures, however, do not fit neatly into either the category of style or excess since they are, as Miller observes, both obviously meant and obviously meaningless. Moreover, Miller's discussion of the third cameo in *Strangers* highlights that fact that some of this stylistic content is not even made clearly visible for the spectator's apperception. If Hitchcock's rebuses, puns, and other hidden visual elements are constitutive of a stylistic system, this system is one that would be paradoxically constituted as such, as an coherent structure, by the thoroughgoing excess which would be its very organizing principle.

In other words, we find in Hitchcock's films, in addition to the dominant and largely classical narrative-geared system of stylistic operation, a subordinate stylistic structure that is both consistent and yet fleeting, sometimes flagrantly obvious but often barely detectable, and that operates independently of the plot structure. That is to say, Hitchcock's games constitute a parametric formal structure, which Bordwell defines as a stylistic system that operates independently of a film's syuzhet system.[80] Unlike the dominant parametric styles of Bresson or Ozu, however, Hitchcock's parametric game structure is thoroughly embedded within the classical texts that provide its alibi and allow it to pass unnoticed. Indeed, Hitchcock's games are wholly reliant on the dominance of classical style, for without it the hidden picture game would cease to be hidden and the pleasure of finding them would disintegrate.

Part of the difficulty in properly categorizing Hitchcock's games within a narrative theory of cinematic spectatorship is, of course, the fact that such rebus puzzles and puns are not narrative devices at all. They are jokes, gags, pleasures in themselves,

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[79] Kristin Thompson, "The Concept of Cinematic Excess," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology* ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 131-2, 135.
[80] Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 275.

and to impute a purpose to them beyond generating a small amount of fun for the audience, and perhaps reminding the viewer of Hitchcock's technical mastery, would be speculative and unnecessary. Leitch and Cohen are both compelled to find purpose in these pleasures in order to recuperate them into pre-existing systems of discursive significance, either narrative or anti-narrative. They do not consider the simpler and more plausible explanation that Hitchcock's games are merely a-narrative, incommensurable, and needing no other theoretical justification than that Hitchcock may have thought them amusing. Although Leitch and Cohen's studies are both productive and useful, Leitch for identifying the elective and contractual pleasures of viewing Hitchcock and Cohen for cataloguing the network of Hitchcock's signature effects, they are both limited by approaches that understand the ludic aspects of Hitchcock as aberrant and in need of recuperative explanation. Rather, what is needed is an approach that examines such games on their own terms, and offers a distinction between the purpose of Hitchcock's games and the effects of those games irrespective of their authorial intention or situation into a coherent narrative practice. This is not to say that previous studies are without merit, but only to suggest that their theoretical perspective blinds them to certain aspects of their object of study, specifically the rhetorical effects of the hidden pictures on the practice of spectatorship. I therefore posit that Hitchcock's picture games have the primary effect of the revision and inversion of viewing strategies for spectators who become invested in puzzle solving, and the secondary effects, which stem from the primary effect, of generating paranoia and encouraging novel critical insight. Even to designate these effects as "functions" would imply more intention than I wish to, and while I do not wish to deny the *possibility* that Hitchcock wholly intended these effects

(which certainly could have been the case), I see no reason to claim them as hallmarks of authorial genius when they could just as easily, and perhaps more simply, be explained as incidental phenomena that happen to be of relatively great significance.

Bordwell's constructivist theory of narration describes an active spectator constantly making and testing hypotheses in order to achieve the end goal of narrative comprehension. The classical film is constructed in a manner that minimizes risk of failure by assisting the spectator in comprehending narrative through the adherence to norms that lead the spectator to draw correct inferences about narrative action. According to Bordwell, the norms that govern the composition of the image—centering, balancing, frontality, and depth—function to render the depicted space as a narrative space that is committed to the larger undergirding norm of psychological causality.[81] Yet the Hitchcock cameo, which is capable of appearing at any moment in the film (although generally near the film's beginning), and is capable of being anywhere in the frame, either centered or not, frontal or not, and in any plane of action, demands that the spectator who wants to find Hitchcock in his films do more perceptual work by attending to parts of the image that are classically less important, that typically yield little useful narrative information, and that would constitute a 'bad' strategy within the classical viewing paradigm. The Hitchcock cameo offers an affective and cognitive reward, in the form of pleasure-producing knowledge and satisfaction, for a spectator's willingness both to expend more mental effort in watching a Hitchcock film and to invest a portion of that effort in areas that are unlikely to yield much narrative value. In doing so, the cameo incentivizes a resistance to, if not an inversion of, classical narrative viewing patterns.

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[81] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 54-58.

The fact that Hitchcock's cameos became increasingly obvious to spot as his career progressed does not dispel the possibility that the director could potentially appear anywhere. In fact, the obviousness and ease of identifying Hitchcock in his later films (a significant uptick in the blatancy of the cameo is noticeable starting, as it turns out, with *Strangers on a Train*[82]) has the effect of signaling the possibility of other hidden pictures to the viewer. As Miller notes, knowledge of one hidden secret implies the possibility of more. If narrative comprehension is a form of problem-solving, and the classical film renders this problem trivially easy, then the cameo performs analogously as a trivially easy hidden picture. The obviousness of the cameo provides a model example, a hail and an entry point into the investigation of less obvious picture puzzles. These puzzles can be divided into three categories: pictures that are obviously meant and intentional on Hitchcock's part, pictures that are ambiguously meant, and those that are probably not meant. With the trajectory of decreasing intention, we can also observe a concomitant decrease in the capacity to attribute narrative or thematic, or even artistic motivation to these puzzles—a tendency toward excess. Crucially, these categories of intention represent conjectural attitudes the spectator can take toward the puzzles and not necessarily authoritative claims on my part about the actual intention of such puzzles, since an integral part of their effect relies on the anxiety of not knowing for sure how significant any such picture really is.

[82] This trend in Hitchcock's cameography is much easier to see now that digital video distribution, the availability of commercial editing software, and online digital video distribution platforms like YouTube enable amateur cinephiles to edit all of Hitchcock's cameos (excepting perhaps some of the secret ones) together and distribute them publicly. As will also be the case with *Last Year at Marienbad* and *Playtime*, changes in viewing technology and practice can often have substantial effects on how films and filmmakers are received and interpreted.

In the first category, those pictures that seem obviously intentional, the cameo is the exemplar. Hitchcock's cameos rely on such a strong authorial intention, both at the level of inclusion in to film at the planning and editing stages and at the baser level of his actually deciding to walk into the frame itself. They could not possibly have entered the film unintentionally. In this category are also rebuses, such as the famous example in *The 39 Steps* when a woman's scream upon discovering the spy Annabella's dead body is implied by a cut to a screaming train whistle. Here, the spectator is required to solve the audiovisual rebus by connecting the shots together to read the scream implied, but not made explicit, by the edit. The puzzle is also highly motivated as an efficient means of narrative exposition, and functions as a sound bridge to link adjoining scenes together and maintain continuity.

In the second category might sit a curious image in *Vertigo* (1958). During the scene in which Scotty and Midge inquire about Carlotta Valdes at the book dealer's store, we can see, if barely, in the window of the office back-projected across the street, a man who walks over to a woman and gives her a shoulder massage that looks at first suspiciously like a strangulation. This image seems at once totally innocent and pointless, and utterly nefarious and suspect. Nothing actually happens—after the brief massage the man walks back to his side of the window and the woman continues sitting at her desk, but the implied strangulation too eerily coincides with the fact that Elster kills his wife by breaking her neck, and yet no one watching the film in a theater could possibly know that fact since its revelation only comes at the end of the film. This secret massage has no narrative motivation, and has no thematic motivation for the viewer, since it is both too ambiguous and properly reading it relies on information the spectator would not possess

anyway; it is only recognizable on repeat viewings and only to viewers conditioned by cameos to visually explore the background plane of Hitchcock's busy streets instead of paying attention to the narratively important conversation going on in the foreground. It might appear thoroughly accidental if not for that fact that Hitchcock or someone else seemingly had to choose to back-project *this* scene, and for the fact that its position directly behind and between Stewart and the book dealer seems to draw the eye directly to it, once noticed. In this case, the epistemophilia of playing the hidden picture game is tempered by the anxiety of *not* knowing what the intentional status of the image is. Even if we read this secret picture as an intertextual reference to *Rear Window* (1954), this only exchanges of one set of anxieties for another, since the image then becomes another kind of cameo—a secret signature that gestures toward the director—and shares the cameo's problem of breaking the distinction between the story world and the storyteller. In either case the spectator's recognition of this image, whichever function it is performing, affects a strain on diegetic closure and a push toward excess.

This tinge of epistemic anxiety is most thoroughly expressed, however, not in *Vertigo* but in its predecessor, *The Wrong Man*. *The Wrong Man* is unique among Hitchcock films in its relative simplicity of plot and terseness of visual style. Whereas in other Hitchcock films the secret pictures are more thoroughly effaced by more complex narrative structures that solicit more attention from the spectator and by the alibi of technical showmanship, in *The Wrong Man* they are more plainly on display. In such an allegedly straightforward and realistic film, any unusual stylistic choices are more immediately noticeable. The first half or so of *The Wrong Man* is pocked with puzzle pictures that seem to comment on the action, but are troubled by both their triviality and

their ambiguous intent. Indeed, from this vantage point the whole film can be read as a tragic drama about the overproduction of knowledge. The impetus for the narrative action is Rose's excess of wisdom teeth, which she explains to Manny by stating that "everybody has more teeth than they know what to do with." It is because of Rose's teeth that Manny visits the insurance office and is wrongly identified. And indeed, if wisdom teeth can be read as a reference to knowledge, then everybody in the film does seem to have more than they know what to do with, or at least what they do with what they think they know turns out to be disastrous. The witnesses at the insurance office think they know that Manny is the same man who robbed them, the detectives think that Manny's calligraphic quirk demonstrates that he is the robber, and even Rose comes to believe that she is responsible for Manny's ordeal.[83] Unlike other Hitchcock films where men and women may "know too much" but where they do tend to actually know something important, to be on to something even if what they think they know is not exactly what turns out to be the case (cf. *The Lady Vanishes* (1937), *Rebecca* (1940)), these characters in *The Wrong Man* are similarly mistaken, but their intuitions are simply *wrong*. In this film there is no grand conspiracy, only an unfortunate series of simple errors in judgment and the authorship of the crime.

The disparities between belief and knowledge, and between observation and inference, are doubled through the film's cryptonymic pictures, which implicate the viewer in a similar bind between the pleasure of knowing and the anxiety of uncertainty. In *The Wrong Man* the third category of picture puzzles, which consists of those that do not evidence having been intended at all, come to the fore as the more pleasurable and

[83] Although, as I have explained above, Rose does seem to share some causal responsibility for Manny's arrest and accusation, she is not *morally* responsible for it in a way that would produce feelings of quilt and responsibility leading to madness.

explicitly intentional picture games disappear behind the veil of presumptive cinematic realism. This alleged emphasis on stark realism is suggested through the film's unique approach to the Hitchcock cameo. Although Hitchcock did plan for and shoot a cameo appearance, he decided against its inclusion in order to preserve the film's realistic atmosphere.[84] Instead, Hitchcock provides a pre-credits introduction to the film in which he appears, lit in silhouette and in extreme long shot, to attest to the factual authenticity of the film via monologue. Announcing that "This is Alfred Hitchcock speaking," he seems to authenticate both himself and the film's somber gravitas with his candid presence, yet Hitchcock's non-cameo takes a form that undermines its own authenticity by refusing to make Hitchcock visually legible. Although the blatant introduction might appear to reject the game of hidden pictures established by Hitchcock's visualized presence in his other films, Hitchcock is here literalizing the concept of the hidden picture by hiding himself, his signature visage, in plain sight within the frame. The roles of the image and sound in authorizing and de-authorizing Hitchcock's presence become reversed: whereas the image typically secures Hitchcock's signature while he himself remains silent, here his voice authenticates his signature while his image has almost nothing to say. The film itself may be more serious in tone than other Hitchcock pictures, but the logic of the cameo remains intact in this introduction, and is even perhaps more subversive than usual for its deceptiveness.

The body of the film contains at least two rebuses (what Miller calls charades), each of which seem to provide an ironic commentary on the action, and each of which seem to elude announcing themselves as deliberate. Firstly, in the police interrogation room the room is rather barren, with the exception of one object which is, like the secret

[84] Dan Auiler, *Hitchcock's Notebooks* (New York: Avon, 1999), 474.

massage in *Vertigo*, at once totally innocuous and incredibly conspicuous. On the interrogation table sits a wooden paper box labeled "IN." An inbox is of course a perfectly reasonable piece of office décor, but in an interrogation room without paperwork, and without a companion outbox anywhere in sight, the box begins to look suspicious. Hitchcock also frames the shot slightly below eye level as if to emphasize the object on the desk, a framing strategy he repeats throughout the first half of the film. Perhaps, like Manny, the box comes under suspicion simply because it is in the wrong place at the wrong time, but nevertheless the image solicits the charade: Manny is being "boxed in" by the detectives. The conspicuous framing appropriately occurs twice, in a film obsessed with doubles. After the first interrogation, Manny is sent out to satisfy "certain procedures" involving being boxed in by detectives in their car, another box-like enclosure. During the second sequence, which occurs after Manny and the detectives return to the precinct, the detectives decide that Manny's duplication of the robber's spelling mistake is sufficient to indict him and send him to another kind of inbox: the jail cell where he will wait to be processed like so much paperwork. About twenty minutes later, Manny is arraigned and sent to jail. His arraignment is structured as another charade, this time built around the concept of "booking." In one sense Manny is being booked in that he is being processed into the New York penal system. In another sense however, he is also being "booked" in the performing entertainment sense of the word: he is forced to stand on a lit stage, complete with brass railings, in front of an audience, to speak into a grotesque microphone and display and perform himself—Christopher Emmanuel Balestrero.

These charades make several different interpretative readings available to the viewer—for instance the oppressiveness of the police and the inhumanity with which Manny is treated—but these readings are never deeply meaningful since all they do is confirm what is being made obvious throughout the film's conventional narration. The pictures do not tell the viewer anything that he or she does not already know; they offer only redundant thematic content if any, an overproduction of useless interpretative information. For the spectator, putting forth the cognitive effort to perceive and piece together these rebuses is only a less efficient means of deciphering the same thematic information generated through conventional viewing procedures (e.g. paying close attention to characters and dialogue). Moreover, unlike the ambiguity of the massage in *Vertigo*, which seems like it *must* have been intended despite its superfluity, these charades are not even, in Miller's phrase, "demonstrably meant." *The Wrong Man* figures a double paranoid conspiracy: one by the police and the community against Manny, and another by the film's narration against the spectator. The film's cryptically coded picture messages, or seeming messages, suggest meaning and significance, knowledge that will make the text more open and available for the viewer's comprehension and interpretation. These messages, though, are only phantoms—shadows like Hitchcock himself is a shadow in the film's introduction—and as Miller claims of *Strangers*' hidden pictures, they do not illuminate the text but only emphasize its shadiness.[85]

If the paranoia engendered by these pictures in *The Wrong Man* is characterized by an overabundance of information that fails to resolve into meaningful, useful knowledge, then the way in which evidence of a secret encourages the search for more secrets by implying their existence seems to perpetuate a kind of paranoid spectatorship.

[85] Miller, "Hitchcock's Hidden Pictures," 127.

The exploration of the depths of Hitchcock's hidden picture world does not, in *The Wrong Man* or elsewhere, ever seem to reach a stable conclusion or a finite end point. Miller criticizes Cohen for the overdetermination of his theoretical approach, but a similar overdetermination of meaning is implicit in Miller's own self-assessment that, seeing potential hidden pictures everywhere, the game for him "never felt over." What Miller experiences, and what is in evidence most barrenly in *The Wrong Man* but traverses all of Hitchcock to a greater or lesser degree, is the generation of spectatorial apophany. The concept of apophenia derives from Klaus Conrad's stage model of schizophrenia, where he writes: "the artificial term 'apophany' describes this process of repetitively and monotonously experiencing abnormal meanings in the entire surrounding experiential field, eg, being observed, spoken about, the object of eavesdropping, followed by strangers."[86] In general, apophenia refers to the delusional perception and recognition of connection and significance between unrelated phenomena.[87] In contrast to epiphany, which describes the sudden acquisition of knowledge through the realization of insight, apophany describes a false realization, a similarly ecstatic but ultimately delusional state of seeming to experience sudden insight when in fact one has only misinterpreted insignificant information.

Hitchcock's hidden picture system engages the spectator at the level of viewing procedure and strategy, incentivizing an inversion of classical viewing norms that privileges the attention to style and excess over narrative comprehension. This system generates spectatorial apophany by offering the cameo as a 'hidden' but obvious picture

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[86] Klaus Conrad, "Gestaltanalyse und Daseinsanalytik," *Nervenarzt*, 30 (1959): 405–410, quoted in Aaron L. Mishara, "Klaus Conrad (1905-1961): Delusional Mood, Psychosis, Beginning Schizophrenia," *Schizophrenia Bulletin* 36:1 (2010): 9-13.

[87] "Apophenia," http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/apophenia#English

for easy recognition, offering other visual puns, rebuses, and cryptograms for a less obvious recognition that remains, however, "demonstrably meant" and, suggesting through implication the further proliferation of hidden pictures that are not demonstrably intentional. The spectator who engages with this system becomes conditioned to seek out and identify secret 'meanings,' even and especially narratively and thematically meaningless or insignificant ones, in the text. As a result, the Hitchcock film becomes transformed into a playground of ludic potential, a structure that, by the very nature of the close spectator's engagement with it encourages the spectator to explore its space and to find novel meanings there. Watching *The Wrong Man* from this perspective, it is difficult not to see sly commentary in all the film's written signage, from the obvious—"Associated Life" insurance—to the thoroughly frivolous: a sign at the police station reading "Shelter" that points opposite the direction Manny is led, a sign in the deli where Manny presents himself reading "nuts," even a partially obscured sign outside the (rear) window of the insurance office that seems to read "pain"—perhaps foreshadowing the suffering of Manny's ordeal and performing yet another pointless narrative and thematic redundancy. Even the film's dialogue becomes affected by pull toward play. During Manny's questioning the detective's surly reply to Manny's claim of innocence ("You want to play it that way?") and his plain disbelief in Manny's alibi ("If you come up with anything else, we'll listen"), although functioning narratively to suggest the coldness and impersonality of the police, can also be understood as darkly humorous musical puns. Yet these novel insights are generated not so much by the authorial voice of the text, but rather by the spectator's own ingenuity of observation. Hitchcock's hidden pictures make the spectator's confirmation bias into an aesthetic practice, one that fuels the attribution

of genius to Hitchcock as a thoroughly controlling master. Hitchcock has become the "premier testing ground of critical insight" in part because his films function rhetorically as a system that encourages the generation of insight. The Hitchcock-Industrial complex is therefore structured by the films' stylistic system and fueled by the spectator's epistemophilia, which the system encourages through incentives of ludic pleasure.

The studies of Hitchcock done by Cohen, Miller, and to some extent Leitch can be read as symptomatic of critical anxieties about the shifting, porous nature of the relationship between viewer and film in the construction of meaning. For Cohen this manifests in terms of "conflicting legibilities" and the breakdown of mimesis, for Miller the act of "Too Close Reading" brings the spectator and the film into a disturbing psychological proximity, and for Leitch the "assault on the audience's certitudes" signifies a disturbing challenge to the spectator's sense of self. However, these anxieties only persist so long as experiencing a Hitchcock film (or any other film for that matter) is theoretically framed as an interaction between systems of reading and writing, and based a communication model in which information is linearly transmitted by the text to the reader's brain. By attending to these anxieties of perception and narration, which in Hitchcock manifest as hidden pictures and secret codes, we can more fully understand how the creation of meaning is a constructive activity that is genuinely shared between the text and the reader/spectator/user, and we can see how ambiguity, not only at the level of interpretation but at the more fundamental level of spatial comprehension and narrative construction, can be harnessed for both productive and playful ends.

Chapter Two: *Last Year at Marienbad*

Alain Resnais' and Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Last Year at Marienbad* is a challenging film. Its narrative is so notoriously complex, convoluted and abstract that it has become *the* canonical difficult film, a cinematic byword for the challenging formal experimentation of art film in general, and of the early sixties modernist cinema in particular.[88] Like Hitchcock's films, and like a good detective story, the film is full of traps. To watch the film is to engage with its intricate and abstruse narrative system, and this engagement consists centrally of recognizing, and thereby avoiding falling prey to, the film's relentless onslaught of visual, auditory, and narrative deceptions. Susan Sontag writes that in the film, "[t]he claim of the past upon the present is reduced to a cipher, a ballet, or—in the controlling image of the film—a game, whose results are entirely determined by the first move (if he who makes the first move knows what he is doing)."[89] Not only is the film's controlling image the game, which is visually represented in the film as poker, dominoes, pick-up sticks, checkers, and of course 'nim,' the distinctive game which recurs throughout the film and which M always wins, but the film's controlling relationship between the spectator and the narrative is one of agonistic play. This is not merely to state the obvious—that *Marienbad* is a remarkably difficult film to make narrative sense of—but to claim that *Marienbad* structures its difficulty as a game between the audience and the film, as a challenge for the viewer, and that the spectator's procedural engagement with that challenge is a site of aesthetic and rhetorical significance.

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[88] Emma Wilson, *Alain Resnais*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 67-8.
[89] Susan Sontag, "Resnais' Muriel," *Film Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (1964): 23-7. Reprinted in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Noonday Press, 1966), 233.

In "Against Interpretation," Sontag also warns that "the temptation to interpret *Marienbad* should be resisted."[90] A film that has been designed to make itself available to myriad interpretative possibilities, any specific meaning to be made out of the film is not as important, for Sontag, as the sensuous immediacy of its images and its engagement with film form. While the impulse to recuperate thematic significance into the film's formal structure, this chapter will describe and explore the structure of *Marienbad*'s spectatorial challenge, which is composed of two interrelated spatiotemporal systems: continuity and repetition. In the former, the viewer is constantly avoiding falling prey to pitfalls of false continuity in the pursuit of a coherent diegesis, while the latter confounds the spectator by suggesting spatiotemporally and symbolically resonant relationships between events, even where none exist. These two narrative strategies are not mutually exclusive, and in fact are frequently employed simultaneously; they simply represent two general trajectories of the film's formal construction.

The use and abuse of the principles of continuity editing in *Marienbad* are well-documented, to the point where the film has become a classic example of spatial and temporal discontinuity.[91] Bordwell claims that the film's use of split image and sound tracks, false eyeline matches and matches on action, and unmotivated camera movements elevates these stylistic patterns to the level of intermittent dominance over syuzhet demands.[92] I would go further and claim that these patterns are primarily dominant and are only intermittently suppressed. In fact, some of the film's most conspicuous uses of proper continuity practices correlate ironically with the depiction of games within the

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[90] Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, 9.
[91] David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction, Eighth Edition* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 257.
[92] Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 278.

film. The film's systematically discontinuous editing is so rigorous that it functions less significantly to inhibit fabula construction (it is not, we must remember, as though there is no story at all) than it does to construct an alternative logic of continuity whereby the spectator's recognition of changes in the profilmic diegetic world and constant reorientation within diegetic space and time are elevated to the status of a self-conscious play activity. Resnais' use of continuity conventions makes this process difficult precisely because these devices typically function in narrative cinema to suggest spatial coherence, and here are deliberately employed for opposite ends.[93] Rather than reinforcing coherent spatial and temporal orientation, *Marienbad* consistently and effectively reverses the hierarchy of classical viewing priorities, making the continually unfolding flow of space and time the spectator's primary concern rather than the conveyance of plot information. Most of the shots and sequences in *Marienbad* are connected to adjacent ones through the film's suggestive but false or ambiguous continuity, which consists not only of discontinuous editing transitions, but voice-over narration that plays variously between embodiment and disembodiment, as well as highly implausible if not diegetically impossible sequence shots which challenge the possibility of coherent spatiotemporal relations within a single frame.[94] To better understand how the film's complex system of discontinuity operates to challenge the spectator's capacity to construct a coherent cinematic space it will be useful to look at a few crucial, representative examples.

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[93] See Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 55-59.

[94] There is also a sense in which such a strong and systematic deployment of continuity practices, even if for anti-classical means, perhaps functions to create an alternative continuity in which unconnected spaces really do seem to be somehow adjacent to each other. This byproduct of Resnais' film has two consequences: firstly it allows the spectator an alternative to 'playing the game:' he or she can simply passively follow where the film leads. Secondly, the kind of space implied by *Marienbad* can be read, as Borges' writing has been, as an anticipation of the kind of networked virtual spaces constructed by hypertext fiction decades later.

The first play of eyeline mismatches occurs roughly ten minutes into the film, just after the end of the play, and consists of seven shots. In the first shot, in which a trio of figures stands looking offscreen to the left, we see the short-haired man farthest to the right turn his head to his left and look offscreen right (shot 1). The film then cuts as if to give an eyeline match to reveal what the man is looking at: a bored-looking woman also looking offscreen right (shot 2). The suggestion of an eyeline match is bolstered by the use of negative space to balance the successive shots, a technique also used consistently throughout the film. Next we get an apparent reverse shot of a different, though similar-looking woman looking intently offscreen left (shot 3), perhaps meeting the gaze from the woman in shot 2 of the sequence. The sense of continuity here is also heightened by a match on the action of a woman walking through the background plane of action. In the next shot (shot 4) this seeming continuity begins to be definitively disrupted: the shot shows yet another woman (ahthough this time obviously different because of her dark hair) seeming to meet the gaze of the woman in shot 3, yet to her left is that very woman (dressed differently), as well as the man from shot 1. Shot 4 seems to be spatially and temporally consistent with the preceding shots, but is in fact neither. This discontinuity is further disrupted as the sequence progresses, as the next shot, through another false eyeline match, shows the woman from shot 2, now in a different position and looking again offscreen to the right (shot 5). The woman turns her head to her left, an action which the next shot (shot 6) matches, although now the woman is now back in the same lobby space from shot 2. She continues to turn all the way around until she is looking offscreen right again, which provides the eyeline for an ambiguous match, to a conversation the husband figure is having (shot 7). To conclude the sequence, he

seemingly mocks the viewer by delivering the line, "Connection? There's absolutely no connection, my friend."

The sequence begins with three shots which are potentially spatially and temporally coherent, followed by three shots which are unambiguously incoherent, and finishes with a punctuating line of dialogue that chides the viewer for trying to make sense of it at all. The discontinuity editing across the film and exemplified here implicates the active spectator (that is, the spectator who is actively trying to make narrative sense of the film, rather than succumbing to the allure of its beauty and hypnotic flow) in an agonistic relationship with the film, and by extension with Resnais and Robbe-Grillet. Rather than merely editing disjunctive shots with no apparent relation between them together, in this sequence Resnais systematically employs the elements of continuity–eyeline match, frame balancing, match on foreground and background action–to generate a very strong *suggestion* of continuity that makes the viewer's task of disentangling the editing in order to make sense of it all the more challenging.[95] Before a viewer can make a significant narrative hypothesis about the depicted action, he or she must have a sense of where or when that action takes place, something the film leaves tantalizingly ambiguous. Through the film's carefully planned detonation of classical continuity editing Resnais turns its function inside out. Rather than focusing the viewer's attention on relevant characters and actions of narrative significance, the film redirects that attention outward, in all directions, at an infinitude of eqi-potentially significant

[95] It is interesting to note here how this level of formal analysis is made possible, barring the capacity to obtain a print of the film and an editing bench, by the rise of home video technology. The experience of watching and rewatching a film like *Marienbad* on DVD, with the attendant capacities of random access to the film and the ability to watch the film in slow motion is a dramatically different experience from watching the film projected onto a screen. In this sense contemporary audiences have perhaps had something of an unintended and unfair advantage in rising to meet the film's formal challenges.

relationships between characters and narrative events. Resnais has suggested that the trope of having characters frequently looking offscreen was Robbe-Grillet's idea, but it is the editing together of those looks that powerfully suggests spatial and temporal coherence, as a prerequisite for narrative significance.[96]

The suggestion of continuity across discontinuous points in space and time is also reinforced by the film's systematic play with voiceover narration. The film consistently weaves X's voiceover in and out of embodiment, ambiguously cueing the beginnings and ends of flashbacks. The first sequence of X trying to convince A that he knows her begins with the two of them speaking at the hotel's staircase. (Although any assumption that this location represents an objective present from which to begin a flashback is undermined by the sound of gravel softly crunching as A walks up the stone staircase.) A invites X to tell her where it was that they met. The image cuts to a long shot of A wandering along a gravel path at dusk, holding one of her shoes, while we hear X begins to answer A's question in voiceover. X describes a scenario in which he interrupts a group conversation with an inane question in order to draw A's attention to him. The image track then cuts to what appears to be that event, while X's voiceover continues to describe it. X describes how someone else breaks the awkward silence by remarking on the evening's planned entertainment (or the next evening's, or some other day's) after which the image track cuts to a dance at the hotel where X and A dance, evidently showing that activity. X's voiceover continues, now describing A walking over the gravel grounds holding her shoe after having broken one of the heels. At this point the image track shows X and M playing cards. X bluffs and loses. Finally the film cuts back to the dance, but now X and A are standing at the bar. This time when X speaks his speech is embodied.

[96] Jean-Louis Leutrat, *L'Année Dernière À Marienbad* (London: BFI Publishing, 2000), 28.

This sequence begins and ends with X's embodied voice explaining how he and A have met before, but the spatiotemporal position of X and A is different at the end of the narration than at the beginning. Just as in the prior example of discontinuity editing where the conventions of classical continuity suggested spatial and temporal cohesion where there was none, here the sound track is performing the same function by seeming to smooth over spatiotemporal discontinuity. Moreover, although the voiceover and image track are generally depicting the same events, they do so in a different order. While the image track shows A walking with her broken shoe, X is describing his pseudo-scandalous interruption of the group conversation. When the image track is showing that event, X describes how someone else comments on the evening's entertainment. The remark functions as a kind of sound bridge to the visual representation of that entertainment (dancing and gambling), yet when we see that entertainment, the voiceover is describing A's broken shoe. Thus the sound track in this representative instance functions not only to suggest continuity, but more specifically to suggest a linear and continuous temporal duration–the linear flow of time as X delivers the voiceover–laid over a nonlinear and discontinuous depiction of space and of recounted time. Although in this particular instance the time of the narration is easily distinguished from the time of the image track, both in terms of linearity versus nonlinearity as well as 'presentness' versus 'pastness' (to the extent that such a difference matters), at other times the film complicates these relations even further by having X's voiceover become embodied onscreen within the flashback structure he is supposed to be recounting while still remaining a voiceover from another point in time.

Thirdly, the prospect of constructing a coherent diegesis is complicated by the film's intricate long takes, in which the possibility of continuity is undermined even without the use of editing. The shot in which X and A are first introduced is such a shot. The shot begins as a bust shot of X looking offscreen to the left, while behind him on the right a mirror reflection shows a couple on the other side of the room. The couple's conversation is heard as if from a close range, and the angle of X's head relative to their reflection seems to suggest that he might be listening to them, although this is an illusion, and the man's line that "you claimed you'd listen only to me" provides another subtle chide at the viewer who would make the connection. The camera then pans right, following the couple's reflection as they walk, until X is out of the frame. After holding there for a moment, the camera follows the reflected couple back to the left as they walk diagonally up to and past the mirror, coming into the frame precisely in time to reveal that X is no longer standing where he was, and then walking through a doorway. The shot lingers to pick up another couple, this time two conversing men, and tracks back to follow them into the room, while revealing A standing on the left side of the doorframe, both facing and looking to the left. As the shot continues to track backward, A turns to look at the two conversing men, while a pair of women, presumably the object of X's look at the start of the shot, cross through the frame behind the men. The camera leads the two men into an adjacent room, and then panning left reveals X, framed in the same position as in the shot's opening framing setup (although now a painting spatially replaces the mirror in the shot's framing). This time, his head is in profile, aligned with his body, and only a mirror reflection of his face seems to look out onto the room, rather than his turned head. He turns and walks out of the room through the same door as the

men, while the camera pans right in a symmetric reversal (it is now X who is walking) of the shot's first pan, to reveal the shot's original couple, now occupying X's original position relative to the doorframe, the man afterwards repeating his dialogue, "…Walking along these corridors with measured steps."

Like the dialogue that teases the viewer at the end of the first sequence of eyeline mismatches, the line here about "a garden of reassuring order, with clipped hedges and geometric paths, where we stroll with measured steps" also works as a reflexive joke about the intricate choreography involved with blocking all the actors for this shot. Not only does this shot flagrantly contest the possibility that these characters are actually walking around these rooms and taking up these rigidly discrete positions (or running, as the case would have to be with X here, and with A in a different long take later) like pieces on a game board, but the dialogue, in this instance as elsewhere, calls attention to the artifice of the scene's construction with the same sense of comic irony found in Hitchcock. If the visual construction of this shot—the misleading glances and the precise and subtly reflexive doublings of character position—suggests a parametric form of narration in which nearly imperceptible formal patterns compete with or dominate the concerns of plotting, then the irony with which these patterns are presented functions to invite the viewer to recognize those patterns, to appreciate the film's awareness of itself and get the joke. *Marienbad*'s puzzling and playful treatment of continuity is both challenging and rewarding, and offers the same kinds of ludic entertainment found in Hitchcock's films in terms of the perceptual play of exploring a particularly potent mise-en-scène that threatens a breakdown of diegesis and representation, only here it has grown out of control to the point where it compromises the viability of the plot

altogether. If Hitchcock's hidden pictures and rebuses constitute a ludic and stylistically parametric system that is subordinate to his films' classical narrative construction, *Marienbad* makes that parametric play dominant and genuinely threatening to the prospect of diegetic coherence.

Similarly, the film's thoroughgoing strategies of repetition and difference with regard to figure movement, dialogue, and camera setup parallel Hitchcock's construction of a referential network of signature effects (a network of which, at least according to Cohen, *Last Year at* Mar-*ienbad* is presumably also a part), although here the citations are almost purely formal in nature. The image of A with her left hand placed on her right shoulder is a particularly common repetition. In another example, one sequence shows A is shown sitting on her bed, reflected in a mirror. The camera zooms in on the reflected image, then cuts 'through' the reflection to show A directly. Later in the film, this setup is repeated, but instead of a mirror, there is a painting on the wall, and instead of a cut, the camera pans left to show the same space, but A is absent. This repetition even enacts a sort of second-order repetition of the replacement of mirrors with paintings, a trope that also featured in the introductory long take discussed above. Although in *Marienbad* the network is shrunk down into a single film, rather than sprawling out over a whole career's work, as a result the effects of suggesting covert interpretative significance between discreet events and objects, as well as undermining classical demands of such narrative interpretation, while simultaneously offering a ludic paradigm to compete with if not replace narrative comprehension, are distilled and concentrated.

Bordwell refers to the film's construction of "abstract narrative topoi" where syuzhet and style become "organization of fixed elements, varied and circulated across

the text," noting the film's resemblance to the aesthetics of serial music and suggesting the film's overall nature as an exercise in ascetic refusal, in which the possibility of a coherent fabula world is repeatedly suggested, only to be denied each time.[97] Yet upon re-viewing the film, the futility of applying standard protocols of narrative comprehension becomes almost comically obvious, a point to which the film's first ten minutes attest through the compounded overdetermination of self-reflexive devices. From the film's opening titles, which Jean-Louis Leutrat compares to invitation cards (and which Hitchcock references in the opening credits to *Marine* (1964), another film about a woman who cannot seem to remember her past trauma and the seductive man who attempts to help her do so) and accompanied by bombastic "end-of-film" music,[98] to the "*Rosmer*" drama staged for the amusement of spectators, which ends with the chiming of the clock and the union of the couple, the futility of narrative engagement is rendered as a foregone conclusion, coherent narrative a complete nonstarter.

Although not at all obvious on an initial viewing, the film's early mockery of aspirations to narrative tension reinforces Bordwell's serial reading of the film, but also suggests that another kind of engagement with the film is possible. If, as Cohen suggests, "Hitchcock" is not an auteurist figure but rather an effect of the cryptonymic citational network he creates, then the form of *Marienbad* (or perhaps, following Cohen, "*Marienbad*") can be seen in part an attempt to map out a similarly cryptonymous system of references within a much smaller spatiotemporal zone. Whereas Bordwell reads the film as an authorial exercise in formal patterning, reimagining the film in the context of

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[97] Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 278. Interestingly, Cohen also makes a similarly ascetic move away from the purely ludic ("I first approached the question of writing systems in the spirit of an interesting puzzle"), and toward a more serious by way of destructive reading of Hitchcock as harbinger of the death of the epistemic regime of occularcentrism.

[98] Jean-Louis Leutrat, *Marienbad*, 8, 53.

the Hitchcock's citational system reveals it to be the opposite: a network of formal patterns designed for the viewer's cognitive exercise. Viewed in this way, *Marienbad* takes on the form of a zero-sum game pitting narrative against play. The more the spectator recognizes the film's traps of continuity and repetition, the greater the sense of ironic pleasure he or she enjoys (or at least, as with Hitchcock, the pleasure of self-satisfaction at one's own feelings of mastery), yet this ludic entertainment comes directly and proportionally at the expense of immersive narrative engagement, which itself is characterized by confusion and anxiety, since the plot as such never comes together. The viewer does more than bear witness to the film's internal network of autocitational topoi; he or she traverses it as the playing field on which the film-game operates. The tension between the possibility of and desire for narrative and its breakdown into constituent formal fragments is inscribed through the process of spectatorship, causing the spectator to protect him or herself from frustration by adopting a distanced, ironic attitude toward the film and its images.

This tension between the process of (attempted) narrative comprehension and self-aware play also reflects Caillois' spectrographic distinction between the free-form make-believe of *paidia* and the agonistically structured *ludus*, but does so in a way that curiously reverses the typical relationship these playful aspects have to narrative comprehension and interpretation. If *paidia* is typically associated with free-form play and diegetic immersion and *ludus* with cognitively active problem-solving, then *Marienbad*'s reversal is to make diegetic immersion extremely ludic and challenging, while constructive interpretation, which is typically a fairly logic and rule-governed practice involving skill, ingenuity, and discipline (of argumentative consistency,

perhaps), becomes a more free-form, associative, and paidiac practice. Perhaps this in part explains why the film is able to encourage such broad-ranging critical interpretations—the spectator's path of cognitive least resistance is to apply associative reasoning and fill the logical gaps, rather than maintain the more strenuous activity of identifying those gaps, and avoiding them as traps.

The film's promotional discourse reflects an understanding of the spectator's considerable activity in engaging with the film, although somewhat different terms than those presented above. Nevertheless, the film's marketing and reception recognize the novel experiential aspects of the film. The challenge, as well as the openness, of narrative comprehension is proposed explicitly by the film's theatrical trailer, which asks the viewer:

> Who's right? Who's lying?... What really happened 'last year'? You, the viewer, must answer these questions. Watch carefully. An object… a gesture… a décor… an attitude—the most insignificant detail. For the first time, you will be the coauthor of a film. From these images you will shape the story based on your sensibilities, your personality, your mood, your own past…. You'll be given all the information. You must draw your own conclusions.[99]

A superimposed title even invites the audience to "Come play the real truth game." To some extent, the trailer functions to sell an experimental and unusual film to audiences by appealing to the attraction of novelty and gimmick ("Come enjoy this NEW sensation… BETTER than 3-D MOVIES… BETTER than WIDE-SCREEN"), promising the spectator an entirely new kind of interactive moviegoing experience, to the extent of offering co-authorship of the film's story to the viewer, even as it ambiguates the difference between creating a story and interpreting one and glosses the fact that the film

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[99] *Last Year at Marienbad*. DVD. Directed by Alain Resnais and Alain Robbe-Grillet (1960; New York, NY, Criterion, 2009).

makes any extraction of a coherent narrative impossible.[100] Despite this almost cruelly misleading trailer, the film seems to have done impressively well at the box office given its difficulty, running at the Carnegie Hall Cinema in New York for thirty-two weeks and grossing over $250,000.[101] Richard Neupert argues that in fact part of the film's strong box office showing came from viewers who saw the film multiple times in order to sort out the film's plot,[102] suggesting that for at least some viewers, the experience of attempting to solve the film was an experience worth paying for.

While one can only feel sympathy for unsuspecting consumers who were lured into *Last Year at Marienbad* on the strength of the promise of greater immersion than 3-D, the film's marketing campaign and theatrical replay value does seem to reflect the opinion of *Cahiers* critic André S. Labarthe, who begins his review of the film by claiming that "*Marienbad* is the last of the great neo-realist films."[103] Labarthe argues that in *Marienbad*, the neo-realist practice of presenting a narrative as a series of fragments and gaps is taken to an extreme and unprecedented degree. He writes that "Resnias and Robbe-Grillet have put together some documentary records, pilot images so to speak, leaving it to the spectator to convert them into a fiction which gives them meaning."[104] In a closing rhetorical volley that strangely echoes the film's trailer,

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[100] *Marienbad*'s marketing as an interactive experience also recalls the direct-address of Robert Montgomery's *Lady in the Lake* (1947) which, in a similarly gimmicky fashion exhorts the viewer to take the place of detective Philip Marlowe both optically and cognitively (the film is shot entirely from Marlowe's optical point of view), explicitly encouraging the viewer to attempt to solve the film's mystery by examining the evidence and seeing what Marlowe sees. *Marienbad* is not the first, but only perhaps the most aggressive and relentless in a lineage of films which employ rigorous formal means (and rigorous marketing) to make the process of narrative comprehension both challenging and expressly ludic.
[101] "Pictures: New York Sound Track," *Variety* 228:9 (October 24, 1962):14.
[102] Richard Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave, Second Edition*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 318.
[103] André S. Labarthe, "Marienbad Year Zero," *Cahiers du Cinema* 123 (September 1961), trans. Diana Matias, reprinted in *Cahiers du Cinéma: 1960-1968: New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood*, ed. Jim Hillier, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1986), 54.
[104] *Ibid.*, 55.

Labarthe states that "[t]he work of the film-maker is no longer to tell a story, but simply to make a film in which the spectator will discover a story. The true successor of the traditional film-maker is not Resnais or Robbe-Grillet, but the spectator of *Marienbad*."[105] Neupert rightly finds the attempt to read *Marienbad* as a realist film in the Italian tradition unconvincing,[106] but Labarthe's polemical review does hit upon not only *Marienbad*'s ludic aspect, but the playfulness of film spectatorship in general, since the spectator's activity of using images as a pilot from which to construct a story is essentially a reductive account of Bordwell's constructivist theory. While it is certainly somewhat dubious to claim that *Marienbad* brings the spectator into a more closely phenomenological relationship with lived experience when it comes to narrative interpretation, the fact that when the spectator engages playfully with the film, is actively engaged in trap-avoidance and spatial puzzle-solving, that play is *real*, in the sense that the spectator is really playing with the film as much as X is really playing nim with M (or would be, if they really existed).

Neupert, though dismissive of Labarthe's argument overall, does however agree that the film's discontinuity editing strategies and shifting, unreliable mise-en-scène function to render "every element of the diegesis [as] merely a temporary or potential item of the storytelling."[107] This view reflects both Labarthe's and the promotional discourse's attitude that the film itself is not so much a narrative presented to the audience, but rather a set of pieces of potential narrative information, which the audience may mentally configure into a more or less coherent story. In this respect, *Marienbad* also parallels contemporaneous developments in French experimental literature,

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[105] *Ibid.*, 57.
[106] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 319.
[107] *Ibid.*, 315.

particularly the Oulipo group's nominal interest in "potential" literature and explorations of combinatory and algorithmic strategies of text construction. Raymond Quenau, who had worked with Resnais previously in writing the narration that accompanies the latter's short industrial documentary *The Song of Styrene* (1958), published his groundbreaking experimental work *"1000,000,000,000,000 Poems*" in the same year of *Marienbad*'s release, 1961. Queneau's work consists of ten sonnets of identical syntax, meter, and rhyme, the lines of which the reader is encouraged to cut up and reassemble, thereby creating a new, but still stylistically correct, sonnet.[108] Although *Marienbad* is not configurable in any literal sense, the marketing, reception, and critical interpretation of the film as a sort of potential narrative and as a new kind of film in which the viewer takes on a greater responsibility in piecing together the story, in part by selecting some pieces of information as reliable and 'truthful' and others as 'lies,' invites an experimental form of spectatorship that, while relying on more traditional procedures of hypothesis construction and inference, redirects those processes for explicitly constructive and configurative ends as opposed to deductive ones.

This explanation of the film's formal structure as an attempt to construct a potential narrative, and the accompanying shift in emphasis from narrative product to narrative process, both raises the question of, and answers, the question of Hitchcock's cameo in the film. Despite the film's systematic disruption of classical patterns of narrative construction via discontinuity and perplexing repetition, the presence of a floating cutout of Alfred Hitchcock in profile, seen at the 0:11:46 mark and incidentally occurring right in-between the first play of eyeline mismatches and the first long take, is

[108] Raymond Queneau, "*100,000,000,000,000 Poems*," trans. Stanley Chapman, reprinted in *The New Media Reader*, ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 147-169.

by far the most diegetically disrupting element in the entire film. While the other elements of the film may suggest only temporary, contingent, and contradictory diegesis, the floating, circa-1960 Hitchcock exists utterly outside the possibility of any diegesis, effecting total rupture of even the tenuous hold on diegetic certainty the film has affected up until that point. Leutrat identifies the cameo with the film's relation to the detective narrative, a sentiment also echoed by Mark Polizzotti in his essay accompanying the film's Criterion DVD release.[109] Yet relegating the image of Hitchcock to the novelty of auteur and genre citation downplays the importance of the cameo. In Hitchcock's films, his cameos in part provide an entry-point into his ouvre's ludic subtext, functioning to signal the game of hidden pictures in wholly obvious terms. Resnais' Hitchcock cameo reflects an understanding of the significance of the Hitchcock cameo in terms of its ludic function, as an explicit invitation to play and as an indication that narrative comprehension via coherent diegesis is irretrievably foregone, play being substituted for it. Moreover, in the same way that the Hitchcock cameo encourages the spectator to pay closer attention to the film's details by suggesting the possibility of other secrets, the Hitchcock cameo in *Marienbad* encourages the kind of attention to detail that enables the viewer to perceive the film's subtle parametric touches (e.g. the transposition of mirrors into paintings and the mid-sequence changes in costume). In short, Hitchcock's cameo in *Marienbad* functions much the same way that it functions in Hitchcock's own films, but to a substantially greater degree since it occurs in a film that is not Hitchcock's.

The cameo is not the only appropriation that *Marienbad* makes of Hitchcock. Although the film's connection to *Vertigo* is obvious—they are both films that deal with

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[109] Leutrat, *Marienbad*, 28. Mark Polizzotti, "Which Year at Where?," booklet accompanying *Last Year at Marienbad*, DVD, Criterion, 13.

obsession, identity, and trauma[110]—it is perhaps most closely related formally to *Rope* (1948). *Rope*'s formal strategy—and playful gimmick—of using mostly very long takes and concealing the edits between those takes via zooms in and out anticipates *Marienbad*'s game structure of asking the spectator to recognize its own spatiotemporal discontinuities. The dialogue on *Rope* similarly seems to sometimes take an ironic posture towards the action, as when the housekeeper Mrs. Wilson inquires to James Stewart's character: "Two desserts Mr. Cadell?," thereby pointing up the fact that the desserts Stewart is holding in one shot are most definitely not the same as the ones he had been carrying moments earlier. *Marienbad* and *Rope* also share the feature of a balustrade that hides the evidence of transgression. In *Marienbad* X climbs behind the balustrade in the garden to avoid being detected by M, while in *Rope* the murdered David's hat, which eventually provides the definitive clue to Rupert that Brandon and Phillip have been lying, is hidden in the closet by the front door, behind the wallpapered balustrade. In a more general architectural sense, the influence of *Rope* is also felt in *Marienbad*'s propensity for framing the depth of adjacent rooms in the hotel, connected by open doors between them. This too recalls *Rope*'s three adjacent rooms, and in particular the dramatic framing that captures all three as Mrs. Wilson walks from the kitchen to the living room in order to clean off the top of the chest containing David's body. Although perhaps not strongly bonded in a thematic sense, *Rope* is clearly a formal and visual influence.

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[110] Donald Skoller, writing for *Film Comment* in 1972, quips that he always wanted to show a triple feature of *Vertigo*, *Marienbad*, and *Wavelength* under the organizational title "Three Masters of Suspense," and also notes that the Hitchcock cameo in *Marienbad* is literally in suspense—hanging several feet off the ground. (Donald Skoller, "Aspects of Cinematic Consciousness," *Film Comment* 8:3 (September-October 1972): p. 42.

In addition to the reframing of *Marienbad*'s relationship to Hitchcock, the shift in emphasis from conventional narrative comprehension to procedure-oriented ludic engagement also entails the recalibration of another well-worn trope of *Marienbad* criticism, the issue of memory, which is inseparable from the concept of the labyrinth. Some commentators have argued that the film's spatiotemporal inscrutability is meant to reflect the frailty and impermanence of memory, both for A, who does not seem to remember anything at all from 'last year,' as well as for X, who cannot seem to properly remember whether his affair with A was consensual or not. The film's construction of space and time are frequently referred to as 'labyrinthine' or maze-like, an observation that was immediately apparent at the film's release.[111] While the analogy to the maze is clearly figurative, the spectator's engagement with the film's systems of discontinuity and repetition really does simulate the sensation of being in a labyrinth by consistently constructing a space and time where frequently repeated events look and feel familiar, yet are subtly different enough to cast into doubt the veracity of any of it. The affective consequence of attempting to stay in *Marienbad* diegetically is the same feeling of displacement anxiety that accompanies being unable to determine one's location in a maze, and also being unable to rely on one's surroundings for any useful clue. Moreover, this sensation is compounded by the combination of subtlety and the film's running time. Perhaps the film's greatest irony, then, is that while X and A seem to be incapable of properly remembering what happened a year ago, the film functions as a pedagogical demonstration of the spectator's inability to properly remember information that he or she has received only an hour previously. Thus, *Marienbad* is as much a literal procedural

[111] "Film Review: Cannes Film Fest Pictures – L'Anee Derniere A Marienbad," *Variety* 222:11 (May 10, 1961): 19.

engine for exposing the limits of memory as it is a story about memory; it is therefore perhaps more accurate to claim that the film's narrative concern with memory is a figurative representation of its actualized spectatorship, rather than the opposite.

In exploring the ludic nature of *Last Year at Marienbad*, I have argued that the film's complex formal system is constituted essentially by two colluding forces: the meticulously premeditated violation of classical continuity norms, and the enticingly suggestive patterns of repetition of narrative information, both of which function constantly to both invite and reject the possibility of substantive narrative relation between them. Not only does the film repeatedly conjure and dismiss these possibilities, but it consistently does so with a heretofore undervalued degree of self-conscious irony, directed both toward the spectator and at itself. The viewer's spectatorial engagement with the film takes on the agonistic form of a game that consists of avoiding the film's narrative traps in the process of trying to stave off unpleasant but inevitable narrative aporia, the reward for doing so successfully being access to the film's ironic subtext, but only at the expense of diegetic immersion.

If a theory of film spectatorship based on play and the cognitive procedures of game-playing is to be posited, one of *Marienbad*'s theory-in-practice contributions is to remind us that part of its ability to captivate comes not from its uniqueness, but from its special self-knowledge that in many ways, it is *not* different from other movies. In citing Hitchcock, it remembers that it is a movie above all else, even as in doing so it posits that the experience of spectatorship is always to a greater or lesser degree an act of play. The film demonstrates that the difference between narrative gaps and narrative traps is only a matter of degree, and also how normative classical viewing procedures, when applied to a

different kind of film object (one that confounds rather than confirms) can be made into a playful if frustrating recreational activity. *Marienbad* is in a sense the apotheosis of obscurantist narrative art-cinema, and yet for Labarthe its power comes from the fact that it is just as much 'any' film the spectator sees in it as it is the paradigmatic modern art film by which every other is inevitably compared. What is ultimately significant about *Marienbad* and its game is that reminds us that at some level all movies are merely collections of essentially unrelated images strung together, that the reconstructed fabula always ultimately belongs to the spectator, that we are always doing more work, and playing more, than we think we are.

Chapter Three: *Playtime*

In many ways, Jacques Tati's *Playtime* belongs not at the end of this study, but at its beginning. The arguments I have made previously about the functions of ludic uncertainty in Hitchcock's films and of the discontinuous construction of space through structures of repetition and difference in *Last Year at Marienbad* become eminently clearer when viewed backwards through the expansive lens of Tati's film. For that matter, the Introduction's argument that film spectatorship is always necessarily a kind of game, one upon which more specific playful activities can be constructed, is perhaps nowhere more strongly illustrated than in *Playtime*. Although the film was not released in France until 1967, and in the United States until 1972, Tati had been working out the film's concept as far back as January 1959. Preproduction lasted from 1962 until 1965, when production began in earnest.[112] Thus, while the film was only completed six years after *Last Year at Marienbad*, its conceptual genesis and pre-production cycle places it in the wake of both *Vertigo* (1958) and *Marienbad* (1961).

Tati's oeuvre has often been discussed within the context of the cinematic legacy of slapstick masters Chaplin, Keaton, and Lloyd, from whom Tati obviously drew much inspiration—Maddock takes this approach in his groundbreaking early study. Tati has, more recently, been examined in the context of the cinematic modernism of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Kristin Thompson, at the conclusion of her book chapter on Tati, claims that his interest in altering the spectator's mode of engagement with his films may place him closer to Godard than to Keaton or Chaplin.[113] John Fawell identifies the critical interest in active, playful spectatorship in Tati's films, argued for by Thompson

[112] Brent Maddock, *The Films of Jacques Tati* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1977), 76-7.
[113] Kristin Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988), 262.

and Lucy Fischer, with this trend toward positioning Tati as a formally and technically engagé modernist.[114] Apart from Thompson's study, which through its emphasis on parametric form situates Tati with Bresson, Ozu, Godard, and other practitioners of this specific formal method,[115] no systematic analysis of Tati's relationship to his cinematic contemporaries has been conducted. Even Thompson's study limits itself to the mere citation of other filmmakers, with the exception of two sentences about Tati and Godard to close out her essay. Many critics indeed seem resigned to leaving Tati largely on his own, treating him as a uniquely idiosyncratic filmmaker whose practice is hermetically sealed from other concurrent cinematic developments. Maddock concludes his study by declaring that "One begins to sense that Tati's vision and style are so much his own that few other works will provide anything even close to what he has to offer."[116] Thompson similarly notes the minimal influence of Tati's "specifically Tatian" stylistic system on other filmmakers.[117]

Although this brief analysis of *Playtime* cannot hope to offer the kind of thorough and systematic analysis of Tati's relationships to his contemporaries that he deserves, it will attempt to illuminate the relationship that Tati in general, and *Playtime* in particular, have with Hitchcock and with *Marienbad*. In doing so I hope to demonstrate how the generative but paranoid excess of Hitchcock's hidden pictures becomes reimagined as an equally generative, but joyful and exuberant excess in *Playtime*. Likewise, I wish to show how *Playtime* recasts the spatiotemporal ambiguity of *Marienbad* in an equally ludic, but far more immediately enjoyable form. Finally, I wish to argue that these inversions serve

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[114] John Fawell, "Sound and Silence, Image and Invisibility in Jacques Tati's *Mon Oncle*," Literature/Film Quarterly 18:4 (October 1990): 221-229.
[115] Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 251.
[116] Maddock, *The Films of Jacques Tati*, 151.
[117] Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 251.

a redemptive function in their revision of postwar cinematic modernism by refiguring counter-cinematic textual strategies explicitly as the site of pleasurable play. Although these trends run to a greater or lesser extent through all of Tati's films, my emphasis on *Playtime* in particular is motivated in part by its chronological position with relation to the Hitchcock and Resnais/Robbe-Grillet films, and also because it is perhaps Tati's most fully realized creative project. Tati insisted on showing *Playtime* last during retrospectives of his work,[118] and considered the film a return to form after the divergence of *Mon Oncle* (1958).[119] As a result, Tati's redemption of modernism should be understood less as a particular reaction to a particular pair of films (i.e. *The Wrong Man* and *Vertigo*), but rather as the culmination of a general attitude in his work that extends at least as far back as *Jour de Fête* (1949).

The thesis that *Playtime* addresses the spectator by instantiating a series of visual games is not a new one. It is most pointedly articulated by Lucy Fischer in her early 1980 article, "*Playtime*: The Comic Film as Game," in which she claims that

> [Tati organizes] the film in such a complex manner that it constitutes a kind of cinematic puzzle or game. Thus, in order to comprehend the intricate narrative of *Playtime*, or to get its subtle jokes, the audience must engage in a series of audio-visual challenges. If it does, it will be highly rewarded, both by the content of Tati's humor, and by the sense of having played the game well. If it does not (as was unfortunately the case with many audiences) it will find itself bored, as bored as the tourists who wander through Paris.[120]

Fischer goes on to argue that *Playtime*'s cinematic game is structured in two ways: one as a hidden picture puzzle that offers a multitude of images for the spectator's perception, the pleasures of identifying such pictures being their own incentive and reward. The other ways the game is structured is through the spectator's "need to remember certain trivial

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[118] Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Tati's Democracy," *Film Comment* 9:3 (May/June 1973): 39.
[119] Michel Chion, *The Films of Jacques Tati* (New York: Guernica, 1997), 12.
[120] Lucy Fischer, "*Playtime*: The Comic Film as Game," *West Virginia University Philological Papers* 26 (August 1980): 85.

details within the narrative and mise-en-scène." The pleasure of this game comes from the later recognition of those elements noticed earlier, such as the German salesman at the trade expo who appears later during the Royal Garden party sequence.[121] Already in Fischer's analysis we can see *Playtime* as a synthesis of the two dominant games in Hitchcock and in *Marienbad*. The hidden pictures in *Playtime* are of precisely the same form as the hidden pictures Miller locates in *Strangers on a Train*, and the spectator's imperative to remember seemingly trivial details of the mise-en-scène in order to recognize them later recalls the game of repetition I have analyzed in *Marienbad*. Fischer also identifies boredom as the consequence of the spectator's failure to play the game well (or at all, if he or she so chooses), paralleling the frustrated boredom that accompanies the failure to master *Marienbad*'s intricate formal structure.

Fischer concludes that "although, through the mimetic powers of cinema, *Playtime* presents us with the illusion of life, what we see is really a highly crafted and synthetic pictorial game."[122] Fischer's assessment of *Playtime* as a "synthetic" experience—both reliant on mimetic representation and also addressing the spectator in a way that reaches beyond it by inviting the spectator to read the image as a rebus—anticipates Cohen's reading of Hitchcock films as sites of anti-mimetic inscription on the image itself. Fischer's "synthetic" spectator experience strikes a balance between mimesis and picture puzzles that allows for both, and explains how *Playtime*, like the many optical illusion gags it contains, can seem to be at once an ostensibly narrative film and an entirely different kind of spectator experience. *Playtime*'s duality of simultaneously offering both a representational, putatively narrative experience and an a-

[121] *Ibid.,* 86.
[122] *Ibid.*, 88.

mimetic, ludic experience extends the premise of Hitchcock's "secret style" of unannounced picture puzzles. Whereas in Hitchcock the hidden pictures are palimpsestically buried beneath the narrative surface of the film with only the cameo functioning as the immediately and obviously visible tip of the iceberg, in *Playtime* this emphasis is reversed. The film's narrative trajectory becomes suppressed in favor of the film's ludic aspects. The spectator of *Playtime* who watches the film eager to find out why Hulot is meeting with Giffard is just as foolhardy as Miller's hypothetical spectator who pores over the shot of the sewer in *Strangers on a Train* expecting to find something interesting down there.

Perhaps the most obvious similarity between the hidden picture puzzles of Hitchcock's films and *Playtime* is the concept of the hidden director. Hitchcock's cameos anchor his puzzle game; they extend a hand to the viewer by offering a fairly easily recognizable secret image while also suggesting the possibility of other secrets and encouraging the viewer to look for and find them. Although in *Playtime* Tati plays Monsieur Hulot, a diegetic character with whom other characters interact, his introduction (and comical delay thereof) into the film functions in a pedagogical manner similar to the Hitchcock cameo by inviting the viewer to look at the film's represented space more carefully and conscientiously. Maddock notes that Tati's de-emphasis of Hulot as the main character in his films began as early as *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (1953) with that film's absence of Hulot for entire scenes.[123] With *Playtime*, Hulot becomes a character with no more central importance than any of the other characters. The opening airport sequence of *Playtime* relies on the audience's presumed desire to see Hulot, the putative star and selling point of the film, and the antics he becomes involved

[123] Maddock, *The Films of Jacques Tati*, 55.

in. Hulot himself does not appear in the film's first ten minutes, but Tati inserts a series of false Hulots—men costumed with coat, hat, too-short pants, and umbrella like Hulot, who also tend to lean forward and walk like Hulot—into the film.

At least three false Hulots appear before the real one: the first walks into the frame at the airport and is recognized by a woman sitting at the bar, although he does not recognize her in return. Hitchcock in fact echoes this gag with his own cameo in *Topaz* (1969), which also takes place at a busy airport. Hitchcock—in a wheelchair—is wheeled to meet an acquaintance on the right side of the frame. After their handshake and disappearance offscreen right, the film cuts to a shot of Michele and Francois looking to the right and recognizing Andre, who has just arrived. The edit functions comically to suggest that Michele and Francois have actually recognized Hitchcock (and in doing so patronizes the spectator for feeling self-satisfied at noticing the cameo), although this recognition, like that of the first false Hulot, is in fact only a misrecognition. The second false Hulot gag occurs roughly a minute later, when the same Hulot doppelganger (by now we can tell by his blue briefcase), walks into the middle-ground of the frame and loudly drops his umbrella. If the spectator managed to miss the first false Hulot, the crack of his umbrella hitting the floor makes this one difficult to miss. Finally, at the end of the airport sequence, this false Hulot is approached by the woman from the airport lobby. She not only recognizes him, but recognizes him *as Hulot*, to which the man replies, with British accent, that she is mistaken. It is only at this moment after having recognized a Hulot-like figure at least once, and possibly twice, that the audience learns for sure that they have been after the wrong man the entire time. The false Hulot gag functions much like Hitchcock's cameo does in that it provides a small visual pleasure which in this

sequence is accompanied, like the *Topaz* cameo (and like the multiple *Strangers on a Train* cameos) with a bit of audience patronizing on the director's part. The gag also trains the audience to be a more scrupulous observer of the densely packed frame; it encourages the spectator's active frame-scanning and emphasizes the point of visual incongruity—that things are not always as they seem—which will serve as a basis for much of the rest of the film's visual and aural humor, including a number of false Hulots that appear later in the film.

As noted above, one seemingly major difference between Hulot and Hitchcock is that while the former is a character, the latter occupies an ontologically unstable position as paradoxically both the iconic director and an inconsequential nobody within the film's diegesis. Although the case is more clear-cut and more theoretically engaging in Hitchcock, several commentators have perceived a similar sort of instability for Hulot. Maddock describes "two coexistent universes: Hulot's and that of the rest of the world. No one is able to share his universe with him."[124] André Bazin writes of Hulot thusly: "The hero in the Commedia dell'arte represents a comic essence; his function is clear and always identical to himself. On the contrary, the main characteristic of Monsieur Hulot seems to be not to dare to wholly exist. He is a mobile inclination, a discretion of being. He raises shyness to the height of an ontological principle!"[125] To this Chion adds that the misrecognition of Hulot by Giffard, the woman at the airport, and others renders him as a kind of "ghost-image" not unlike the mirrored reflection that Giffard at one point chases after.[126] This image of Hulot, established by Bazin and echoed by Chion, constructs the

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[124] *Ibid*, 44.
[125] André Bazin, "M. Hulot et le Temps," in *Qu'est le Cinema* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1975), 43, quoted in Chion, *The Films of Jacques Tati*, 48.
[126] Chion, *The Films of Jacques Tati*, 47.

character as a liminal figure, diegetically unstable in his tenuous relationship to the world around him. In *Playtime* Tati performs the magic trick of making Hulot seem to disappear from his own diegetic world, which is also Tati's disappearance from his own film, by blending into the background and diluting his image visually—and his comic essence metaphysically—into the other characters in the film. Chion later describes Tati's characters of the postman in *Jour de Fête* and monsieur Hulot as "links, bridges, and vectors of messages," claiming ultimately that Tati's films are about "desires at communication."[127] By conceiving of Hulot himself as a medium for the communication humor and the transfer of joy (and, to be fair, a bit of disaster as well) in an almost McLuhanesque sense of the word, Chion parallels Cohen's view of 'Hitchcock' as a de-auratic, anti-mimetic, 'spectral' process of inscription on the film image itself. Tati's effacement of Hulot from his own films may be read as performing a similar resistance to mimesis, although as I have argued previously this resistance should be understood not as an aggressively anti-mimetic impulse, as Cohen contends, but rather as an a-mimetic, disinterested consequence of the filmmaker's desire to establish a site for play.

Tati himself phrases the effacement of Hulot in *Playtime* this way:

> There's no star, no one is important, everybody is; you are as important as I can be. It's a democracy of gags…. The images are designed so that after you see the picture two or three times, it's no longer my film, it starts to be your film. You recognize the people, you know them, and you don't even know who directed the picture. It's not a film you sign like Fellini's *Roma*. *Playtime* is nobody.[128]

Here Tati, echoing both Labarthe and the marketing discourse of *Last Year at Marienbad*, phrases his intent in minimizing the centrality of Hulot explicitly in terms of democratic equality, both for the characters in the film and with respect to the relationship between

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[127] *Ibid*, 143, 145.
[128] Rosenbaum, "Tati's Democracy," 39.

the director and the audience. In *Playtime* the effacement of Hulot gives all of the films' characters an equal opportunity to be funny, and gives then all a more or less equal chance of being the spectator's object of attention. Chion describes this democratic effacement in terms of a transfer of humor from Hulot to everyone else in *Playtime*.[129] We may well read this metaphysical transfer as a joyful inversion of the transfer of guilt that is central to Rohmer and Chabrol's study of Hitchcock. Whereas in Hitchcock such transfer has the paranoid function of making someone as innocent as Henry Fonda in *The Wrong Man* into a potential criminal with a guilty conscience, in *Playtime* the transfer of humor allows any of the characters to possess the comic innocence and grace of Hulot.

At the level of spectatorship, Tati attempts to efface himself as the film's auteur by suggesting a transfer of ownership from himself to the audience. This transfer is a function of the film's formal construction, which tends to offer multiple simultaneous areas of relatively equal interest packed into its dense frames.[130] Maddock echoes Tati in claiming that the film's democratizing cinematography and mise-en- scène, as well as the preponderance of false Hulots, "gives the audience the opportunity to construct its own film; to follow whichever character it chooses; to decide just who the film's star should be."[131] In the sense that the film often refuses to emphasize or even mark narratively significant information (to the extent that there is any at all), leaving such determinations up to the spectator even to the point of comic ambivalence about which character is supposed to be Hulot, *Playtime* offers the viewer a great degree of latitude in 'selecting' the film's important content by deciding which information to attend to perceptually. Tati

[129] Chion, *The Films of Jacques Tati*, 40.
[130] For a more comprehensive account of the film's formal construction, see Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 252-7.
[131] Maddock, *The Films of Jacques Tati*, 84.

is, of course, still the principal author of the film. Tati and Maddock's claim that the spectator becomes co-author of the film is perhaps inaccurate, since the content and order of images is still entirely up to Tati. It is more accurate to claim that the structure of Tati's film allows the spectator a remarkable degree of latitude in deciding what is important in *Playtime* both in terms of narrative and in terms of comic gags. Thompson argues, following Tati himself, that the film is too dense for a viewer to notice everything in the film on a first or even repeated viewing, and that spectators often tend to notice different things about the film.[132] Instead of offering the audience co-authorship of itself as a film, *Playtime*'s structure enables spectators to construct substantively different comic fabulas out of the same syuzhet material. Through his authorial self-effacement, Tati shifts his creative role from narrative auteur to architect of a play experience. This shift is not limited only to the matter of the spectator's experience of narrative within a fictional diegesis, but as Fischer argues, also refigures the experience of cinema as a synthetic, a-mimetic one in which the spectator's comprehension of represented space is transformed into a pictorial game, the playing of which becomes the spectator's responsibility.

The difference between Tati's games and Hitchcock's lies in the direction to which their ludic material excesses tend. In Hitchcock, the presence of cameos, rebuses, and other puzzle pictures is generative in that the spectator becomes uncertain about whether the visual puns are intentionally meant or not. This results in a paranoid apophany that contaminates the ludic pleasure of the puzzle game with a tinge of anxiety. In *Playtime* excess performs an equal and opposite function. Thompson notes that the film's neutral, 'democratic' form entails a spectatorial difficulty in determining what is

[132] Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 254. Rosenbaum, "Tati's Democracy," 36.

supposed to be funny and what is not. As a result, "everything begins to look strange and funny."[133] Although the picture-puzzle form is quite similar, the function of visual excess in *Playtime* is diametrically opposite that in Hitchcock's films, and as a result generates a purely pleasurable ludic experience rather than a conflicted one. In a sense, the respective generic contexts of *Playtime* as comedy, and of films like *The Wrong Man* or *Vertigo* as suspense film, function to frame affectively the kinds of playful experiences the audience has with the film by establishing and assuming to fulfill viewer expectations about the nature of the content purveyed.[134] The relationship between games and narrative in these films is mutual; they inform and contextualize each other.

The idea that *Playtime* offers a kind of co-authorship with its audience also reflects André Labarthe's *Cahiers* review of *Last Year at Marienbad*, in which he declares that the film's refusal to endorse any of its depicted events as either definitely true or false allows the spectator to make those determinations and thereby construct his or her own (relatively) unique story out of the film's complex plot. What is most intriguing about these parallel propositions is that *Playtime* and *Marienbad* seem to be such extreme formal opposites. The former is shot tableau style; it consists mostly of long takes, medium or long shots with little camera movement, in strict chronological order and without large gaps in depicted time. By contrast, the latter systematically employs mobile tracking shots and refuses to distinguish represented time from recounted time at

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[133] *Ibid*, 259.

[134] It is perhaps in part for this reason that Hitchcock's attitude towards *Psycho* (1960) as an ironic, tongue-in-cheek film may initially seem strange to viewers who have only seen the film once or twice (On Hitchcock's attitude toward the tone of *Psycho* see for instance François Truffaut. *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 200.) In the same way that the narratively insignificant bits of dialogue in *Marienbad* seem to mock the viewer and the principal characters, there is not a little comic irony in the fact that nearly all of Arbogast's hypotheses about Marion, as well as the Deputy Sherriff's guess that Arbogast met up with Marion and that they have both left, turn about to be accurate if the viewer knows how to read them correctly.

all. *Playtime* offers very little in the way of substantive narrative action and encourages the audience to therefore look elsewhere in the film for entertainment, while *Marienbad*'s narrative is as densely packed with information as the mise-en-scène of *Playtime*'s Royal Garden sequence and as difficult to disentangle.

Although in some respects *Playtime* and *Marienbad* are formal opposites, the two films also have much in common both in terms of their formal strategies and the functions of those strategies. In particular, the editing patterns, mise-en-scène, and sound design of the films are worth examining in detail to illustrate how the two films' formal strategies converge and diverge, and how the effects of those formal choices come to bear especially on the films' construction of diegetic space. Both films construct spatial relations as ambiguous in a way that encourages the spectator to adopt a playful posture, but the consequences of this ambiguity for the films in terms of the intended affective response is somewhat different.

Tati's editing strategy is remarked upon very little, and when it is discussed it is often only to contrast the film's other, more important formal devices. Maddock describes Tati's editing as "anticlimactic," claiming that Tati displays little concern for anything beyond "functional" cutting.[135] Thompson similarly notes that the editing pattern in *Playtime* generally consists of cutting "illegible" shots together in order to foreground the film's other parametric practices.[136] In a sense, each of these assessments is both true and false. Tati's editing is largely functional; it does sometimes consist of illegible spaces cut together to encourage the spectator to pay attention to other aspects of the image. Indeed, the strategy of editing discontinuous spaces together reflects the

[135] Maddock, *The Films of Jacques Tati*, 144.
[136] Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 252-3.

discontinuity editing of *Marienbad*, but this comparison is only superficial. What has seemingly gone unnoticed is how often Tati employs match on action cuts, and how the function of such cuts is altered by the film's large frame and dense mise-en-scène. Typically, the match on action functions to suggest spatial and temporal continuity by editing in the middle of an onscreen action in a way that minimizes the spatiotemporal disruption of the cut for the viewer. The action that structures the edit is also ideally the central focus of both shots, so as to ensure that the viewer pays attention to the continuity of the edit rather than the disruption. Tati also uses this strategy, but his often-cluttered and deeply staged 70mm frame frequently refuses to cue any particular action as the focus of either shot. The result is that Tati's match cuts do suggest continuity, but this continuity has to be sought out and identified by the spectator; if the spectator is not attending to the appropriate action when the cut occurs the action will seem to be discontinuous and illegible.

Spatial continuity therefore becomes another kind of gag game, which the viewer may or may not notice. Intriguingly, this would imply that different spectators might have different experiences of the stability or instability of space in the film. In this respect, in the way the film makes the perception of continuity and discontinuity into a challenge for the spectator, the film's editing takes after *Marienbad. Playtime* uses matches on action as a continuity editing device, but uses them in a way that suppresses their ability to suggest continuity. This practice inverts the strategy of *Marienbad*, which uses discontinuity editing practices, but uses them in a way that encourages the spectator to perceive continuity where none actually exists. Although *Marienbad*'s discontinuity editing is considerably more systematic and central to the film's project than editing in

Playtime is, and although the actual formal editing devices of the films are opposites, both films use editing to make the perception of continuity into a game that produces different outcomes.

If editing in *Playtime* uses an opposite form in order to achieve the same effect as editing in *Marienbad*, the mise-en-scène of the two films parallel each other both formally and functionally. Fischer cites the re-emergence of the German expo salesman and the Greek trashcan during the Royal Garden sequence as examples of the game of the spectator's having to remember seemingly trivial aspects of the mise-en-scène in order to receive a comedic payoff later in the film. This game, which she likens to 'spot the differences' children's picture puzzles, generates additional pleasure for the player who excels at it and confusion for the viewer who does not. *Playtime*'s organization of objects in the frame into a challenging game of identifying repetitions, as with the German salesman, and differences, as with the trashcan which appears during the Royal Garden sequence in one shot but disappears when the space is shown later, directly echoes the strategies of spatial repetition and difference in *Marienbad*. The similarity between the tourists' hotel and the airport, suggested when the group takes the hotel's escalator down to the door and accompanied by a nearly identical intercom announcement, similarly reflects the ambiguously different salons and gardens of the hotel in *Marienbad*. Just as paying close attention to subtle shifts and changes in spatial representation in *Marienbad* yields senses of spectatorial mastery and pleasurable irony, close attention to such shifts in *Playtime* enhances the pleasurable experience of the film's gags.

For example, the "Slam your Doors in Golden Silence" gag sequence at the trade expo relies on the spectator's careful observation of the sequence's mise-en-scène and

reveals multiple layers of comedic repetition and reversal. At the most superficial level, the gag is funny because the false Hulot has rummaged through the papers in the salesman's desk, which causes the salesman's boss to invite the real Hulot to sit at the desk, whereupon he yells at Hulot before storming out. This aspect of the gag relies primarily on the spectator's capacity to recognize the false Hulot as different from the real one. Careful observation, however, reveals another layer to the gag: earlier in the sequence, before the false Hulot begins perusing the salesman's papers, he can be seen at the exhibit immediately behind the "Slam Your Doors in Golden Silence" setup. At that exhibit, a different salesman invites the false Hulot to sit down and examine a desk's attached filing cabinet. Afterward, when the false Hulot is thumbing through the German salesman's papers, it is evidently because the false Hulot has mistaken the "Doors" exhibit for the desk exhibit. The fact that the false Hulot is really not malicious in intent, only mistaken about the exhibit, adds an additional layer of nuance to the gag that can only be gleaned by paying attention to the seemingly insignificant background of the scene. As if this were not sufficient, Tati adds yet another level of humor to the gag when the German salesman invites Hulot into his exhibit to yell at him. Chion writes that this joke in which the salesman must invite Hulot in first in order to be able to kick him out is the heart of the gag,[137] but there is even more: by inviting Hulot to step into the exhibit, to sit down and examine the filing cabinet, the German salesman is transforming himself and his exhibit into the desk exhibit, the existence of which the salesman is completely unaware. If the false Hulot has confused the "Doors" exhibit for the desk exhibit, the real Hulot is encouraged to do exactly the same thing, which results in a further confusion about which exhibit the salesman is supposed to be running as he switches back and forth

[137] Chion, *The Films of Jacques Tati*, 52.

between pretending to be selling desks and doors. Ultimately he abdicates the role of salesman by storming out of his own exhibit and slamming the door, but this demonstration of the product he is supposedly selling—even as he is trying to demonstrate his refusal to sell anything anymore—humorously prevents him from properly expressing his indignation or from truly escaping the frustration of his job.

The depth and complexity of this gag relies on the spectator's ability to perceive and keep in mind information about the desk exhibit, which is framed in the background throughout the gag and draws very little attention to itself. The gag relies on a confusion between two different but visually almost identical spaces and the appropriate actions of the salesmen and customers in those two spaces. If in *Marienbad* discerning the ambiguity between adjacent or identical spaces is structured as a challenge, the reward for rising to meet that challenge is at best a sense of self-satisfied comic irony that allows the spectator to appreciate the film's discourse on memory from a more distanced, wry perspective. In *Playtime*, the same spatial challenge of recognizing differences and similarities between spaces pays an outright joyous dividend through the film's intricately structured spatial gags. In this case, form and function of spatial construction through mise-en-scène are similar, but *Playtime* encourages the spectator to playfully engage with the film's space primarily by offering incentives for doing so, whereas with *Marienbad* the prospect of failure, and the punishment of real confusion engendered by failure, looms much larger.

As a final formal consideration I wish to discuss the strategy of image-sound discontinuity in *Playtime* in relation to the same formal strategy in *Marienbad*. In the latter film, the discontinuity between image and sound most prominently manifests itself

in the film's use of voiceover narration that renders time ambiguous by blurring the distinction between the past and the present, and also undermines the veracity of depicted and recounted events by frequently combining contradictory visual and aural information—as for instance when X speaks about A's fear of the mirror in her bedroom while the visual track shows A rolling up against the mirror in a kind of ecstasy. *Playtime* also systematically employs striking contrast between image and sound, and in fact sometimes the formal similarities between these two films in terms of sound are remarkably similar. Consider for instance the shot in *Marienbad* where A ascends the hotel's staircase while the striking of her shoes upon the stairs sounds not like marble, but like the gravel from the garden. More conspicuously, the rendering of dialogue in both films as inconsequential snippets of decontextualized small talk parodically literalizes Hitchcock's mocking description of 'pictures of people talking.' In both films dialogue, so integral to exposition in classical narrative, is presented as largely pointless and irrelevant to diegetic action.

As with the film's editing and mise-en-scène, *Playtime*'s sound effects function in the context of the humorous gags and jokes that constitute a large portion of the film. In one of the film's opening gags during the airport sequence sound mismatches function not to disrupt temporal relations as they do in *Marienbad* but to comically disrupt spatial ones. As an example, the shots inside the airport terminal are sonically punctuated by the various sounds of characters walking through the space, and particularly the distinct noises made by the various kinds of shoes worn by the characters. In a room full of characters walking, Tati chooses to foley only one or two pairs of shoes at a time. Since Tati also chose to post-dub all of the film's sound, the spatial positioning of the film's

sound effects is less precise than if they had been recorded on the set.[138] The combination of the 70mm format and the tableau shooting style mean that all sound comes from relatively far away and from a relatively central position. The result is that the viewer must do significant perceptual work in order to match the sound of shoes to the correct pairs of feet. In addition to generating comedy, this sound effect mismatch resists easy assimilation into a coherent sonic spatialization. Identifying what Chion terms the sound's point of audition, the point from which a visualized sound originates, is constructed in *Playtime* as another kind of perceptual puzzle for the spectator.[139]

The challenge of spatialized sound is compounded by the often humorous foley effects Tati uses, which may for instance employ the sounds of suction cups for shoes, or alternately use a sound like a shoe stepping as the sound effect for a maid nearly dropping some towels. As in *Marienbad*, the sound-image relationship in *Playtime* is sometimes flagrantly dishonest, offering sound effects that do not even approach plausibility. Although such sound effects are typically subsumed under the rubric of the generic conventions of comedy, they can be read as effecting a formal strategy of disruption of the stable representation of space in the same way that similar discontinuity functions in *Marienbad* to disrupt the stability of temporal relations. The mismatched and gravelly sound of A's shoes on the stairs in *Marienbad* is exactly the same kind of formal device as the suction-cup sound of *Playtime*'s turbaned air traveler. Just as the discontinuous relationship between images and voiceover in *Marienbad* makes the elements of that film's diegesis only potential items for storytelling,[140] the sound effects, and indeed much

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[138] Rosenbaum, "Tati's Democracy," 39.
[139] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 89-91.
[140] Richard Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, 315.

of the spoken dialogue in *Playtime* function in a sense as only potential sounds, and therefore only potential jokes, until the spectator can perceptually map them onto visually framed points of audition. The film's audiovisual construction of space is, as Fischer argues about the film's visual gags, synthetically constructed in a way that, like *Marienbad*'s narrative construction, bridges the boundary between the spectator's diegetic immersion and extradiegetic awareness and also spans the continuum of jubilant *paidia* and disciplined, concentrationary *ludus*.

While the two films share similar formal approaches to sound, the effects of their sonic discontinuities tend to be interpreted as starkly opposite. *Marienbad*'s refusal of truth through contradictory image-sound juxtapositions is generally read as an anxiety-inducing failure of memory and perhaps even as a result of haunting trauma—possibly A's rape by X. A number of critics, including Emma Wilson and Lynn Higgins, read the film as a narrative about either literal or allegorical trauma and a concomitant failure or willful repression of memory.[141] *Playtime*'s image-sound discontinuities are, by contrast, received as an exuberant display of Tati's *joie de vivre* and his positive, uplifting attitude in the face of ever-increasing technological dehumanization. Wherefore this great disparity? Why is it that quite similar gags in *Playtime*, *Marienbad*, and even Hitchcock are received as strategies of liberatory comic humanism, historico-temporal anxiety, and puzzle play tinged with paranoia, respectively? One obvious answer is that in each of these cases, the relative emphasis on narrative versus a-narrative play is different. Hitchcock's picture puzzles are embedded within a narrative dominant film text, one that predominantly engages with the spectator's desire for narrative information; the playing

[141] See Emma Wilson, *Alain* Resnais, 67-86 and Lynn Higgins, *New Novel, New Wave, New Politics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 83-111.

of games in Hitchcock's films is often an illicit, even fugitive activity.[142] Therefore in order for the viewer to pursue the film's hidden pictures he or she must, in a sense, break the rules of conventional viewing practice and resist comfortable viewing strategies in favor of higher risk ones. In *Marienbad* narrative and play are on more equal footing since the two are so thoroughly mutually implicated. *Marienbad*'s game is its occult syuzhet construction, and as a result there is no privileged, high-yield viewing strategy that the viewer is encouraged to adopt, resulting in an inherently anxious viewing situation. *Playtime* is an uplifting film partly because unlike the previous examples in which perceptual play and puzzle-solving is an illicit textual practice requiring an non-normative form of spectatorship (even as the films may encourage if not condone such an approach), *Playtime* sanctions a playful viewing strategy as appropriate. This attitude can be understood as directly in relation to the classical model narration espoused by Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson. They argue that in classical Hollywood cinema, narrative elements are presented redundantly and obviously so that spectators may follow the plot action with maximal ease.[143] This approach to narration minimizes the spectator's risk of failure by spreading narrative cues out across the entire spectrum of formal parameters. *Playtime* employs a similar redundancy in its depiction of comedy. The film distributes its gags broadly across the spectrum of formal parameters, from editing to image to sound, thereby virtually guaranteeing that no matter what the spectator pay perceptual attention to, he or she will be rewarded with humor. Indeed, the

[142] I borrow the term "fugitive" here from Bordwell, who uses it to describe films that employ parametric narration, suggesting that such films seem to escape easy categorization along common axes of nationality, historical period, or genre (Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film,* 274). I have argued previously that parametric or style-centric narration is integral to the games in all of the cases analyzed in this study, including Hitchcock. Just as parametric films evade legislations of critical taxonomy, visual games in these films evade recuperation into traditional categories of narrative motivation, even as they simultaneously, more literally evade the spectator's perceptual detection.

[143] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 31.

only viewing strategy that would fail to be successful in terms of generating pleasure would be to attempt to carefully follow the film's goal-oriented narrative trajectory.[144]

Playtime is not therefore so much an extension of silent slapstick or and updating of its codes for a more contemporary climate. Rather, *Playtime* presents a fully-fledged alternative to the dominant paradigm of narrative cinema. Thompson is correct to compare Tati not with the silent slapstick masters but with Godard. *Playtime* satisfies nearly all of Peter Wollen's criteria for counter-cinema: 1) narrative intransitivity—through its episodic construction and frequent digressions, 2) estrangement—though its effacement of Hulot as a protagonist and the dispersal of attention across many characters, 3) foregrounding—through the proliferation of visually synthetic picture puzzles that point up the limits of immersive mimesis, 4) multiple diegesis—through the ontological ghostliness of Hulot, as well as through image-sound discontinuity (in explicit comparison to Wollen, "Not only do different characters speak different languages, but different parts of the film do too. Most strikingly, there is a rupture between sound track and images…"), 5) aperture—admittedly less important to Tati, although as I have argued *Playtime* does stand in significant relation to the formal practices of Hitchcock and Resnais/Robbe-Grillet, 6) Unpleasure—through a shift in responsibility for the spectator's pleasure from the narration to the spectator him or herself, through the film's refusal to directly cue many of its gags, and through the fact that this extra spectatorial effort causes the viewing the film to be cognitively tiring,[145] 7)

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[144] While it is true that Hulot's light romance with Barbara, the American tourist, constitutes something of a rewarding side plot, this is notably not the narrative the film purports to tell at the film's beginning. Moreover, the intermittent, sketchy nature of the romance subplot makes recognizing it as such itself into a kind of game for the spectator, since the flirtations between Hulot and Barbara are not cued any more strongly than any of the film's running gage are.

[145] Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 252.

reality—through the use of cut-outs as replacements for background characters, and also through the film's synthetic game structure that encourages the spectator to see the film as simultaneously plausibly mimetic and necessarily artificial (in order for the film's humor to work properly).[146]

Playtime engages with many of the filmmaking practices traditionally identified with postwar modernism, here figured by Wollen's theses on Godard, but does so in a way that refigures these disruptive formal practices. Unlike Godard, and unlike *Last Year at Marienbad*, perhaps the high-water mark of postwar modernism, *Playtime* deploys these strategies of resistance in a way that recuperates them explicitly as a form of play. Tati's pursuit of play, and his approach to filmmaking as the construction of play experiences for the audience, should not be read as a conservative retreat toward childish nostalgia in the face of technological modernization and the ever-increasingly impersonal and inhuman future. Rather, with *Playtime* Tati redeems the experience of modernity and of postwar cinematic modernism by suggesting playfulness as the appropriate response to vicissitudes of the hypermodern future.

[146] Peter Wollen, "Godard and Counter-Cinema: *Vent d'Est*," reprinted in Rosen, *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, 120-129.

Conclusion

This essay began with a theoretical question—how can film spectatorship resemble game playing? This question in turn implied others: In what ways is the viewer's spectatorial problem-solving activity a playful one? To what aesthetic and rhetorical ends can a film engage this play activity, and how have the films examined in this study done so? I have sought to show that there is always a latent potential for play in the practice of spectatorship, and that films can and do engage this playfulness in both aesthetic and rhetorical terms. Indeed, it is apparent that in these playful films it is often quite difficult to disambiguate the aesthetic from the rhetorical. The Hitchcock cameo is at once both an inscription of the director's artistry and a device that encourages the viewer to look at Hitchcock's films differently—to examine them in a way that encourages us to attribute genius to him. The cameo simultaneously indicates both a process of persuasion and the factual evidence of that persuasion's success. Similarly, *Last Year at Marienbad*'s circularity is not limited only to its narration, but extends to its interplay between formal representation and the audience's interface with that form. The film's treatment of memory raises the issue of whether rhetoric precedes aesthetics by inviting the question: which is more essential to the film: the spectator's failure of memory of that of the characters? Both Hitchcock and Resnais/Robbe-Grillet short-circuit the distinction between what is diegetic and what is extradiegetic, thereby making it impossible to wholly separate the experience of fiction from the fiction itself. The "synthetic" experience of watching *Playtime*, as one that requires both a cognitive investment in diegesis and the ability to quickly and frequently see beyond it—to see the

image in more literal, less representative (less mimetic) terms, is also a synthesis of the representational issues raised by Hitchcock and Resnais/Robbe-Grillet.

These films evince a shift in emphasis in the potential of film narration, or at least an increased awareness of the complexity of the relationship between the spectator and the text. Whereas Bordwell's constructivist model of narration posits cognitive problem-solving as a means to achieve narrative comprehension and/or aesthetic satisfaction, the films I have discussed understand narrational problem-solving as an end in its own right. They conceive of the process of spectatorship as itself capable of instantiating a rhetorical aesthetic (or perhaps an aesthetical rhetoric) in which the art of the film—the site of defamiliarization, to return to Shklovsky—is not merely perceptual but intentional and cognitively actionable. That is to say, through the inclusion of the viewer's spectatorial decision-making heuristics (i.e. activities of hypothesis-making and claim testing) as a fundamental and necessary aspect of the art, these films represent a legitimately interactive aesthetic experience between the individual user and the media object.

That this shift in understanding comes during the 1950s and early 1960s (*Playtime*, recall, entered production in 1964) is not coincidental. Indeed, it is bound up historically with both technological and Western cultural transitions during the postwar period, and also indexes these very changes in attitude. Belton argues that the American film industry in the 1950s championed widescreen technology as a way of addressing the American public's demand for a novel, "more participatory kind of motion picture experience."[147] Not only widescreen, but 3-D from 1952-1954 (against which *Marienbad* was compared in its marketing) and Cinerama in 1952 (which *Playtime* references through its large 70mm format and oblique views of Paris as joking nods to Cinerama's

[147] John Belton, *Widescreen Cinema* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 76.

proclivity for travelogue) also emerged as saleable technologies that were marketed explicitly in terms of "audience participation" and active over passive entertainment.[148] Disneyland opened its doors in 1955, and in doing so further marked the transition from passive spectatorship to active engagement with a specifically spatialized, architectural play space. The innovation of widescreen and other large format film processes enabled directors like Hitchcock, Resnais, and Tati to exploit both the filmed image's increased information density as well as the audience's desire for 'interactive entertainment.' Hence, the films in this study appear less as filmed narratives and more as 'motion picture events' in a way that simultaneously recalls the novelty of the attractionistic pre-classical era of film history, and also looks forward to the blockbuster era in which visual spectacle and fan discourse dominate over narrative content.

For what began as a theoretical question then, I have very loosely sketched something of an historical explanation. This study in part serves as evidence that such a transmedial history of this era would be useful in illuminating the contemporary media situation. Yet this historical explanation only reinforces the necessity of theoretical interrogation. The issues raised by these particular films regarding the roles of diegesis, procedural rhetoric and aesthetics, and of narrative content versus narrative construction versus a-narrative play, are also questions close to the core of contemporary debates about videogames and other digital media technologies.[149] Although I have, in a sense, reverse-engineered an approach to film theory by repurposing components of game

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[148] *Ibid.*, 187.

[149] Although the debate seems to have cooled in recent years, the infamous ludology/narratology debate within game studies, largely fought over the extent to which preexisting approaches to narrative media such as those informed by literary and film theory were relevant to the study of video games, has raised the still open question of how to conceive of within the video game context. See (Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Jonas Heide Smith, and Susana Pajares Tosca, *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction (Second Edition)* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 214-216.

studies (and Bogost's work on procedural rhetoric has been particularly useful in this process), my intention has not been to be reductive or academically colonialist (from either the film or games perspective), but rather to demonstrate the generative value of an interdisciplinary approach. The respective objects of study for the disciplines of film and game studies bear some fundamental differences, but they both essentially require a human component to function and solicit from their users similar kinds of strategic cognitive activity in terms of reward and incentive. As I argued in the Introduction, they both also share an essentially playful component, and that fact that both narrative filmmaking and video games are deeply invested in the construction of artificial spaces and temporalities suggests an intimate connection between them that is fertile ground for continued research and investigation.

Moreover, the kinds of analysis conducted in this study could scarcely have been possible without the aid of digital video technology. The rise of American art-house exhibition during the 1950s and early 1960s (eighty theaters in 1950, four hundred and fifty in 1963) enabled audiences to spend more time with films than they could previously (since art houses tended to hold films over longer than other theaters) [150] and allowed them a social atmosphere in which to engage in critical discussion. This trend toward increased temporal access to films (congruent with the increasing information density of the frame) and increasingly social and critical discourse surrounding films is thoroughly amplified by the existence of digital cinematic objects. As Richard Neupert suggests, some of *Last Year at Marienbad*'s sales success was generated by repeat viewers, but the existence of *Marienbad* as a digital file entails both a virtually infinite

[150] Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 2, 110.

capacity for replay on demand as well as the freedom of random access. This digitalization suggests a further shift in the spectator/text relationship, since spectators now have more control than ever over the nature of exhibition. A precise examination of Hitchcock's rebuses and cryptography could scarcely have been possible in 1956, or of *Marienbad*'s discontinuity in 1961, or of the density of Tati's gags in 1968, but such studies appear now partly as a consequence of changes in the nature of the spectator's (and especially the academic spectator's) phenomenological relationship to cinema.

Therefore, the convergence of media forms detailed by Henry Jenkins and referenced at the beginning of this study can be seen not only as a convergence of exhibition technologies and of cultural forms, but also importantly as a convergence of critical practices. As theatrical exhibition of moving image entertainment continues to yield ground to consumption of digital files and streaming video, it is not only the general audience's consumption habits that are subject to change, but the critic's and the researcher's analytical strategies as well. The cross-pollination of traditional cinematic practices with video games and digital interfaces requires that researchers a flexible attitude towards what constitutes the categories of cinema, new media, games, art, and entertainment broadly. As I have attempted to show, even our understanding of these differences historically is not immutable but subject to revision when necessary.

The lessons of *Playtime*—that the future is not always necessarily bound to be alienating and inhumane, but on the contrary contains the potential to be deeply humanizing, and democratically so, are worth carrying forward. Each of the films I have examined in this study, though perhaps *Playtime* does so most purely, demonstrates not only a propensity for play, but also a desire to make the audience an integral part of the

films' aesthetic creation. Even Hitchcock, for all his manipulativeness and control over the audience, still requires its cooperation and willingness to submit to his directorial whims. Finally, what began as a question about the nature of spectatorship can be reframed as a question about the nature of authorship: these films demonstrate the extent to which making meaning out of films—be it narrative comprehension, thematic understanding, or the recognition (which is sometimes also the very generation) of hidden messages—is indeed a thoroughly collaborative process between the audience and the filmmaker, mediated through the screen.

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