

Beyond an Aesthetics of the West: Hitchcock's *Vertigo*

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It is no longer possible to think in our day other than in the void
left by man's disappearance ...

—Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*¹

Denn das Naturschöne als Erscheinendes ist selber Bild.

—Theodor Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*²

Hitchcock's *Vertigo* is more than a masterpiece about sexual obsession, murder, and psychoanalysis. It is one of the most daring and sublime philosophical readings of the human condition. In particular, the film explores the nature of the Western manner of gazing, the idealization of *das Naturschöne*³ exemplified by the imaginal sensuousness of woman. The restored 70 mm theatrical reissue of *Vertigo* with its digitized DTS stereo rendition of Bernard Herrmann's music intensifies the cinematic presence of woman, regarded primarily from the standpoint of the dialectic power of beauty.⁴ Suddenly, beauty, power, woman, and

¹Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (New York: Random House, Inc., 1970), p. 342.

²Theodor Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 105.

³"The beautiful-in-nature." (1) In Kant's aesthetics, the formal condition for imagination's "free play." (2) In Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, the "central motif" of art continually challenging the infrastructural closure of society. (3) Awakens thought to the phenomenal variants of a radically different mode of judging. Our naming of *das Naturschöne* in this chapter relates to all three modalities, in particular, however, to Theodor Adorno's reading of it in his *Aesthetic Theory*, tr. L. Lenhardt (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1984). Henceforth, *AT*.

⁴For recent information on literature about Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, see *Vertigo Links* on the internet: <http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/8417/links.html>.

music are conjoined with manipulation, control, submission, and even murder. Despite Hitchcock's cinematic brilliance, the dialectic triumphs in its desperate search for representing, enframing, and capturing the multiple modes of (human) presence, showing human longings through representation rather than spontaneous performance. More plainly, the power of presence expressed by imagining the beautiful, whether it be the San Francisco landscape or a woman's profiles, is confined to a technical ordering (editing/directing) akin to the Socratic gaze, a dialectic staring at "things," an erotic attachment to detecting whatever is going anywhere. Scottie, (James Stewart) a retired police detective, cannot go beyond this kind of *Befindlichkeit*, always on the look for definite images, answers, and explanations. He shadows Madeleine/Judy (Kim Novak) without ever letting her be noted outside his gaze and desires. Aspiring a "definitive" image of presence, Scottie becomes the neurotic hero of Platonism, bringing Socrates' views of controlling life by means of reason to a vertiginous end. These staring eyes illuminate the order of things, and gaping so intensely, they turn the world upside down.

Confining presence to images, representations, and directional frames, Hitchcock's film, exceeding the well-known story of a thriller, manifests that it is not merely Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore) who kills. The dialectic too murders simple naturality. It mirrors reality falsely by enframing presence "theoretically," directionally. In short, the dialectic gaze traps, captures, and suffocates presence from "within" the inner home or the sublime police of the "soul." On the verge of patriarchal floundering, Scottie engages in an ontology of the figural, a post-Cartesian spying, a dialectic eyeing of presence that is clearly "egographic." What is dizzying for viewer, actor, and director of this film is Scottie's (and everyman's) peculiar manner of looking. From the very beginning, the film highlights the phenomenon of watching, seeing, gazing, wondering/wandering, and searching. In short, it explores the restrictive strategy of dialectic questioning: What is she up to? What is she doing? Why is she doing it? Where is she going? How long is she staying? What is she thinking? What does she look like? What is she wearing? And, of course, how can I change her? How can I make her mine? How can I make her see that I'm the one she wants?

The Dialectical Gaze

Vertigo is about the ecstatic visual nature of presence, the apparition of the natural simplicity. It aims to advance toward frames of an impossible image — the unexchangeable. When Scottie looks at Madeleine, he recasts her to his look without realizing that she disrupts the specular. While he confuses beauty with representation (mostly his own), Madeleine expresses the beautiful beyond the figural. Scottie's attempt to fence her in is typically Western-dialectical, in a manipulative, calculative, and ocularcentric sense. It is natural for Scottie to pursue her. Being a detective, the idea is to catch the thief, the prowler, the robber, the unwanted and the undesirable. What makes this matter so vertiginous is the filmic attempt to capture this subject. Far from being a thief or prowler, Madeleine eludes Scottie who is constantly faced with her unconquerable apparition. Wandering through an icy voyeurism, Scottie believes Madeleine ought to be noticed at any cost as if she needed to be reflected in the eyes of a stranger. In this dialectic gaze, he sees her yielding to his lust for plenitude. Ironically, woman as subject/object becomes a non-perception. She remains almost entirely unknown to Gavin and Scottie. Hitchcock expresses this absence of Madeleine's visibility in his onscreen deconstruction of behavioristic psychoanalysis. Like Freud, he acknowledges the complex nature of desire and the difficulty of confining it to the visible screen. While there are traces of a problematic dialectic in Hitchcock's reading of Madeleine, he sees "something" neither Gavin nor Scottie are capable of seeing, namely, that Madeleine's onscreen visibility — so new, so fresh, so unassuming — is an illusion.

The visible dramatizes the privilege of consciousness. With regard to this, Scottie inscribes Madeleine's innocent naturality into conscious visibility. He is unaware of the difference between imaging and presence, between the visible and its mere copy. He acts as if the copy were true, as if consciousness were naturally visible. Yet, Hitchcock tells us onscreen and offscreen that the dialectic is the film, a Western imaging/reasoning. And that it (id) cannot be a guarantee for certainty. In that regard, *Vertigo* is also an anti-film that tells the offscreen story of the lure and trap of the visible. The film-music points to that, expressing the unexchangeable, invisible presence of the beautiful.

Scottie's representational desire is more visual than auditory. To protect himself from (her) nature, he is accompanied by an old Socratic friend — the dialectic. As Socrates says: "Now is there not something of a mirror in the eye with which we see?"⁵ There is the gaze of the soul, and, then, there's the look of (in) the eye. The dialectic joins the "super-celestial gaze" with the spectralities of beauty. Still, these spectralities retreat behind the dialectic gaze. Succumbing to the exclusive attraction of appearances, Scottie, in turn, drowns (his) reason in mirrors he is unable to master. The dialectic fails him and, for that matter, anyone who turns to it exclusively as an instrument of control. His cinematic attunement is, unknowingly perhaps, guided by a particular conversation of Socrates (with Alcibiades): "Then, the eye, looking at another eye which is most perfect and which is the instrument of vision, will there see itself? But looking at anything else either in man or in the world except at what this resembles, it will not see itself" (SW 327). For Socrates, the eye that is most perfect is reason. But here lies the false carnality as well as the origin of Scottie's vertigo. Reason in its proprietary essence is insufficient to challenge the abyss. Vertigo begins with the powerlessness of reason, with the twilight of the commanding eye in the West.

Pursuing Madeleine, Scottie's erotic obsession turns into a desire to possess and control her. This indicates his (and our) inability to love without disrupting the identity of possession and eros. Shortly after the film begins, Hitchcock previews Scottie's dialectic failing in a most unusual "curtain-raising" effect. Scottie follows Madeleine down a dark alley into an even darker building when suddenly a door opens onto a colorful and bright flower-shop. The delight of a sunny opening is compared to the dim and desperate search for the unreachable. The screen unfolds a letting-be of presence (*Anwesen lassen*), Madeleine, moving freely, widely sensuous beyond the film auteur's expectations. The mood signifies Adorno's gesture of deconstructing the Kantian ethics in order "to live so that one may believe oneself to have been a good animal."⁶ Paradoxically, Madeleine does not act irrespective of what

⁵See Luce Irigaray's reference to Plato in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 327. Henceforth, SW.

⁶Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectic*, trans. by E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), p. 299.

Hitchcock, Scottie, and Gavin may think. She plays the game of presence naturally, inviting the eye to pause, browse, and plunge toward unseen openings. Undoubtedly, she *appears* to act. And, if we read her wandering dialectically, as Scottie always does — since there's an answer to every question — Madeleine is merely an actress. Yet, her *Dasein* tells a different story. She is neither an actress nor someone who is posited as a figural ideal. Without representing her movements, she radiates presence anew. The scene of the flower-shop gives impressions of Madeleine that are neither infinitely abstract nor concretely specular. There is a certain standing-still of love and the self, beyond the opposition of body and spirit. We see a filmic interlacing of the beautiful and the natural without ever falling into bodily decadence. If there are traces of decadence, they have become properly nonimaginal precisely at the margins of her own falling (into Scottie's arms).

Exceeding Hitchcock's direction, Madeleine invites us to think of filming as "seeing Being" genderless.⁷ In this regard, her fervor is more like that of someone as yet unborn, quite plainly, signifying nonidentical presence, an appearing beyond appearances. But to someone who is merely pursuing an appearance easy to frame, she will seem to have the look of an identifying feminine presence. So, Scottie does not see that by managing Madeleine/Judy, he is actually trying to manage human existence. He is putting life on stage to be stared at, to be represented, to be controlled. The viewer gets the impression that Scottie is driven by the *idea* of Madeleine, indeed, by his idea of presence. Invariably, we encounter the message: presence is there to be filmed, to be caught, to be protected by a certain gaze, a distinct representing. Until, one realizes that the old message-system, the long continuity of dialectical visibilities is essentially powerless in the face of an eye that refuses to stare.

Regarding her differently, Madeleine surfaces as the inordinate motif of presence. Throughout the film, however, (her) presence means a *Blicksprung* into apparition. Adorno announces such an aesthetic pos-

⁷In this essay, I do not highlight Madeleine's "negative" alliance with Gavin, mostly because it is not a central issue. I regard her departure from dialectic impositions more significant. However, for a superb reading of the "darker" side of Madeleine see William Rothman's "Vertigo: The unknown woman in Hitchcock," in *The "I" of the Camera* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 152-173.

sibility by reading apparition as that which appears more than appearance. At the end of the film, Scottie partially discovers Madeleine's (beautiful) nature in her elegant, yet nonimaginal "phenomenal overflow."⁸ Yet, Scottie's optics during the film remains essentially the same. He sees only one thing, the image of (his) representation, a "what," that is, presence as object of (his) reflection. She has become an exquisite ideal, exclusively, a woman embedded in a particular image. For Scottie, Madeleine is merely a specular hymen, his own narrow mirroring of life, a shadow, a silhouette, an obstacle (to Gavin too). Scottie is bent upon discovering (detecting) the true character of Madeleine in order to satisfy his impulse to transgress the barrier between spectator and image. His desire to uncover her is part of his unwillingness to be other than explicitly specular. His representation of Madeleine, therefore, twists back upon his nebulous self in a Socratic rectitude of vision. He is forever divided from Madeleine and the "improper" character of her "phenomenal overflow," indicated by the image of the nun at the end of the film. Both the antagonist and the director of the film aspire to a sublimity on the supersensible by touching Madeleine. In their eagerness to preserve their essentializing gestures, ironically, however, they never meet the "real" woman.

So, in addition to the double of Madeleine and Judy, there is another *Doppelgänger*: the film and the anti-film. There is Hitchcock's film of Scottie failing to affirm the human by denying Madeleine outside his obsession for the feminine unknown. There is also *Vertigo* breaking out of Hitchcock's film in order to discover a world beyond *presentment*, or a certain loss of presence.⁹ This reveals Madeleine, forgetting the dialectical umbrella and allowing for a *Blicksprung* that does not yield to a cunningly calculated set-up. There is no typical looking-glass enclosure. The other film is Madeleine roaming freely in her *Anders-streben*, ever opaque to Scottie's speculation. It shows a Madeleine who does not lose herself in an image-repertoire that uncovers presence while simultaneously clothing it (dialectically).

⁸Midge perceived early on that Scottie failed to see this "phenomenal overflow" in her. This is why she broke off their engagement so quickly.

⁹"Presentment occurs when a subject posits something, anything, as preeminently an object for that subject, and posits this relation as normative." See David Halliburton's *The Fateful Discourse of Wordly Things* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 380.

Soft Gelassenheit

But why the dialectic still? Even in a filmic genre? Scottie's desire for fixed presence, world as corpse, dissecting and analyzing its meaning, in short, his aesthetic necrophilia, is a mere substitute for what Edith Wharton calls "the fullness of life." The frozen representation of beauty is more overwhelming than the light of its natural visibility. Hitchcock's photoplay explores the seductive nature of representation. He underscores Scottie's refusal to tame the gaze. As he unfolds this play, he withholds from view Madeleine's filmic alterity. She does not fall into vertiginous representations, or mere mirroring. There is nothing left to mirror. Her wandering is not imitative. Here anti-filming does not copy or repeat the same world picture. Beyond this age, she breezes out of Scottie's sight and puts the play back into presence.

In contrast, Scottie engages in a dialectic screening of being (*Sein*), drowning becoming (*Werden*) in the vast sea of image-fetishism. Determining Judy's appearance, he empties her landscape from its beautiful bloom. Hitchcock's cinematic itinerary, however, differs from Scottie's "filming" of Judy. He adds music to Scottie's imaginal strategies, thereby dissolving some of the latter's phallocentric tendencies. Scottie's continuous dialectic endeavors are disrupted by the haunting power of Herrmann's music yearning for a discourse deprived of a founding *telos*. The film music is intimately bound up with listening to a feeling beyond moral, political, or transcendental configurations of pleasure and displeasure. No attempt is made to recapture or regain any metaphysical investments. Deconstructing Scottie's erotic enclosure of Madeleine, the music allows the viewer to see her breaking out of (his) representation. Indeed, one might say that Herrmann's music makes room for Madeleine's *ecstasis*, her standing outside of presentment. Making cinematic movements less manipulative, it introduces impressions of reality quite different from the relentless foregrounding of the imaginary. The resulting effect is often a glimpse of subjectivity that necessitates Scottie's problematic perception of Madeleine's natural spontaneity. Paradoxically, the music does not simply adhere to her dimension. Its rhythm lies somewhere in-between, intensifying the dichotomy of representation and presence while indicating the strife of commanding and letting-be. As director, Hitchcock relinquishes

Vertigo to a presumably aesthetic indifference, where seduction is separated from reality.

Beyond this attunement, there is a certain *Gelassenheit* in Madeleine, expressed in her desire to withdraw from teasingly tangible delusions. Her San Francisco roaming does not hide her game of disillusioning the hunter — be it Scottie or Gavin, who initiates the game. Hers is an intriguing, yet not necessarily contradictory gaming. In the end, she outwits Scottie, Gavin (who “created” her), and Hitchcock himself, coming out of the film into the very play of flowing-over. This strikingly engaging, ecstatic performance “murders” the false cinematic necessity of “staying alive” in order to participate in Gavin’s monstrous game and in order to please (Scottie). Herrmann’s music supplements her performance, expressing (her) disappearance. Breaking away from the linear sequence of shots, yet disappearing solely in the film, Madeleine becomes the woman she is — Kim Novak. Her game does not end with Scottie. She may begin to fall in love with him but she leaves him before she falls further, disrupting, finally, the alliance between Hollywood and the dialectic. Surprisingly, Hitchcock tries desperately to retain this alliance as the image of the nun reveals.

Diegetic Interventions

Films are there to be read and reread. Rereadings bring forth new filmings. So, we learn that the film does not end with the cinema. The music continues to be heard. The images linger long after the film’s technical ending. The language of images lies neither in the images nor in a conscious manipulation to master them. It lies rather in an audio-visual falling from cinematographic scenes. Hence, the film itself experiences “vertigo.” It is suddenly transformed into a diegetic presence, drawing attention to deframing, “de-filming,” fading, withdrawing, disappearing. Still, something lingers where nothing is allowed to be itself. There is no longer a subjective-objective content (“what”). Nonetheless, there is a “how,” more clearly, how she begins to listen to herself. This how is also a disappearance of dialectic language. The music introduces this language beyond signs akin to Heidegger’s idea of “language speaking,” when being emerges without merging with beings in communication.

Such metacinematic language may also be regarded from the standpoint of the glance, particularly with regard to the alternating glances of Melanie Daniels in *The Birds*. The fusion of rhythm and glance signifies a narrative — however elementary — that yields to no directional closure. Paradoxically, while the film's director as well as the actors may determine the cinematic glances of actresses, these glances exceed any intentionalities. Musical inserts enhance the power of the gaze beyond the staring subject. The simultaneous fusion of hearing and gazing unfolds a polylogic that veers toward an appearing beyond appearances, toward the uncanny end of representation. This very simultaneity of hearing and gazing provides alternatives to the detective mechanisms of a directing subject.

Expanding the onscreen story with its cinematographic limits is sometimes named "diegesis," a word Plato already used to address the most uncanny impressions of reality.¹⁰ Diegesis may be regarded as an offscreen narrative that disturbs the familiar, visible imagery enframing the film. In *Vertigo*, it signifies Madeleine's displacement of Hitchcock's directing. It includes Scottie's story but is not exhausted by it, allowing for the filmic simultaneity of music and the gaze as well as the viewer's rewriting of the film. The diegetic text provides for the gradual disappearance of Scottie, Gavin, and their actual director. On this view, Madeleine, who ultimately cannot be cinematized, becomes the event of a new vertigo — turning the head of the viewer. She invites us to see the other Hitchcock, the other director, the other film in *Vertigo*. And, of course, it is this other film, the diegetic supplement, that makes *Vertigo* intriguingly dizzying. This turn to the viewer's judging (*Beurteilung*) of an extraordinary filmic overflow does not exemplify a subjective aesthetics. On the contrary, it belongs to Madeleine's gaming inasmuch as the cinematic images demand that the viewer be more than a mimetic spectator who merely narrates the story of Scottie. The unsettled yearning and haunting rhythm of Herrmann's music with Hitchcock's aesthetic transience of the cinematic text (shadows, dissolves, sudden openings) unfold Scottie's story beyond the realm of what actually takes shape in *Vertigo*. Hence, it is neither the acting nor the simple narrative

¹⁰See Richard Neupert, edited and translated *Aesthetics of Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), pp. 79-95.

but the collision of sound, image, and impression that gives the viewer the opportunity to film this film again in and beyond the space of Hitchcock's filming. Here Madeleine exceeds Hitchcock's desire to direct the audience. She marks a filmic opening not limited to the psychological tensions of an audience. The cinematographic grammar in *Vertigo* is not merely linear. Nor, as we already pointed out, is it merely the narrative of a detective, or the end of a dialectic itinerary. There is no single projection as Hitchcock's cinematic winnings show. What frequently matters in his films is a certain elegance of precision and intrigue. "I don't care about the subject matter," he says. "I don't care about the acting; but I do care about the pieces of film and the photography and the sound track and all of the technical ingredients that made the audience scream."¹¹

In configurations of shock, fear, and anxiety, *Vertigo*, wiping out a peripheral vision of world, focuses on Scottie's fetishistic pursuit of Madeleine. As we can readily see, however, this pursuit is not limited to onscreen incidents. The film's complexity adheres to several apparitions of Madeleine. There is the mysterious wife of Gavin Elster whom we never see. There is her copy, the icy, remote, and stunning woman Scottie encounters at Ernie's. Then, there is her seemingly dark ancestor, Carlotta. There is also the sensuously beautiful shop clerk Judy Barton. And last but not least there is Midge who also belongs to Madeleine. In short, Hitchcock provides five animae in Madeleine. How are they related? Are they each different from one another? "What" do they signify?

There is ample reason to read Midge as not being bound to the general filmic direction. She is independent and a commercial artist who finds reasonable fulfillment in her work. Although she loves Scottie very much, he is too indecisive for her. She would rather live alone than yield to his (or, anyone's) sovereignty. For her, the onscreen pursuit of the specular is a very limited and limiting representation of life. Midge (Barbara Bel Geddes) abandons the engagement with Scottie early on. She images the beautiful differently. She wants to bring Carlotta to life, letting beauty arise naturally without manipulating its images. This sentiment haunts Madeleine too. Her other mirrors, be they Carlotta,

¹¹François Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), p. 207, 211.

Gavin's wife, or Judy, also reveal a desire to abandon the false necessity of a male-oriented-world. The very idea of woman dissolving the power of man's will turns out to be as dizzying for Hitchcock as it is for his male actors and spectators.

Things begin — and this is what *Vertigo* is all about — to turn radically from the natural attitude of the West to a bewildering state of transcription. So, the film asks: What happens when woman falls off the roof of man's house? When she falls into the abyss? When she is no longer supported by the ladder that was always there? A revolution occurs. But this one lasts longer than a football game. It is not merely a Marxist event but the event of difference. Beyond lazy, habitual representations, we are left dangling from a gutter, wondering whether help will arrive. This mood at the very beginning of the film prepares the viewer for a cultural and historical acrophobia. Suddenly, we are afraid of the highest values. We no longer aspire them. We have come to the point where we want to be as far away from them as possible. Herrmann's rhythms and melodic variations of Madeleine's attunement attest to a West that is threatened by the values it produced. In short, the viewer too is linked to this threat. Invited to be Madeleine, she (the viewer) is filmed and refilmed in Hitchcock's film. The old story of mimesis becomes a frightening fiction inasmuch as the dialectic of inspecting presence turns out to be a lie. While Madeleine and Judy theorize this economy of the narrative, Midge is already practicing it. She has not only reached a decision. She lives the turn, *die Kehre*, the music of a "new nobility," Midge offers the viewer a cinematic *Gelassenheit*, a filmic friendship, deforming the mirror of Scottie's false necessity. By underscoring this, Midge is inscribed into Madeleine, belonging to the diversity of her phenomenal figurabilities. Beyond the Socratic dialectic, she unfolds a new reason that does not screen, protect, or enframe presence. It is a *Denken* that disinstalls, almost imperceptibly, the metaphysical path of rationality. For Midge, presence is visible, perceptible, naturally beautiful to the eye. For Madeleine, in her constellation of apparitions, the matter of presence is more complex, no longer unveiling itself to the exemplarity of will and representation. Whenever representation is present, Madeleine fades, becoming ghostly to Scottie. However, her disappearance is not truly successful. For the viewer will see her again in diegetic (metacinematic) encounter, quite differently from how she appears to

Scottie, and, even, to Hitchcock. Putting Scottie aside, the viewer embraces Madeleine as diegetic image of *das Naturschöne*.

The spectator discerns Madeleine's desire for the noumenal in Carlotta. However, both onscreen and offscreen, the montage of Madeleine's figurabilities is incompatible with the "noumenal" image of Carlotta. The latter marks a convention of identity woman can no longer afford. Beyond Carlotta, the diegesis reveals Madeleine charged with disseminative power even in excess of Judy's dynamic sensuousness. There are many natures in Madeleine. Her first may have been Carlotta. Her last merely appeared to be last. For Madeleine as Judy dissolves into Madeleine as woman and woman signifies *das Naturschöne* beyond *Aktionsobjekt* as well as mere aesthetic contemplation. *Das Naturschöne* is not a particular natural being. Nor is it woman as a whole. The paradox of Adorno's concept lies in the difference between the concept's modern/postmodern orientation and its soft-modern extensions. In other words, what is beautiful-in-nature is so uniquely woman, that one wonders how it can be filmed. Yet, here, in an unanticipated space, lies the clue to the very significance of a diegetic reading of Madeleine.

The Romance of an Anti-Film

It goes without saying that the allusion to the beautiful-in-nature is not a step-back to romanticism. It is absurd to regard *das Naturschöne* as an archaic metaphysical, at best poetic, construction. Adorno, who reads the beautiful-in-nature as a powerful fleeting image, insists that this seemingly innocuous concept is the "central motif" of art (AT, 119). In our context, this means reading Madeleine as *Gestalt* of *das Naturschöne* freed from the dialectic net of reason. At the threshold of this form, a nonrepressive prose of life begins, telling the untold story of Midge in Madeleine, and, of Madeleine beyond Midge, of Judy in Midge, and, of Madeleine beyond Judy and Midge. Called upon by the cinematic text, this *Gestalt* is neither figural nor fictional, subverting the dialectic impositions of Gavin and Scottie. Striving to become a monadic work of art, she does not imitate nature but an ephemeral instance of it in the image of the turn, *die Kehre* to the new, the not yet, the possible. The new is intimately related to the end of tradition. Embedded in beauty, Madeleine, in her *Herkunft*, cannot be compared to a particular image.

If she were merely to be regarded as such, she would still be confined to Hitchcock's story. The diegesis of the film allows her to break out of Hitchcock's desires and to reach out to the event of letting-herself go without becoming fictional. This invites an alliance between letting presence be and letting Madeleine go. The two are not the same. Intimately related, presence and absence point to an in-between. It may be Carlotta or Judy in Madeleine protected by Hitchcock's direction. Beyond these cinematic instances, however, Madeleine dispels the sovereignty that flows so powerfully in our culture from ancient Athens to modern Hollywood. Her explosive specificity, therefore, cannot be captured in film.

In effect, Madeleine emerges as nonimaginal *Gestalt* of promise, of resistance, of freedom from conventional identity. She is not mimesis of something real but anticipation of "how-it-is-yet-to-be," yet to come. Initiating this surplus of images, Hitchcock overreaches any specific image. We are not surprised when Madeleine finally falls, departing from Scottie's seductive path. While there are times when she appears to give in to him, the destiny of Madeleine/Judy is not aligned to Scottie's. Here we ought not to confuse instances of erotic kindness with her vocation to become a novel monad. Since she promises what cannot be represented, Scottie cannot understand "what" she is promising. Her point of departure, then, is a certain expressionist monad, relieved from ontology, singularly universal, promising the image of the unexchangeable. Presence (woman) cannot be exchanged for representation (a man's program). As Adorno says: "Apparition defies the ruling principle of reality" (AT, 122). Madeleine points effectively to a radical opening in which the film, finally, refuses to engage in the principle of exchange. Hitchcock unfolds traces of this idea in *North by Northwest* where he deconstructs American culture. In *Vertigo*, however, Madeleine, via Hitchcock in part, resists "culture" in general. Consequently, she resists the pathology of enframing (*Gestell*), i.e., the practice of ordering existence under a precarious identity. By virtue of her epoche to the empirical world, she, in fact, tells the untold story of woman/nature/beauty. More precisely, the beautiful *Gestalt*, arising in filming, is not seen as object of action or detection, but as evanescent monadic appearance of nature. *Vertigo*, however, draws neither upon naturalism nor romanticism but upon a "mirroring" of freedom such that nature, revealing the beautiful, mirrors an economy of free presencing. This "presencing"

signifies a dynamic monadography by which Madeleine expresses, briefly stated, a *Gelassenheit* beyond mediation/meditation. She falls into a temporal abyss, reflected in the shattered mirror of Scottie's images. What is naturally beautiful, then, is her unique exit from the mimetic order, acknowledging filming as *Gelassenheit* rather than communication or spirit adjusted to merely useful tasks.

Beyond instances of German cinematic expressionism, Hitchcock's film indicates "another beginning" for filming. Few films explore the connection between filming and presence as hauntingly as *Vertigo*. Beyond Scottie's (and Elster's) story, this film reveals philosophy wondering about filming, and films trying to film the philosophical. In oblique encounters, both show the human imagination wandering about in decentering turns toward the visibly invisible. Between reason and madness, exhibited in the relation of Scottie and Madeleine, there comes to light the forgetting of a certain naturality. Image, representation, and will cannot be entirely overcome in the world of cinema. Nonetheless, at the end of *Vertigo*, there lingers an unexchangeable gift — the invisible presence of a sublime *Lebensgefühl*. From beginning to end, Hitchcock's film is a telling of this nonimaginal emotion, appearing/disappearing in(to) the cinematic form of Madeleine. While Madeleine herself is never quite there (in the frame), a hauntingly brilliant and eloquent appearing of Carlotta Valdes, solely in the image of a portrait, eclipses the self of Judy in Madeleine, perhaps, of Madeleine in Judy. Hitchcock, unable to throw off the ghostly power of Carlotta, awakens filmmaking to a filming neither he nor any other director (in his eyes) is able to master completely: to let the film be other than itself. In the diegetic domain, the film sketches out relays of thought without restricting the cinematic grammar to image-movements enframed by a particular cause of action (*Beweggrund*). The film, then, is no longer merely a photoplay of Gavin's murder. A different turn surfaces, a vertigo which films out strong directional, metaphysical views, dislodging Hitchcock's ontic religious anchorings exemplified in images of white towers, churches, bells, and nuns. Beyond Scottie's itineraries as well as Hitchcock's attentive directing, the unsayable presence of beauty permeates *Vertigo*. With its cinematographic aura and psychological finesse, this film is simultaneously an anti-film, demanding a radical turn in how we think about ourselves and how we relate to the shadows and voices of ancient Athens. *Vertigo* is Hollywood with a different face. We

see this face only in a painting. Still, it unfolds the mood of the entire film. Hollywood is now Carlotta, deranged, outcast, without her offspring, but also without the all-seeing eye of Reason. Mysterious and free, she appears and disappears beyond the scene of patriarchy where vertigo begins. For under patriarchy, there is no vertigo. The latter begins when the former ends. Marking the twilight of onscreen imaging, *Vertigo* succeeds in subverting Hitchcock's own directing. As work of art, the film dissolves the director(s) too. Paradoxically, the only thing that lingers is Madeleine's offscreen typography, falling from Hitchcock's filming. Nonetheless, the viewer recognizes that it is Hitchcock's brilliant directing that makes Madeleine a "bio"-graphy of the power of beauty.

Beyond an aesthetics of the West, the film holds up a promise of *das Naturschöne*, an elegant constellation of fantasy and reality in which a "different beginning," or, another "place" for thinking is made possible. Still, Hitchcock's project fails, if it is merely read as a master thriller or as a psychological story pertaining to Scottie and Madeleine. Hitchcock longs for a film that surpasses itself by rising to a work of art which does not necessarily fall from the everyday world. Without realizing it perhaps, he seems to nourish an important aspect of Adorno's "aesthetic" explorations: "While apparition is the instant of illumination and of being touched by something, the image is the paradoxical attempt to capture this exceedingly fleeting moment" (AT, 125). The attempt to make the image (Madeleine) stand still, and simultaneously, to intensify the dynamic quality of this desirable stillness (*das Naturschöne*) fails in the cinema. Yet, it fares well in filming.¹² More than imaging or discerning the hidden meaning of images, filming invariably shoulders the principle of elegance, for Kant, perhaps, the only lasting virtue. Allowing for exactitude, filming exceeds the cinematographic interests of filmmaking, disengaging the hermeneutic urge to see and interpret "things" in a particular way, be it transcendental, absolute, or even perspectival. Filming radically displaces metaphysical representations. It shows a signifier that has lost its signified and has thereby been transformed into apparition. The self had been such a signifier; now, the self is an

¹²See my *Filming and Judgment: Between Heidegger and Adorno* (Atlantic Highlands NJ: Humanities Press International, 1990). This text illustrates an unprecedented thinking of filming beyond the dialectic and "deconstruction."

a-imaginal constellation. Thus, the scene of the self has moved away from it-self. Ob-scenity emerges, revealing a *glissement* of self, a being-in-apparition. Rapidly fading, the concept of self shows traces of it-self in Madeleine, a collage of images not linked to the progression from past to present into future, nor simply to a circle of temporality, unless this circle reveals filmic formations of difference. Neither appearance nor noumenon, the self dissolves in filming. Julie Christie expresses this "softmodern" mood in *The Gold Diggers*: "I'm born in a beam of light. I move continuously yet I'm still. I'm larger than life, but yet do not breathe. Only in darkness am I visible. You can see me but never touch me. I can speak to you but never hear you. You know me intimately and I know you not at all. We are strangers and yet you take me inside you. What am I?"¹³ Still, a self may be uncovered: in filming, Madeleine may be viewed as enabling viewer, director, producer, author, actor, and critic to see, make, write, and reflect upon a phenomenal montage of presence. More than a self, however, it is *filming* (Madeleine) that exists. To amplify Godard's Cartesian mime: "Je pense, donc le cinéma existe."¹⁴ Exceeding the bold and exact operations of the camera, filming is also more than a postmodern eye striking out against the Cartesian subject. In addition to a radical questioning of the dialectic script, filming provides a distinctive way of encountering presence, whose traces of past and future are no longer present to representation. Beyond images and narration, filming happens when *Denken* becomes the unexchangeable emotion, ready to enter into a fateful discourse of worldly things.¹⁵ A peculiar sensation belongs to thinking, the feeling of *das Naturschöne*. The supplementary apparition of the beautiful-in-nature that rises in the film, but does not present itself as such, endures in filming as Madeleine wanders beyond the diverse expressivities of color, music, and dialogue toward the splendor of human experience and its uncanny brevity.

¹³Cited from Mary Ann Doane's *Femmes Fatales* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 94.

¹⁴See Timothy Corrigan, *The Displaced Image* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), pp. 3-23.

¹⁵Indeed, this is the very title of David Halliburton's text, a highly original interdisciplinary inquiry into the relation of *Denken* and the socio-political that amounts to a much needed Continental philosophical alternative to deconstruction.

Finally, *Vertigo* expands the notion of film into an art of the anti-film. Madeleine blooms as work of art, exceedingly disruptive in each cinematic moment. She exhibits what cannot be seen, what cannot and will not be in the sensible world of the cinema. The narrative in the film becomes problematic inasmuch as Madeleine, on her way to apparition, is unable to participate in the ontic strategies of Gavin, Scottie, or even Alfred. *Vertigo* begins as it ends, with Madeleine falling from Hitchcock's own filming. She turns the idea of a single dialectic (Scottie) upside down, revealing a discernible turn to an "indiscernible" *Lebensgefühl*. Her glance rests beyond the faces of the "directors" in the film (Gavin and Scottie) as well as the director of the film. An anti-film surfaces in the film, perhaps, a just wandering about, as the viewer wonders what *Vertigo* is about.

Madeleine, the Softmodern

In reading our time it is easy to slip into a mode of perception that sees the world as will and representation or, politics and technology. What may therefore remain unsaid is how *we regard the world* and this *how* need not be another *what*. That is to say, world need not be read as presentment. If we do an aesthetic take on it, world suddenly becomes more than a teletechno-electro polis. It also becomes more than a particular political gaming. This "more" is not read ontologically in Heidegger's sense. Nor is it read "messianically" in Derrida's sense. While the dynamically eschatological mode may be more desirable than the Heideggerian as well as the Blochian hope, Derrida's concession of promise, the promise of gift, is perhaps too metamodern, or, at least, still too postmodern.

We would like to propose an aesthetic that is neither transcendental nor ontological in the manner of Gadamer's "philosophy" of art. Aesthetic, then, is neither modern nor postmodern. It is rather Kantian in Madeleine's softmodern sense. What about an aesthetic of the softmodern? A playing/judging/imagining in and beyond cinematic criteria? One might argue that a modern and postmodern reading of presence is still too hard. In the former, we have too much "realism," while in the latter we get lost in semblance. The problem with regard to both is that there is still too much "dialectical theory." The prescription, as Lyotard might say, is still too strong in both forms of thought. On

the other hand, we don't merely want to describe or just hang loose in a peculiar Lyotardian gaming. This would be excessively postmodern.

It is time, as Nietzsche urged a hundred years ago, to lighten up, to dispense with the spirit of gravity. However, this new clearing ought not to be confused with Vattimo's "soft thinking." The softmodern is quite different from a post-Gadamerian play of interpretation. The softmodern is related more to the idea of "soft goods," that is, goods that are not durable. In short, the softmodern is not designed to exist for a long time. It doesn't last. More clearly, this means that softmodern judging exceeds the modern holding on to values as well as the postmodern letting go of them. What is so intriguing about the softmodern is that it lets the goods come and go without worrying about when they're going to come and when they're going to go. Additionally, the goods are not bad for us. They may be ghosts. They may belong to the community. They may be the ideas of the genealogy of culture. They are good for us precisely because they are not durable. We no longer want the ideas to be durable. This does not mean that they are weak. We may even want the ideas to be the kind of goods (and not necessarily gifts) that are pleasing to the senses, bringing ease, comfort, or, a quiet *techne*. In this regard, the goods are not transcendently beautiful.

The softmodern, then, might well be "photo-graphic" if by "photo" we fancy what is light, radiant and momentary. This *Lichtspiel* reads and rereads the moment. It is drawn to *Augenschein*, to what "strikes the eye." Paradoxically, what strikes the eye in *Vertigo* is the apparition of tomorrow, the machine of today. Smooth and delicate, the softmodern moves without ever failing to ground something again. Nietzsche refers to this thinking as a kind of *adagio*, a slow and graceful judging that opens world to the continuum of strandedness. This strandedness is a constellation of relations none of which function provincially. The strandedness is an ecstatic globe. It is world-wide exceeding historical time and capital eternity.

The softmodern reflects upon our time as a complex web, a universal machine, demanding a new literature of *Denken*, one that mirrors the tensions of the modern and the postmodern. The text, TV, and the Internet are breaking out simultaneously. As the discourse changes, the dis-location becomes more obscene. The film is suddenly gone and filming is nearly counterspectral. 