

# A Hand for Hitchcock

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**Abstract:** Using the films of Alfred Hitchcock, this essay addresses the concept of “haptic cinema”, Applying a term from art history and perceptual psychology and physiology that refers to the role of the hand in sensing and grasping to film style. The essay argues that while previous discussions of haptic cinema have focused primarily on the sense of touch, that the grasping hand needs to be considered. Drawing on close analysis of sequences from films by Alfred Hitchcock, the essay stresses the complex role the hand plays especially in relation to grasping.

**Keywords:** Alfred Hitchcock; Haptic cinema; Hand: *Psycho*; *Vertigo*

### Hand and Eye

Eyes gaze at us from the films of Alfred Hitchcock: the closeups of a woman’s eye in the credit sequence of *Vertigo* (1958); Norman Bates’s eye peering through his peep-hole into Marion Crane’s motel room in *Psycho* (1960); the eyes in Dali’s décor in the dream sequence of *Spellbound* (1945) sliced by huge scissors; the slowly rotating close-up of Marion’s dead eye soon after her death in the shower; or the hollow eye sockets that stare at us from the corpses of Mrs. Bates as well as Dan Fawcett in *The Birds* (1963).<sup>1</sup> Apparatuses of vision abound as well: the photographic equipment—lenses, camera, viewers, flashbulbs—in *Rear Window* (1954); the huge glasses reflecting Marian’s murder in *Strangers on a Train* (1951); the telescope that views the distant murder in *The Secret Agent* (1936); not to mention the images projected on movie screens in *Rebecca* (1940), *Sabotage* (1936), and *Saboteur* (1942). These images occur in films portraying the seductions and perils of vision. Hitchcock explores vision’s many modes: its ability to penetrate (Norma Bates’ gaze invading Marion’s private space); to receive (the dark pupils into which the camera seems to plunge in the *Vertigo* credits); and to reflect (the dark lens of Miriam’s glasses imaging the moment of her death). But hands abound as well in Hitchcock, opening an aspect of our physical being that offers dynamics of action and sensation just as profound as the seeing eye.<sup>2</sup>

Hitchcock entered filmmaking in the late ‘twenties, the point in film history when filmmakers sought self-consciously to define their

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1 Hitchcock’s use of the eye is described by many critics, with Pomerance 2004, providing a particularly rich discussion.

2 Hands in Hitchcock have already been a topic for a number of critics. As early as 1956 Phillippe Demonsablon’s *Lexique Mythologique pour l’oeuvre de Hitchcock* in “Cahiers du Cinema” 62 included an entry on hands. Walker 2004 (pp. 202-237) includes an insightful section on hands with which I share a number of insights. McElhaney 2006 (pp. 138) discussion of touch in Hitchcock offers a brilliant of hands in Hitchcock. Barton’s essay “Hitchcock’s Hands” (Barton 2002, pp. 159-178) deftly discusses the way hands are gendered.

medium. Throughout his career Hitchcock used a key term from this era to define his film-making, “pure cinema,” indicating the discovery of the nature of film as unique medium.<sup>3</sup> But even pure cinema requires a viewer, and that viewer requires a body. Hitchcock understood both directing and watching a film as an embodied process. In recent decades film theory has turned away from the disembodied concept of spectatorship that characterized apparatus theory to an understanding of film viewing that engages the whole body.<sup>4</sup> Strongly influenced by phenomenology, scholars such as Antonia Lant, Jennifer M. Barker, Vivian Sobchack, and Laura U. Marks undertook pioneering work on this concept of embodied spectatorship and specifically “haptic” cinema, a cinema reflecting the bodily sensation of touch and tactility.<sup>5</sup> Following the path these scholars opened, I will present a somewhat different emphasis in my understanding of the haptic. The haptic does not refer exclusively to the sensation of touch; it engages a broader understanding of the *hand* (and not just its fingertips). Touch explores the surfaces of the world, but the hand also reaches into space and grasps things. It is this aspect of the haptic, acknowledged by previous critics but often underemphasized in relation to film, that I will explore.

Touch, of course, cannot be eliminated from the “haptic.” The term comes from the Greek word *haptikos* sometimes translated as “to touch”, but also as “to grasp.”<sup>6</sup> Its use as a critical term comes primarily from art historian Alois Riegl who used “haptic” to define a change in the way space was portrayed in art, moving from a mode of representation in antiquity based on the contours of objects as felt by the hand to an art that triumphs in the Renaissance that addressed the eye primarily by placing things with a deep container of empty space.<sup>7</sup> Lant was one of the first to apply the term to film. Recent writers on “haptic cinema” have primarily evoked the sensation of touch that is conveyed by films—“the tactile eye” as Jennifer Barker puts it. But, while important, touch addresses only one aspect of the haptic, and does not exhaust the full embodied experience of the world that the hand affords us. As a scientific practice haptics divides the hand between prehensile acts—dealing with gripping and holding—and non-prehensile ones in which fingers perform but do not grasp (from feeling surfaces to tasks like typing).<sup>8</sup> Keeping in

3 A late and clear discussion of pure cinema occurs in a 1963 interview. See, Hitchcock 2015, p. 288.

4 Besides the critics I cite for the discussion of haptic cinema, the work on embodied spectatorship is now voluminous. I will cite the pioneer work of Shaviro 1993 and a more recent book, Shaviro 2016.

5 Lant 1995, pp. 45-73; Barker 2009; Sobchack 2004 and Mark 2002.

6 Jones 2018, p. 1.

7 Reig 1985. Lant offers the best summary of Reigl's use of the term in an art historical context in Lant 1995, pp. 47-51.

8 Wilson 1999, p. 120.

mind this varied terrain of the haptic, I will explore how Hitchcock treats the hand not simply as a source of sense-data but as an active means of interacting with the world.

The hand interacts with the world differently than the eye. As the canny title of Mark Patterson's book, *Senses of Touch: Haptics Affects and Technologies* indicates, the way the hand senses the world is varied.<sup>9</sup> Lynette A. Jones, senior research scientist at MIT, divides the haptic principally into touch and *kinesthesia*, the sensation of movement of body and limbs.<sup>10</sup> Not only is the hand not our *only* organ of touch (in contrast to the uniquely specific role of the eye in vision), touch itself is not really a singular sensation. Patterson includes several areas within touch: *proprioception*, sensing the position of our body in space; *vestibular*, a sense of balance based in our inner ear; *kinaesthesia*, based in our muscles tendons and joints; as well as the *cutaneous* sensation of touch based in the skin.<sup>11</sup> Such an inventory can't be neatly divided into sub-senses, since these aspects interrelate and each possesses its own complexities. Jones notes “even within the skin itself there are four recognized submodalities,” cuing us to touch, temperature, pain, and itch.<sup>12</sup>

Further, our hand does more than simply relay touch. It enables essential aspects of our embodied being in the world. Jones puts this succinctly. “The essential element of haptic and haptic exploration is that there is active movement of the hand, so that the sensory information a person receives does not come just from passive contact but from actively exploring the environment.”<sup>13</sup> This sense of exploration, of grasping and holding, and of moving through space becomes essential for understanding what the hand means in Hitchcock. Laura U. Marks' beautifully defines the tactile dimension of cinema as “touching, not mastering” {p. xii} and sees her task as a critic in terms of “moving along the surface of the object” [xii].<sup>14</sup> While I find this a profound insight into certain possibilities of cinema, I do not think it gets us far in understanding Hitchcock. Jennifer Barker tackles haptic relations beyond the tactile sense in her chapter entitled “Musculature” which deals with the bodily sense of movement. But her concept of the “film's body” moves away from the bodily affects that film can invoke so powerfully.<sup>15</sup> As a viewer I am directly physically affected by the closeup views of grasping

9 Patterson 2007.

10 Jones 2018.

11 Patterson 2007, pp. 3-4.

12 Jones 2018, p. 9.

13 Ibid., p. 5.

14 Marks 2002, p. xii.

15 Barker 2009, p. 69.

and searching hands that Hitchcock presents, recalling how our hands felt in similar moments.

### The Director's Hand

The hand mediates between the bodily and the meaningful: it is never simply a mass of flesh and bone or an organ of physical need, but always forges a relation to our being in the world. Through gesture, it constitutes one of the major modes of expression for the actor articulating its individual digits and performing symbolic motions. In film, a close-up can make the hand the center of a viewer's attention, the pivot of drama. In film history, close-ups of hands played almost as important a role in the development of editing as did facial close-ups. Strong film directors have used hands in distinctive ways, both in terms of actors' performances and the images they construct. Early on Hitchcock recognized that the hand could play a unique role in film style.<sup>16</sup>

In his 1937 essay "Direction" Hitchcock described the unique possibilities of the film medium—"pure cinema"—and stressed the power of editing.

The screen ought to speak its own language, freshly coined, and it can't do that unless it treats an acted scene as a piece of raw material which must be broken up, taken to bits, before it can be woven into an expressive visual pattern.<sup>17</sup>

To explain this, he describes the sequence of the killing of the anarchist Verloc by his wife from his recent film *Sabotage* (1936), perhaps his most ambitious film to that date. As he describes the power of editing, he demonstrates the expressive role of the hand, even preferring it to the face. Mrs. Verloc serves dinner to her husband after she has learned her brother has been killed by one of his bombs.

So, as she serves at the table, you see her unconsciously serving vegetables with the carving knife, as though her hand were keeping hold of' the knife of its own accord. The camera cuts from her hand to her eyes and back to her hand; then back to her eyes, as she suddenly becomes aware of the knife making its error. Then to a normal shot—the man unconcernedly eating; then back to the hand holding the knife. In an older style of acting Sylvia [Sidney] would have had to show the audience what was passing in her mind by exaggerated facial

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<sup>16</sup> My book on the films of Fritz Lang discusses his use of the hand, which makes an interesting comparison to Hitchcock. See Gunning 2000. McElhaney compares Lang and Hitchcock's use of hands in McElhaney 2006, p. 138

<sup>17</sup> Hitchcock 2015, pp. 253-261. (originally published in 1937).

expression. But people today in real life often don't show their feelings in their faces, so the film treatment showed the audience her mind through her hand, through its unconscious grasp on the knife.<sup>18</sup>

Hitchcock's discovery of the language of the cinema went hand in hand with his insight into the expressive human body, moving away from portraying conscious intentions through legible facial expressions into a more shadowy realm, as repressed desires become revealed through unconscious gestures.

Hitchcock used the language of film to reveal the hidden languages of the body. Hands often betray Hitchcock's villains. Not only are his murderers frequently stranglers (Uncle Charlie in *The Shadow of a Doubt* (1943); Brandon and Philip in *Rope* (1948); Bruno in *Strangers on a Train*; Bob Rusk in *Frenzy* (1972)), but unconscious gestures reveal their murderous impulses. Uncle Charlie makes violent gestures with his hands that belie his suave charm and elegant manners. (The way he tears his toast as he has breakfast in bed; the twisting of the napkin as he speaks to niece Charlie in the bar; the convulsive motion of his fingers as he watches her from his window). The hands of Bruno Anthony seem possessed, literally demonic. Like the lobster that emblazons his tie, they resemble large claw-like appendages emerging from the depths of a murderous unconscious. His hands are reflected grossly enlarged in the lens of his victim's glasses as he murders Miriam in the amusement park. Bruno's hands have a will of their own, most obviously when he almost strangles a lady at a Washington party in a sort of trance. In the film's most suspenseful sequence Bruno's hand reaches down into a sewer drain to retrieve Guy's incriminating lighter. This cloacal realm of darkness perfectly suits his evil intention, an image of the subterranean depths from which his impulses come. Bruno's hand ultimately turns against his plot against Guy. The dying Bruno still denies he has Guy's lighter, but his hand betrays his claim, opening as he dies to reveal the exculpatory object and deliver Guy from his sinister influence. His hand seemed to radiate a dark power. Critics have pointed out that the demonic energies of Bruno's hand seem to contaminate the apparently innocent Guy. Hitchcock cuts from Guy's rage at his cheating wife, as he says "I'd like to strangle her" to a close-up of Bruno flexing his hands, ready and willing to fulfill Guy's wish.<sup>19</sup>

The hand frequently serves Hitchcock as an emblem of guilt, literally catching characters "red-handed." Recall the close-up of Norman Bates's blood-stained hands as he cleans up after the murder perpetrated by his "mother," or Philip's bloody hand after he breaks

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

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his stemware when Mrs. Atwood mistakes him for her nephew David whom he has just helped strangle in *Rope*. But the signs of guilt are not restricted to villains. In Hitchcock's underrated exploration of the effect of guilt on the innocent *The Wrong Man* (1956), Hitchcock shows Manny Balestrero's fingers besmirched with ink after his fingerprinting for a robbery he did *not* commit. Close-ups of dirty hands recur frequently in Hitchcock and often carry primal association of shame more than evidence of actual guilt, as characters become marked in a circuit of guilt and shame. Thus the brown make-up that smears Dr. McKenna's hand after the knifing of Louis Bernard in *The Man who Knew Too Much* (1956); or the spot of blood on Melanie Daniels' glove after the gull attacks her in the *Birds* (an attack for which at least one character blames her). These images announce that these characters have become implicated in scenarios of violence they cannot control. Marnie's unconscious guilt is triggered by images of red stains, which Hitchcock turns into a red filter suffusing her visual field at moments of panic, transferring this stain of shame and guilt from hand to eye.

In all these instances the hand reveals hidden impulses and displays shame or guilt in ways that either the conscious mind represses or tries to hide from view. In Hitchcock's first film focused on psychoanalysis, *Spellbound*, Dr. Peterson described the body's role in expressing something the conscious mind denies. John Ballantyne exclaims he feels his hand burning but cannot consciously recall the war incident in which his hand was injured. Dr. Peterson, his lover and analyst, offers the Freudian insight that he is really suffering from memories. Ben Hecht's dialogue succinctly describes the process of repression and displacement: "The memory only touched the body, the mind that feels." The feeling mind here dwells in the hand.

But more than through dialogue, Hitchcock portrays visually the hand's capacity for expressing shame and acting out evil impulses, triggering our own physical participation as viewers. We not only watch these scenes, we *feel* them. The sequence of Bruno's hand searching for the incriminating lighter which he dropped into the sewer drain symbolizes his affinity with darkness and the depths of human evil. But the effect of this sequence lies in Hitchcock's ability to root this gesture in our haptic experience. As we watch Bruno's frustrating attempt to gain a purchase on the lighter's polished metal we feel it in our hand. In spite of our lack of sympathy with Bruno's evil purpose, we feel relieved as his ineffective stroking motion of fingertips on the lighter's surface converts to the hand's firm grasp.

### Give me your hand! / Nothing to Hold

Hitchcock's films can grip us from the very beginning of action as *Vertigo* proves. The film begins in deep darkness. An image fades in, but remains somewhat obscure: a horizontal bar divides the frame in the foreground

as the distance remains a soft focus blur. Abruptly it becomes more defined: a hand grasps the bar with a metallic clang, then another hand reaches up to grasp it as well. The camera pulls back as a man climbs up a rooftop ladder and rushes towards the camera, then dashes off-screen. A uniformed policeman and a plain-clothed detective climb up the ladder and chase after the man. Our location becomes defined: an urban rooftop as behind the figures a cityscape under a twilight sky. The film's first image emerges with the haptic gesture of the grasp, signaling this film is about holding on precariously. Demonsablon listed as one of his categories of hands in Hitchcock, "grasping hands": this gesture play a crucial role Hitchcock's haptic cinema.<sup>20</sup>

The opening chase of *Vertigo* ends with the terrifying plunge of the cop off the roof top, witnessed by detective Scottie McPherson (James Stewart) as he clings desperately to a collapsing gutter. The fall is preceded by one of Hitchcock's most daring visual metaphors, visualizing Scottie's POV of the alleyway below him. As in the famous shots of the mission stairwell later in the film, here the space seems to stretch unnaturally, as if Scottie's view were being pulled downward, yet also resisting that plunge. This visual manipulation beautifully expresses the contradictory impulse of the sensation of vertigo, sometimes described as the conflict between the fear of falling and the desire to jump. It is also a perfect example of haptic cinema that goes beyond touch, evoking the vestibular sensation of loss of balance that provokes the dizziness of vertigo. Hitchcock's dominant editing figure—an off-screen look/POV shot/reaction shot—conveys Scottie's anguish as he remains suspended over this abyss. As Scottie stares into the depth below, an offscreen voice offers salvation: "Give me your hand!" Scottie looks up. We see the police officer holding on to the slanted roof, as he reaches downwards to Scottie. Cut to Scottie staring upward. In the following medium close-up the cop repeats, "give me your hand", his arm outstretched toward the camera, his hand blurred beyond the range of focus, trembling and seeming ungraspable.

Hitchcock presents the cop's fall in nine shots lasting a total of 20 seconds, and ending the first scene of *Vertigo*. Two shots show the drama of the failed hand grasp. The first a beautifully designed process shot in which the cop's arm and hand reach down toward Scottie from the left as Scottie in the middle of the frame clings for dear life and looks up helplessly towards the offered rescue, while the depth stretches below in wide-angle distortion. The next very brief shot shows this hand reaching downward as Scottie's two hands grasp the gutter tightly. The hands do not touch. Then three shots show the cop's fall: a very brief medium long shot of the slanted rooftop as the cop falls past the suspended Scottie and a medium close-up focused on Scottie's face as we glimpse the body

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20 Demonsablon 1959, p. 26. The French phrase is "mains saisissant".

falling behind him and his gaze shifts downward. The third process shot shows the cop's body hurdling through space, growing smaller until it lands on the ground below. The last three shots reprise Hitchcock's look/POV/reaction pattern as Scottie looks below in horror. We see from his aerial POV the small figure of the dead man as others rush to toward it, then a cut to Scottie again in closeup, his eye wide staring downward.

Hands in Hitchcock are more than just a recurring motif.<sup>21</sup> Like eyes, the hand forms a nexus between our bodies and the world. As a director of thrillers, Hitchcock not only portrays bodies in action but creates sequences and situations in which we, as viewers, experience intensely this bond between our embodied self and the dangers and delights the world affords. Hitchcock's popularity as "master of suspense" depends on his ability to almost physically bind audiences to unfolding action. This is the aspect of directing that Hitchcock stressed most often: the necessity to make the audience "participate,"—become immersed in the action. As he explained in "Direction":

The point is to draw the audience right inside the situation instead of leaving them to watch it from outside, from a distance. And you can do this only by breaking the action up into details and cutting from one to the other, so that each detail is forced in turn on the attention of the audience and reveals its psychological meaning. If you played the whole scene straight through, and simply made a photographic record of it with the camera always in one position, you would lose your power over the audience. They would watch the scene without becoming really involved in it, and you would have no means of concentrating their attention on those particular visual details which make them feel what the characters are feeling.<sup>22</sup>

In the opening of *Vertigo*,<sub>1</sub> he constructs Scottie's ordeal so that the viewer doesn't just witness the drama, but empathizes with the physical fear of falling, the strain of trying to maintain a grip and the horror of missing a rescuing grasp. Through an intensely experienced scene like this, Hitchcock's cinema makes us aware of our body's place within the world as well as the cinema. The hand serves as a pivot in this interaction.

The cinema has the ability to make us not only witness, but *experience* what we see through bodily empathy. As we watch bodies move on the screen our own bodies recall the feel, the motion and the postures we watch, making them experiences we share rather than simple depictions. As we watch Scottie's ordeal our bodies recall what it is like to cling against the pull of gravity and to anticipate the grasp of the

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21 Although they are of course also motifs, as Michael Walker's section on hands show, Walker 2004, pp. 202-237 .

22 Hitchcock 2015, pp, 256-57.

offered hand. But this recollection is more than a sensation; it involves the hand's capacity for exploration and movement through space that Jones defined as the unique aspect of the haptic. The hand that searches for Scottie's grasp and his reluctance to take it for fear of losing his tenuous hold underscore the essential difference between haptic sensing and the sensation of vision. As Jones puts it:

Haptic sensing therefore differs from other senses, like vision and audition, in that it is bidirectional: the information we can extract about an object's properties is exquisitely linked to the movements made to perceive those properties. In the act of exploring an object we may even change its properties, such as when we exert too much force on a ripe strawberry and crush it ...<sup>23</sup>

Scottie can see the outstretched hand but cannot take hold of it.

Embodied cinema, including haptic cinema, not only draws on our memories and fantasies of physical actions and encounters, but allows us to explore their possibilities real and imagined. The goal of phenomenal analysis should be to cue us into the manner in which our actions weave the complex nexus between the world and our bodies. In his tantalizingly brief essay on film Maurice Merleau-Ponty claimed:

This is why movies can be so gripping in their presentation of man: they do not give us his *thoughts* as novels have done for so long, but his conduct or behavior. They directly present to us that special way of being in the world, of dealing with things and other people, which we can see in the sign language of gesture and gaze and clearly defines each person we know.<sup>24</sup>

The great phenomenologist refers here, of course, to cinema generally, its ability to capture our physical being and its inherence in the world. If every film possesses this possibility, no filmmaker exceeds Hitchcock's skill in making us feel the force of gesture and gaze, hand and eye.

The failed grasp becomes a motif in Hitchcock. Scottie invokes the trauma of failure powerfully in the second scene of *Vertigo* when he recounts his recurring dream of the policemen's fall and says, "I try to reach out to him, and..." But nowhere does it appear more powerfully than in Marion Crane's death scene in *Psycho*,<sub>1</sub> a moment that for me resolves the frenetic violence of the shower murder into a deep sense of loss. Although few scenes could be more terrifying than the rooftop plunge in *Vertigo*,<sub>1</sub> the emptiness that echoes through this scene in *Psycho* makes it Hitchcock's darkest and perhaps most poignant use of the hand. In *Vertigo*

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23 Jones 2018, p. 7.

24 Merleau-Ponty 1964, p. 58.

Scottie's dilemma lies partly in his inability to reach out to the extended hand. His thwarted instinct to cling relates the complex of hand, arm, and shoulder which form Scottie's lifeline to the primitive hand grip humans inherited from their primate ancestors. Preceding the upright bipedal mode of walking that defines the advent of the human, the hand served to cling and release when swinging from tree limb to tree limb provided the major means of locomotion. As Frank R. Wilson points out in this primal stage "falling was a *normal mode of locomotion*."<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately it is not a mode Scottie can rely on.

In *Psycho* after the shower attack, we see an extreme close-up of Marion's hand, flat against the bathroom wall, her fingers spread wide in contrast to Scottie's fingers gripped tightly on the gutter. Marion's fingers slip down the smooth and slick tiles, her hand splayed uselessly. Here in one of Hitchcock's most tactile shots there is nothing for her to cling to. We feel the wet expanse of this clean and frictionless surface as a lack. As her hand moves downward, her finger curls slowly as if hoping to scratch a hold in the slick, unyielding space. In the following medium shot, in contrast to Scottie's wild-eyed taking-in of his situation, Marion's eyes become progressively blank, unseeing, as life drains from her. After the rapid montage of the murder containing many shots of less than a second, this shot seems agonizingly slow, awaiting the growing stillness of death. The camera follows Marion's slow slide down the wall until she settles at the bottom. She lifts her arm and the camera withdraws a bit. Her hand is nearly silhouetted, backlit against the gleaming white of the shower tiles. Its movement outward seems to respond to the camera's retreat as beseeching it not to abandon her.

As if in deliberate contrast to Scottie, Marion's tragedy does not come from being unable to grasp—which she does in her penultimate act of seizing the shower curtain. Rather, she makes this grab, the most fundamental haptic gesture—but to no avail. There is no human hand offering rescue here, only empty space and inanimate objects. Death seems almost to eat away space in the following extreme close-up, as the image blurs, the right half of the shot dissolving in vagueness. On the left the plastic shower curtain hangs, its opaque translucence rhyming with the blurred space. But the sharp focus of Marion's hand in the foreground, groping for something and touching the curtain, seems almost severed from the mottled mass of her nude body, barely recognizable in the background.

Marion's last living act is to grasp this flimsy curtain in a pain-filled gesture. Her final grip on life brings neither rescue nor comfort. She collapses in the next shots, dying as the curtain, her final means of support, tears from its rungs. Both the silent horror of the Marion's death in *Psycho* and the anguish of the opening of *Vertigo* evoke the power of the

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25 Wilson 1999, p. 78.

hand to grasp. We *feel* as we watch these sequences the urge to hold on to something, to be rescued from the inevitability of death. Scottie as he hangs to the gutter endured both the fear of falling to one's death and the guilt and trauma of survival. Marion dies alone. No human hand reaches to take hers. Her convulsing hand can only contact the inhuman textures of tile, enamel, plastic and the relentless spray of water.

### Monumental Cliffhangers

In *Vertigo* and *Psycho* Hitchcock offers his most powerful and extended images of grasping hands. But the grasp struggling against a fall forms a recurrent motif in his work, almost an obsession. The rooftop fall in *Vertigo* was preceded by the intricate, if less affective, climax of *Saboteur* (1942) The central action of this sequence recalls *Vertigo*: one man reaches out to another clinging desperately as he hangs above a fearsome drop. But beyond the drama of the attempted grasp, the hand takes on emblematic force here due to the location of this struggle: the massive arm and hand of the Statue of Liberty. The rescue is attempted as the characters move precariously upon this giant hand.

Chasing the Nazi saboteur Fry to the upper reaches of the monument, the protagonist Barry Kane confronts him on the outer guardrail of the uplifted torch, causing him to tumble over the edge. In long shot Kane leans over the railing as Fry falls and catches himself on the cleft at the base of the statue's thumb. As Kane dashes to look over the other edge of the railing we get the first shot that watches this drama from an aerial perspective above the statue. An abstract geometry dominates this shot, largely a matte painting of the foreshortened statue and its polyhedral base, with Kane and Fry tiny human figures shoved into the bottom left corner of the frame. Fry twists his dangling legs as Kane precariously descends stepping onto the statue's massive hand, sliding along its crooked index finger. We see a high angle medium close-up of Fry, terrified and trembling, holding onto the all-too-smooth surface of the monumental hand. Hitchcock follows this with a brief close-up of Fry's two hands trembling, his fingers seeking to gain purchase. Kane bends down towards him and we see a close-up of his hand descending toward Fry, and Kane's outstretched fingers almost brushing Fry's hands, which dare not release their grip to take the offered hand. Kane tells Fry, "I'll get your sleeve." A close-up shows Kane's hand touching the back of Fry's hand as he edges down his arm to grasp the cuff of his jacket. Hitchcock intercuts Kane and a closer shot of Fry's sweat-covered face until we get the crucial shot of the sequence.

An extreme close-up reveals the seam of Fry's jacket as it begins to tear. The master of suspense here flaunts his control of space and time, cutting from this crucial detail to a distant long shot framing the statue's extended arm, reducing the characters we care about to tiny figures. This high angle shot frames the titanic arm to which miniscule human

beings cling against the watery surface of New York Harbor. This extreme contrast in scale epitomizes Hitchcock's editing, demonstrating cinema's ability to switch spatial viewpoints radically. Withdrawing at this crucial moment to a distant view not only plays with the audience's immersion in the scene, but expresses his almost sadistic power to toy with our immersion in the scene. It also sardonically replicates the human drama of hand and arm in another dimension of scale, from vulnerable humans to impassive monument. Hitchcock returns to the intimate close-up of the fabric of Fry's jacket as the seam gapes open, exposing his pinstripe shirt through the widening rent in the dark cloth.

The next shot reiterates the contrast in scale with a shot of the statue filmed from a lower angle that shows not only the statue's arm but shoulder and head framed against the sky. Fry and Kane, seeming insignificant and barely visible, struggle for life powerlessly, while the frozen face of the statue stares away from them. We shift to the nearly microscopic level as the fabric continues to tear. The alternation of close-up and distant views continues with yet another angle of the statue filmed from below and canted so that she fills the frame diagonally, her arm seemingly thrusting the torch with its visually insignificant human burden into the upper left corner of the image. These three long shots of the statue intercut with the parting of the seam visually animate this titanic figure. Recalling Eisenstein's lion statues in *Potemkin*, it nearly allegorizes the scene: the vengeful spirit of Liberty awakening to revenge herself on one who threatens her. That this godlike entity uses the tiniest means, the tearing threads, for her act of nemesis aligns its power with that of the director, viewing all this from above and stirring it into motion.

Human scale returns as the tear opens so that the sleeve pulls away from the shoulder the threads snapping barely audibly on the soundtrack. In close-up, Fry, viewed as always from above, glances over at his shoulder as he notices his clothing unraveling and looks up in bewildered terror, pleading, "Quick, the sleeve..." Kane holds tight to the sleeve as Fry's arm slips out of it. In perhaps Hitchcock's most perfectly imaged fall, Fry plunges towards the ground. After a close-up of his grim reaction, we see Kane crouched in the notch of the statue's hand, the now empty sleeve rippling in the breezes until he releases it and it blows away, an emblem of the failed grasp. He climbs up the monster hand to the observation ledge where other hands reach out to him and he is gathered into the embrace of his lover as the film ends.

In later interviews Hitchcock indicated his mistake in placing an unsympathetic villain in danger, limiting audience concern. The opening of *Vertigo* demonstrates the power of having the film's star dangling over the abyss. The unique power of *Saboteur*'s final sequence lies in visualizing both extremes of the inanimate, the pure materiality of the ripping fabric and the allegorical power of the statue. But in *Vertigo* and *Psycho*, the deaths we witness are also humanly painful and deeply felt. Gripping and reaching hands in those two films have a different register than in

*Saboteur*, marking Hitchcock's increased concern with the precariousness of human existence, and with making it more painful to watch.

If the opening of *Vertigo* can be seen as a variation on the closing of *Saboteur*, both these films are referenced and their tones redefined by the ending of *North by Northwest* where the hand-grasp and danger of falling reappear. I believe Hitchcock designed NBNW specifically in response to *Vertigo*, released one year earlier, but its final climax most closely resembles *Saboteur*. Again, the location is an American National Monument composed of gigantic figures, in this case Mt. Rushmore. Hitchcock again plays with scale, as small human figures climb over the titanic faces of American presidents, impassive as dramas of life and death play out upon them. There are many differences between NBNW and the other two films—most crucially here the hand grasp holds and a rescue takes place.

Gender plays a key role in this transformation. The dramas of clinging hands and failed rescues in *Vertigo* and *Saboteur* involved only men. But in NBNW it is Roger Thornhill's inamorata, Eve Kendall, who hangs on the beveled edge of the monument unable to get a foothold, or a sure grip that would allow her to hoist herself up. In fact, Hitchcock's earliest cliffhanger in *Young and Innocent* (1937) had also put lovers in peril, with the hero rescuing his girl as their car falls in a collapsing mine shaft. The closeup of their hands as the hero Robert Tisdall pulls young Erica Burgoyne out of danger anticipates later scenes, but the sequence remains elementary compared to Hitchcock's later elaboration of this situation. A firm hand grasp also prevented a fall in the climax of *To Catch a Thief* (1955), but here the dangling person held in the hero's grip is a thief and her situation is used to force a confession from her. But in *North by Northwest* the grasping hands resolve a romance plot. It comes as the climax to a game of hide and seek as spies pursue Eve and Roger across the faces of the monument, attempting to retrieve a pre-Columbian figure that contains government secrets. Action and conflict dominate the scene, compared to the suspenseful paralyzes of the previous films.

A spy leaps at Roger as the couple come around a rocky corner. After a struggle Roger pushes the villain off the edge of a cliff, his fall shown in the process shot of a body hurtling through space that appears in all three cliff-hanger sequences. The threat eliminated, Roger sees Leonard, the most villainous of the spy-ring, struggling with Eve, wresting the terracotta figure from her and pushing her down. In a plunging longshot Eve hangs desperately to the cliff wall, the moonlit abyss gaping beneath her. Roger reaches downwards towards Eve in long shot. In close-up Eve lifts one trembling hand and Roger strains his hand towards her. The possibility of imminent rescue disappears as a rock ledge gives way beneath Eve's feet in close-up. But in the following close-up Roger grips Eve's wrist before she falls. Roger clings to Eve as she dangles over the cliff's edge. A close-up shows Roger's other hand struggling to maintain its hold on the cliff edge. We return to the high angle shot of the

pair with the depth looming below, as Roger looks upwards. Roger asks Leonard: "Help, help me," and Leonard in the next shot steps forward seemingly in response.

The situation recalls *Saboteur*—enemies drawn to help each other by a dire situation—but quickly reverses it. As the camera lowers, framing Roger's hand on the edge of the cliff Leonard raises his foot and brings it down on his gripping fingers. This may be the most literally painful image of the hand in Hitchcock's films even if its over-the-top quality hardly carries the sense of loss found in *Vertigo* or *Psycho*. A hand-grasp becomes a sadistic act of crushing. The following closer shots stress both pain and the danger of falling, Roger winching and Eve terrified. A closeup of foot grinding on fingers becomes redefined by an off-screen sound of a gunshot and Leonard's foot tilts off the hand. A surprising cut shows the terracotta idol smashing as coils of microfilm pop from its belly. Two shots show Leonard's plunge off the cliff as Roger and Eve hold on.

Hitchcock delivers the end of the sequence and of the film, in his most positive and indeed magical image of redemption offered by a hand-grasp. In a low angle close-up Roger looks down intently as Eve strains on his grasp. Roger encourages Eve and she declares, "I can't make it," adding "pull harder!" As Roger grins in the next close-up, his tone of voice changes and he declares, "Come along, Mrs. Thornhill." The cut here is perhaps Hitchcock's most daring—yet playful—as the action of lifting Eve is continued over a change in location and a major ellipsis of time. Roger pulls Eve by her hand up into an upper berth in a train sleeping car, the camera pulling back from close-up to show the couple embracing in their mobile wedding bed. Roger defends himself against Eve's claim he is being silly by saying, "I know, but I'm sentimental." The film then ends with the shot that Hitchcock jovially confessed in interviews to be a phallic symbol as the train enters a tunnel.<sup>26</sup> All of the sequences discussed demonstrate Hitchcock's devotion to montage and its ability to transport the audience through space and time through the gestures and emotions of characters. Until this moment the editing in this sequence has not been as intricate as our other three examples. But this cut shifts characters from one time and place to another and its recklessly interrupts suspenseful action stands as one of Hitchcock's most powerful experiments in montage.

The sequence also stands out for its successful resolution of the hand grasp. Hands here neither fail to make contact nor come apart. The emotional bond between lovers underlying the handclasp (literalized as a marriage bond) did not appear in the previous films. The contrast with *Vertigo*, the film that just preceded it, carries significance for Hitchcock's career. Although the handclasp and fall that opens *Vertigo* does not

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<sup>26</sup> [Hitchcock/Truffaut](#) (revised edition) (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 150.

involve lovers, no other Hitchcock film deals as painfully with the failure of lovers. In spite of its current reputation, *Vertigo* was initially a critical and box office failure and it is hard not to feel that in *NBNW* Hitchcock hoped to exorcise the tragic tone of that film. The last line of *NBNW* seems to dispel the sting of one of Scottie's most bitter lines when he says to Judy/Madeline after discovering her duplicity, "You shouldn't keep souvenirs from a murder, Madeline, You shouldn't ... you shouldn't be that sentimental." The end of *NBNW* labors to reverse the horror of repeated falls to the death of Madeline and Judy in *Vertigo*. The very magical and literally incredible nature of the rescue seems to suggest Hitchcock may see such a happy ending to be only achieved through cinematic trickery, more a wish fulfillment than a dramatic resolution. Hitchcock's emotional pendulum swung back to the tragic with his next film, *Psycho*, which is as much a reversal of the comic tone of *NBNW* as that film is of *Vertigo*.

If the three handclasp/falling sequences in *Saboteur*, *Vertigo* and *NBNW* form a trilogy of variations from melodrama to tragedy to comedy, they all contrast paradigmatically with the death scene in *Psycho*. Their public spaces contrast sharply with the privacy and intimacy of the bathroom, the multiple characters reverse the isolation and nudity of Marion Crane. Even the failed handclasps offer more human fellowship than Crane's lonely death. All this makes her final gesture of reaching out into nothingness that much more painful. While her collapse in the bathtub may seem less horrific than the male bodies hurdling into the abyss, her physical vulnerability and exposure make the action more haptic. The feel of wet enamel plastic and downpouring water offer the tactile equivalent of the empty-handed reach. That gesture in its futility and poignance holds the key to Hitchcock's haptics. It is not simply touch, but the need to grasp *something*, the blind searching of space for some response, some comfort or aid. This reaching out, its failed attempt to master the world around one provides the climactic moment of this the coldest scene in Hitchcock's coldest film. Although the hand ultimately takes hold of the shower curtain, it seems at first to reach out towards the camera as a witness. But the camera offers no solace. Marion's lifeless nude figure is observed at the end by circular images recalling a cold eye and pitiless gaze: the low angle shot of the round showerhead with its rays of spray; then a moving camera following the stream of water washing away blood, the drain with its mini-maelstrom, which slowly dissolve into the wide open dead eye of Marion. Hand and eye here grasp and reflect nothingness.

### Pointing: Hand as gesture, gesture as sign

There is a famous publicity photograph portraying Hitchcock at work. Taken early in his career in the late 1920's, Hitchcock's plump jowly face is unmistakable, even if his hair is dark and uncharacteristically full. The young director stares fixedly at something off-frame, presumably the



scene he is directing. Behind him to the left stands his wife and collaborator Alma Reville holding what seems to be a script and casting her own intent gaze, but more cautious and observant compared to Hitch's almost ecstatic expression. The keynote of the image lies less in Hitch's stare, than his gesture, outstretched arm and pointing finger. The gesture seems deliberately excessive; it looks more like a witness pointing an accusing finger at a fleeing culprit than a director instructing an actor. Along with the outreaching grasping hand this pointing gesture, a motif Demonsablon had already noted and named "indicating hands," defines the essence of Hitchcock's haptic filmmaking.<sup>27</sup> The pointing finger is polysemic, and its two primary meanings are on display in this image of the director: most obviously pointing something out, directing attention; and more subliminally the primal gesture of accusation, pointing the finger at the guilty one.

My intention in this essay has been not only to explore certain key moments in Hitchcock's films, but to demonstrate how his mastery of cinematic language was founded in a deep intuition of the relation between our body and the world. The haptic opens a way into understanding how cinema can do this, especially, if we do not limit the term to tactile sensation. Our hands do more than feel or grasp the world; they orient us within it, pointing the way, opening us to both sites and sights. Hitchcock's hands create a nexus with language and signification through gesture. Too often critics reduce the embodied nature of aesthetic experience to simple bodily sensation. Phenomenology as a method undoes the duality of body and mind, the tendency to think of meaning as simply intellectual in a narrow sense. Gestures make us aware of the way language itself, the vehicle of meaning, remains rooted in our bodily being and our movement through space. Cinema relies on this embodied nature of language.

Body language is more than turn of phrase; it indicates how strongly language dwells in our embodied nature. Gestures make this evident. Frank R. Wilson describes the "hand-thought-language nexus" the evolutionary interrelation of language and gesture.<sup>28</sup> But this nexus does not rest simply in our biological past. Our relations to the world around us, as much as our communication with our fellows, begins with gestures. The pointing finger opens the path into the human realm of sense:

Cognitive and developmental psychologists regard the appearance in children of pointing as a "gesture of intentionality" (at about fourteen months) to be an important milestone in their mental development and consider its exclusive use by humans a demarcation from chimpanzee cognitive potential. Chimpanzees neither spontaneously produce this gesture nor acquire it through training.<sup>29</sup>

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27 Demonsablon 1956, p. 27. The French phrase is "mains designant."

28 Wilson 1999, pp. 35- 60.

29 Ibid., p. 50.

The pointing gesture shows again the merging of hand and eye as we navigate the world. As the publicity photo of young Hitchcock shows, the pointing finger directs the look, vectorizing our gaze to literalize what Robert Bresson has called the "the ejaculatory force of the eye."<sup>30</sup> In evolutionary terms, Wilson relates pointing to what is known as the *dorsal* visual system, "essential both for simple target identification and tracking... and to guide the preformation of the hand so that it can perform an anticipated task as soon as it makes contact with the object."<sup>31</sup>

As an emblem of the director's role the pointing finger relates to another hand gesture that publicity images of Hitchcock often featured: framing a scene with the extended thumb and index finger of two hands visualizing the director's position as observer and master. The gesture literally frames the scene, claiming it or owning it—defining it. If the framing gesture expresses Hitchcock's mastery over the image, the pointing gesture speaks more to his desire to plunge the viewer into the action allowing her to participate in it. The act of pointing exemplifies Hitchcock's role as director, directing the spectator's attention to the significant detail or action.

While Hitchcock's description of the language of film stresses editing's ability to break a scene into its significant parts, his direction also makes these fragments hang together. I would describe this aspect of his direction as *vectorization*, making one shot lead to another with continuous energy or trajectory. The POV pattern in which an off-screen look leads naturally to what was seen provides a prime example of this vectorization. But composition, camera movement and even actor's movements also carry out this role of pointing the audience's attention in a specific direction and moving it along. The opening of *I Confess* (1953) beautifully demonstrates this vectorization aspect of Hitchcock's direction.

The film opens with a series of an establishing shots of Quebec City as if Hitchcock were flaunting his location shooting as much as setting the scene. After a couple of picturesque images, a shot dominated by a large arrow-shape sign indicating a one way street appears. A second shot of an arrow sign follows soon after, marking it as a motif. The next shot shows the only living human being in this sequence as a distant silhouette of Hitchcock performing his cameo as director, crosses the frame at the top of a stairway. Then a third pointing sign moves us into the heart of the plot, as a camera movement follows the direction of the arrow and tracks through an open window to discover a dead body on the floor. Although this opening sequence does not show a human hand pointing, the signs embody the indicating gesture. Hitchcock stresses their link to the essence of his style with a pun: these French signs for one way street actually say "Direction".

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30 Bresson 1977, p. 6.

31 Wilson 1999, p. 107.

The pointing finger appears frequently in Hitchcock's films. Already in *The Lodger* it occurred near the opening after the discovery of the Avenger's victim. An elderly lady who saw the perpetrator escaping describes him and seems to see his reflection in a lunch wagon coffee urn. She points offscreen with outstretched arm and we see the reflection of a bystander jokingly masquerading as the murderer. Here the gesture performs two essential traits: directing the gaze off-screen and making an accusation (and significantly, a misidentification). From the beginning of his career to its end this essential gesture embodies Hitchcock's style. A pointing finger actually appears in the last minute of Hitchcock's last film, *Family Plot* (1976) as Blanche in close-up points out the glowing diamond hanging from the chandelier. The pointing finger takes on an almost emblematic function for Hitchcock, not simply drawing attention to something, but thematizing the act of pointing something out and its ambiguities of this gesture of identification.

The finger can point to evidence, but in Hitchcock it often involves uncertainty as well. A shot in *The Man who Knew Too Much* (1956) of the bullet hole in the ballroom window after Louis Bernard has been shot demonstrates this role as enigma. In close-up no less than five pointing fingers surround the hole in spite of the unlikely positions characters would have to assume in order to form this pattern. The shot becomes almost extra-textual, underscoring the question of who shot this innocuous seeming fellow. While pointing fingers can indicate incriminating evidence they often point to deeper levels of meaning. Sebastian's thumb passes along the dates of the bottles in his wine cellar until he pauses at the one bearing the wrong date in *Notorious* (1946), revealing not just evidence the bottles have been tampered with, but exposing the betrayal of his marriage. As Jeff watches through his telephoto lens, Lisa in *Rear Window*, points to the wedding ring on her finger, evidence that Thorwald murdered his wife, but also her signal to Jeff that she has proved herself worthy of marriage. This gesture indicating evidence of both crime and romance, soon transforms into a sign of peril as the camera edges over to reveal Thorwald who also registers Lisa's signal and thereby becomes aware of the role of Jeff, who had felt himself invisible and invulnerable due to his distance and visual apparatus. Most eerie, Madeleine's dark glove fingers point out two positions on the cross section of redwood in *Vertigo* as her off-frame voice says in an otherworldly tone, "Here I was born and there I died, for you it was just a moment, you took no notice." Her gesture points us into the world of the dead, while also serving as a ploy in the plot to embroil Scottie in a murder. In all these instances the pointing finger not only indicates a specific object but opens up another context that redefines the situation.

Undoubtedly the most thorough treatment of the pointing finger and its implied accusation of guilt comes early in Hitchcock's career, in his first sound film, *Blackmail* (1929). Like other critics, I consider *Blackmail*

Hitchcock's first masterpiece. Here the finger of accusation conveys a sense of an undeserved, but equally unshakeable, guilt. The highly symbolic nature of the pointing finger in this film is underscored by the fact that it appears in a painting, as a fixed and highly significant gesture. A court jester, his face convulsed in laughter, points directly in front of him, making anyone who stands before the painting the target of his mockery.

Alice White has ditched her detective boyfriend at a restaurant for a secret date with an artist in his studio. She enters rather warily and glances out the window where she sees a policeman on patrol below. Reassured by this presence of the law, she looks around the studio. Hitchcock cuts to the painting of jester, so closely framed one might take it for an actual person. A rapid track back of the camera reveals it as a canvas propped on an easel. Alice responds with delight and immediately reproduces the gesture. She points off at the painting exclaiming: "I say that's good isn't it?" The doubling of the gesture already indicates the painting's power over Alice; it has already contaminated her actions.

The artist's attempt to seduce Alice turns to rape when she resists, as he pulls her into a bed in a curtained alcove. Hitchcock indicates the hidden struggle through the rustling curtain, until we see Alice's hand emerge from the curtains, flailing. As the camera dollies forward, her hand gropes and grabs a bread knife from a bedside table. Holding the knife, her hand disappears within the curtains and slowly the rustling ceases—until the artist's hand flops into view, obviously dead. Alice emerges slowly from the curtains in her underwear, robot-like, holding the knife in her hand as she stares about her uncomprehendingly.

Shivering, she looks around the studio. Her POV shows her dress draped across the canvas where the artist threw it. She walks to it mechanically. As she lifts the dress from the canvas, Hitchcock cuts to a close view of the painting, its pointing finger seeming to pop out at her (and the viewer). A full face close-up of Alice follows staring directly at the camera, looking startled at first and then enraged as she strikes out at the canvas and its implied accusation. Hitchcock cuts on this action to show her from the back as her fingers tear the canvas. She turns, staring glassy-eyed at the camera and walks towards it as if in a trance. Alice wanders the streets of London until dawn. During her walk Hitchcock blends her traumatized consciousness with the urban environment, frequently intercutting shots of the artist's dead hand. As Alice views an electrical sign advertising Gordon's Gin that proclaims "White for Purity" and shows a moving cocktail shaker, it transforms into a hand stabbing with a knife. As dawn breaks, a close-up of the hand of a tramp sleeping on the sidewalk summons up the artist's hand again to the terrified Alice.

The painting of the jester haunts the remainder of the film, less as evidence in the investigation than as a sign of persistent guilt which moves between Alice and Frank her detective boyfriend. Assigned to investigate the artist's murder Frank notices the torn canvas, but finding

Alice's glove on the scene makes him realize she must have had a hand in the killing. As Frank conceals this incriminating evidence, Hitchcock cuts back to the painting, its accusatory gesture now pointing to him as well. Frank's action setting up the unsavory blackmailer as a primary suspect in the killing forges an ambiguous but strong bond between the couple whose union seemed precarious at the film's opening. Before the blackmailer plunges to his death from the dome of the British Museum he too makes the accusatory gesture, pointing his finger at Frank and telling the pursuing police, "Ask *him!* Why his own..." His accusation, like Alice's attempt at confession in the final scene, is interrupted.

The blackmailer's death during the police pursuit is intercut with Alice writing a confession, unwilling to have someone take the blame for her killing. But at police headquarters Frank keeps her from making a confession that now would help no one. As the film ends the couple try to join in the laughter provoked by the desk sergeant's sexist joke. But Alice's glance off-screen leads to her POV as the jester's pointing finger seems to loom out of nowhere. She is startled, but the following shot reveals that the painting being carried down a corridor by a police officer. The laughter continues hollowly as the film ends.

Enduring the pointed finger of accusation, like the stain of guilt, tests our human being, body and soul. In his dramas of guilt Hitchcock draws on both a Freudian understanding of repression and Catholic doctrines of Original Sin—discourses which both address our bodily being, albeit in seeming contradictory ways. Hitchcock explicitly returns to the theme of overcoming unconscious repression in his last great film *Marnie*. Both of the hand gestures I have dealt with in this essay recur in this film in ways that relate not only to the burden of guilt but to liberation from it.

Marnie is a thief and resists sex, her thievery and frigidity reactions to a repressed trauma of a childhood act of killing. Hitchcock signals the displaced affect of the repressed memory through Marnie's hysterical reaction to a stain of red on a field of white, evoking both the actual killing and the deflowering of a virgin (recall Alice's reaction to the advertisement "White for Purity" or the stained dress in *Stage Fright* (1950)). Flouting conventional psychoanalytical strictures, Marnie's husband Mark attempts retrieve her traumatic memory. Resembling a detective as much as an analyst, he induces Marnie to participate in Jung's technique of free association. As Mark offers words increasingly swiftly, Marnie loses her cocky attitude and begins to show signs of panic. The word "water" evokes seemingly conventional associations, but ones in which the theme of purity and guilt lurk. "Sex", "Death", and "Black increases her panic. When Mark suddenly exclaims "Red!" Marnie loses all her defenses proclaiming repeatedly, "White, white!" and collapses crying "Oh God someone please help me!" As eloquent as Jay Presson Allen's dialogue is at this point, I want to stress the visualization of Mark's gesture in medium close-up. As he exclaims "Red" Mark jabs his finger directly at off-screen Marnie. His gesture replicates the jester from *Blackmail* with its imputation of guilt.

However, rather than an unresolved haunting sense of guilt, Mark's gesture opens an uncomfortable process aimed less at assigning guilt than undoing its hold on its victim. Mark plausibly attributes Marnie's compulsive theft to her need for the love that her mother (also out of a sense of guilt) has withheld from her. Hitchcock translates this psychological need into symptom and a gesture: the need to steal displaces a desire to grasp love. Thus in the penultimate scene that leads to the film's denouement, Marnie opens the Rutland safe intending to steal cash before escaping from Mark and her marriage. But, after opening the safe with satisfaction, Marnie hand becomes paralyzed as she tries to grasp the money—a gesture of impotence underscored by the camera repeatedly zooming in and out on the bundles of cash. Mark appears alongside her and tells her to take the money, that as his wife his cash is hers and she is not stealing. Marnie's hand remains frozen, her grasp unresponsive, even when Mark grabs her arm and tries to force her to take.

This failed grasp does not trigger a literal fall into the abyss. Rather it signals the inability of money to substitute for love, something already indicated by Marnie's repetitive pattern of theft and the failure of her gifts to elicit a loving response from her mother. The following scene where Mark and Marnie confront her mother causes the initial trauma to reemerge for her memory, revealing the primal stain and the truth of Marnie's "guilt." Marnie's final attempt to reconcile with her mother elicits the confession that she was the only thing her mother ever loved. But, as Marnie rests her head on her mother's lap, Mrs. Edwards' hand hovers above her daughter's head, not daring to touch or make contact, another suspended gesture.<sup>32</sup> Marnie is left with her husband, whose love she confesses, as the film ends, is better than going to jail—a bittersweet but oddly touching declaration which could have ended *Blackmail* as well.

Ending a discussion of the hand in Hitchcock is equally hard. Not only are there many more instances that could be discussed, there are many other registers of the haptic in these films, ranging from what McElhaney calls "the light grazing of the hand towards object or bodies" to the violent impact of punches and slaps.<sup>33</sup> Such an investigation becomes impossible to close down. Hitchcock's oeuvre wove together many motifs over his long career, which invite critics to trace not only meanings but intricate patterns of development. He remains perhaps the most bodily and the most enigmatic of film directors, enticing us as viewers to experience the mysteries of the gestures of his character and of his own style, and to speculate on their implications. We do so to the degree that we participate in his films—are drawn in and grasped by them.

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<sup>32</sup> McElhaney beautifully explores the dynamics of touch between Marnie and her mother, McElhaney 2006, pp. 130-134.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

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