

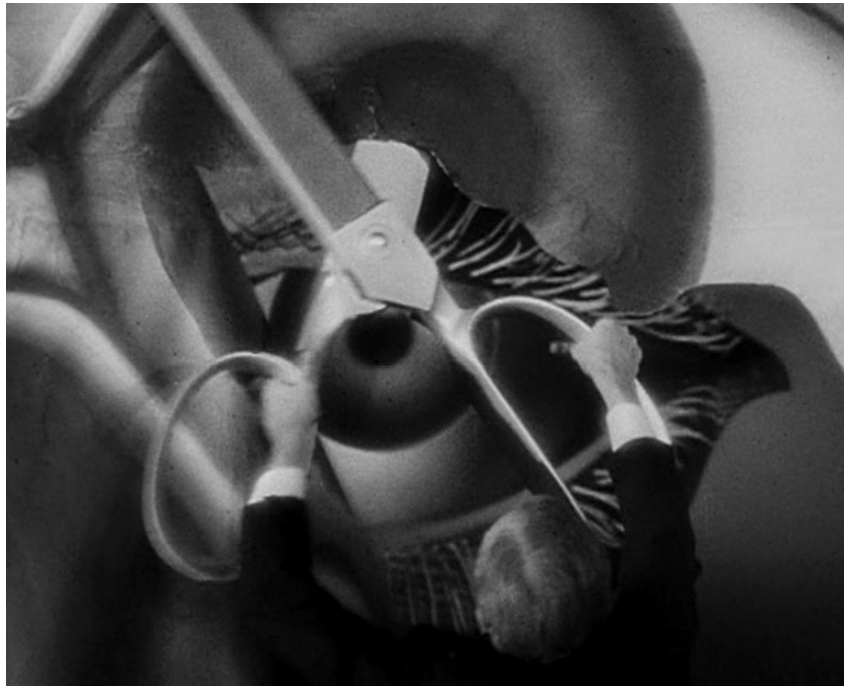
TOM COHEN

Legacies of Theory; or, Grand Central Station

Today, more than ever before, to think one's time, especially when one takes the risk or chance of speaking publicly about it, is to register, in order to bring it into play, the fact that the time of this very speaking is artificially produced. It is an *artifact*. In its very happening, the time of this public gesture is calculated, constrained, "formatted," "initialized" by a media apparatus (let's use these words so that we can move quickly.) This would deserve nearly infinite analysis.

Derrida, *Artifactualities*

The image of an eye being cut is from Dali's dream sequence in Hitchcock's *Spellbound*. I will ask you to linger on this title a moment, which seems to address being bound to or by a certain spell. Here, one might suppose, if the spell lay in the eye or seeing itself, it is also capable of being cut or suspended — as if the eye were cut with scissors by what precedes it in the order of memory, traces, machines. I will return to this picture or image or frame, which I offer in association with the phrase "legacies of *theory*" that serves to title the conference. The term theory reverts to seeing, after all, the Greek *theorein* that mutates into theater and, implicitly, the performative, which suspends its *ocularist* premise: in the shot below the legacies of the eye, the dominance of the eye in the medium that seemed to service it, is cut, the *theorein* itself scissored by something that precedes it. I will focus, under the question of the legacies of theory, on the site in which theory seems most



abjected, warded off or put away, which is to say, where it strikes at a certain artifactual eye as constructed.

Legacies are relayed through vertiginous temporal networks and backloops, splintering and recasting times. Yet to speak of them, as with “legacies of theory,” is to risk memorialization — what may seem a temptation, momentarily, in the current environment. Yet what if what we call “theory” were to prove, from the point of view of centuries hence, as a mere beginning, a key phase in a collective transition of epistemological models for late, post-“global” orders? Or if what we once called, even, close reading has all along migrated from bibliocentric to teletechnic networks, archival or tele-archival sites from which ideologies and memory systems are or seem legislated — and one had no choice, if one is impelled to test, or translate, or dissolve old software, but to return, as does a certain figure in

“theory,” to the category of inscriptions, seemingly preoriginary settings? Does the phrase “legacies of theory” mark a family property to be given lineage, or needing legitimacy, or a moment of generational transition to be speculated over — in what would seem an implacable enough horizon (the university in ruins, the spectrigenous spell of post-democratic and post-global America)? So, first of all, I offer an opinion: that this is not quite over — whatever has been implied by the translational task of “theory” or whatever name or form it takes. It perhaps has hardly begun — if it aims, in its entirety, at positioning a certain epistemo-political program to be transformed, or have that chance, if it has all along been something preparatory to the event. Perhaps it has barely begun — or so one might assume, given the shifts and accelerations we are witnessing in the post-democratic and post-“global” mediocracies today: the drift to a one-party state, the reversion to totalized “wars,” the impingement of climactic impasses and bio-eviscerations, and so on.

I will begin with an anecdote, a memory, and it is of Paul de Man. It was after his reading of “The Resistance to Theory” at Yale. At the reception I asked him something, which I don’t recall, but the back and forth settled on Benjamin. De Man quipped that he was “an over-rated writer.” That’s all I recall — and he repeated it. Nasty. Now you see: there is a difficult transition, or legacy of theory, between Benjamin and de Man, whose late work could be seen as a rewiring of Benjamin’s metaphoric epigrams, engineering the micrological sites in the mutating archive which could, perhaps, be intervened at. Yet Benjamin is largely missing from de Man’s writing except for the late talk, an odd piece, on “translation” — where *that* is nonetheless defined, in the follow-up discussion, as what is preparatory to the event. This fratricide within the postal relays of “theory” (what we can call that — keeping in mind that, above all, we will associate the ghost of this term with what de Man called “inscription,” with programs of memory and time which legislate perception and the senses, such as what de Man grouped under the term aesthetic ideologies), this *fratricide* operates like a kind of incorporation.

In the public narratives of “American” deconstruction, Derrida’s might be called with ample reason the good as if to a sort of bad de Man — whose posthumous implosion withdrew the afflatus of charisma or aura and left untimely scars or foreclosures never quite accounted for, whose legibility had been quarantined (in Avital Ronell’s phrase). Perhaps the implications of de Man’s occlusion has yet to be narrated, or evaluated as the design of a certain

“de Man,” or assessed as an opportunity that was, generally, mishandled or missed. What we now call the “de Man” affair worked essentially to leave a wound, or unmournable space, in the historical trajectories of theory — a rift that might be, oddly, responsive if not responsible to what has not occurred in the critical trajectory since de Man’s virtual bracketing and occlusion. Now, I will only comment, personally, that I had always been amusedly perplexed by this event, which implied such a rupture within the “legacies of theory.” I found it natural enough that de Man’s discursive history had, shall we say, *interesting* episodes; I found it curious that the *response* of colleagues was bound to a strategy of defense and explication that was, rhetorically, a trap; and I found it curious that his various legatees fell into something like trauma. There would be no recuperating this. And since de Man perhaps knew this was coming, and built a trajectory on the evacuation of aura and personification, I never assumed he could not have maliciously willed something of the sort — forcing, as a matter of course, a betrayal or evacuation of what would have been his own memorialization.

Today, one can see some errors de Man made in his strategy — even where one could not imagine this otherwise. By “strategy” I mean how he deployed his conceptual turf. Unlike Benjamin, who would reverse significations for classic tropes in a fashion left externally unmarked (*allegory*, say, where the premise of representational indexing is turned back on itself, destroying its own preinscriptions) or Derrida, who will perpetually alter nomenclature, the later de Man turned into a received discourse directly — and disappears, becomes a point of disappearance, into their preoriginary constitution to pass, *abruptly*, elsewhere, behind the shingle: into the linguistic orders of programming. *Irony, ideology, the aesthetic* — each classical term was to bear the burden of its own sabotaging within the broader canon, since their perpetual “relapse” into hermeneutic staples was, for de Man, structural. Yet all things considered, it was naïve even to assume these words, like those of classical rhetoric, could do the work assigned to them for readers. For instance, one might want to translate whatever de Man meant by the term “language” into something like teletechnics per se — of which the era of the book would be a primary dossier. When the term *allegory* is recovered, from Benjamin’s praxis, as an archival practice altering time-lines and positing “irreversible” translation — that is, the passing of an entire epistemological or Enlightenment template — it still conceals itself behind “modernist”

facades.¹ De Man, in repairing that “over-rated writer,” knowingly entered a trap that attends any project returning to a site that is preoriginary to yet restorative of a precursor text — you see, the legacies of theory, like any other, can be quite bloody, cause civil wars, battles and usurpations (a point I will turn to in a moment with some remarks on Hitchcock’s *Spellbound*).² What can one do with the term “irony” today, not to mention “anacoluthon” — if, that is, these were categories to be filled out, which they were not. I have always differed from those who felt “de Man” sketched a program to be implemented and repeated, to draw close to positions hypostasizing “grammar” (a handy and scandalous de-anthropomorpheme): I always assumed, at its limits, de Man built a set of traps that required to be broken, again, as the answer to their riddling appropriation of historical forces. By a reorientation toward “the materiality of inscription” as sheer anteriority, de Man was an engineer, seeming the opposite, of intervention, of a thinker not of “rhetoric” but technicity and mnemonic politics.

It may be that de Man’s very role in “American deconstruction” and the overarching trajectory of Derrida’s work obscured a reading that would have been quite differently produced, that it came at a reverse price: let us just say, a reading where de Man’s micrological refinement of Benjamin’s “materialistic historiography,” his engineering of precisely how, in exemplary moments, monads within the archival machine stood to be entered, suspended in their machinations, opened to disinscription, might appear as

- 1 For de Man, excavating and implementing Benjamin’s core logic, as if recovering a term at a point preoriginary to its perpetual “relapse,” allegory or irony for that matter, or the aesthetic, could not do this *work*. These terms appear in de Man at times spellbound before their own aporia. Other formulas also were too tentative: to pass “irreversibly” into the *other* conception of language that is “performative,” as de Man defines it, invests too much in this last word — rendering it, if inescapable as a station of sorts, an obstacle.
- 2 As an engineer refining the tools for what Benjamin called “materialistic historiography,” de Man’s surgical readings (and let us keep in mind this image of the medical practice, the surgical intervention, the archival hospital or asylum it implies) present techniques for interventions in what Benjamin called monads — singular sites in the archive where the rewiring of historical trace-chains is optioned. The hermeneutic tradition always tends toward “relapse” before the event, and that relapse guards political regimes wired to self-destroying cultural histories and programs.

entirely technical. There remains a rift between De Man and Derrida that is unexplored, unopened, because so much weighed against its interrogation even by Derrida (loyalty to a fallen comrade). It is an interesting rift, since the space it opens, contested and ascribable to neither style, returns to a sort of undefined task that is not altogether owned or defined by the “deconstructive” styles that have defined it. It may be that the intervention de Man was altogether poised toward in a fashion more thoroughly deauratic than Benjamin could muster, with the latter’s “over-rated” tropes (blasting, shock, natural history), would be oriented not to academic polemics about unreadability in the 80’s but to a yet more horizonless aesthetic totalization than that of the “world wars” of still imperial nation states that seem, merely, preparatory to the post-“global” order emerging today — one caught, like America, in an auto-immunity process acceleration that will, in effect, as is already clear, bring a close to one epoch of formal “democracy” in its previous imaginary. That is, as one inspects what de Man meant by *aesthetic ideology* in its spellbinding dominion, its *programming of perception and sensation and memory* (as well as defining how the “aesthetic” can be understood), it seems clearer that late de Man, with his tools, was seeking sites not where the aporia of readings could be elaborated but where an encompassing inversion would be — was already — required. These sites would have been keystone sites that shared, nonetheless, the role of altering entire networks, prerecordings, historial agencies, pasts and, necessarily (for this was their point), possible pasts and futures. He was speaking, that is, of *media*, of teletechnics in what he chose to call, with effaced citations, its “materiality” — what for de Man loops through sheer anteriority as such. This, much as Benjamin would attempt to rewrite allegory or translation as a cinema that, void of aura, would resemble no known practice (unless that is Hitchcock).

What has this to do with the eye as a construct, today, or within the histories of recent media? Reading, which may become more micrological by degrees, and puts structures of memory and cultural transmission on the line, so to speak, enters the programs of the “senses.” One might recall that Benjamin defined aura, in the Baudelaire essay, as “personification,” and its retraction is what, again, de Man will focus on in examining prosopopeia as a ghost trope that conjures the specter of a subject.) When Benjamin referenced a recasting of the “sensorium,” of how the senses themselves (say, the eye or the visual) are programmed, one is returned to the orders of memory and *technicity* and inscription — that is, one finds oneself in the spell

of *aesthetic ideology*, of which ocularcentrism, the dominance of the eye, might be taken as a symptom and agency. The notion, that is, that what we call the “eye” deriving from Plato’s *eidein* (which pretends to fuse *knowing* with *seeing*) and empowering the imaginary *capo* of Enlightenment epistemology, were itself a mnemonic construct, literally and historically. Even prehistorically — given that the *visual* has been produced and implemented to define a certain, perhaps now entirely prosthetic, model of the human.³

But this leads back to the artifactual “present” which seems spellbound by a *totalization* of aesthetic ideology through a mutating media which, in every sense political and altering the very premise of the polis, saturates and neutralizes informational streams, occludes the “materiality” of what we will call the *nonanthropomorphic*, and accelerates what Derrida has posited as its suicidal auto-immunitary spiral in a spectral “global” war on something called *terror* that is without temporal or aesthetic horizon.

I will retrace this line of inheritance I have been toying with and an abrupt shift that is not one, really, where a thread or series of appropriations, or transposed legacies, has formed a sort of cat’s cradle. Rerouted through Benjamin’s own shuttle, I have reattached de Man’s so called “materiality of inscription” was reattached to teletechnics as such, and hence a certain way of thinking media broadly. Nothing resembles the material caricature of cinematic production like the de Manian phrase, “the phenomenality of inscription,” yet while de Man, essentially an engineer, recasts the “over-rated” Benjamin on allegory, on translation, and on “materiality,” he does not cross the threshold into *cinematics*. The histories of teletechnics that produces the “present” have been little examined. When Derrida in *Specters of Marx* appropriates Freud’s account of the three traumas to human narcissism — the Copernican, the Darwinian, and the Psychoanalytic — he adds a fourth, or “materialistic,” in what he calls an aporetic postscript to this roll-call. Yet he refuses to identify this with Marx simply and disperses across the general teletechnic accelerations of the 20th century: we might metastasize

3 It seems that the early survival of the *anthropos* determined seeing through two functions, identifying the friend or the enemy clan (that is, *face*) and tracking prey (the *chase*, the determination of sheer movement as the capture and annihilation of what is to be consumed) — and that the model of the chase would become that of reading, of philosophical pursuit of the truth (already implanted by memory), recognition.

it, synechdochally, as the advent of the cinematic image. I want now to make a brief incursion into this domain, keeping in mind that whatever one must call, today, political and sensorial programming is tied to the advent and mnemonic controls of the cinematic. One is currently in a zone, again, where what has been a totalization of war (now “global”) and its corresponding disappearance from the screen (no corpses) coincide — and where an irreversible drift toward militarized one-party (if not authoritarian) consumer states using Enlightenment epistemes as a recycled front is not to be approached as, perhaps, merely virtual.

I would propose a brief reading of the implications of the Dali image cited above, as a moment embedded within competing histories and *histories of the artifactual senses*. In doing so, if only in caricature, I would ask what sort of active histories of the senses and of contemporary teletechnics need be practised, written, explored — and in what active sort of a spectral mode — to engage, if not break, the media spells one finds one’s horizons engulfed in today, amidst various numbing accelerations? How, moreover, does reading or even rhetorical analysis resonate, in the era of teletechnics, as a means of altering memory programs on default?



Hitchcock inscribes his screen with a recurrent series of bars or slashes, slicing and citing space and time before any visibility quite, any memory, any inscription can quite coalesce: this recurrent series precedes spells and casts them, it is Hitchcock's signature for the cinematic cut even as it both generates and suspends ocularcentric programs. It is this pattern which is the unexpected topos of *Spellbound* — where it is sought as the clue to an amnesia tangled in the end of a world war and the enunciation of a new mediatic dispensation, and in which a new "empire" of post-war culture is as if contested.

Spellbound is set toward the close of the world war, yet also at a certain locus in what I will call the prehistory of contemporary teletechnics. If we find ourselves, today, in a certain spectragraphic and spectragenic domain — momentarily signaled by a "global" war on terror, so called, presented as without temporal or geographic boundaries — it may be of interest to know what different technologies might have been at war over control over the shape memory and programming would take. One of those engines, certainly, is the cinematic, as a sort of sponge and umbrella for all tele-technologies at once (telegraphies, animation, telephony, photophorics), the site in which encompassing templates of information, identification, and programming would be installed (associated, as it must be, since its advent, not only with propaganda and advertising, but nuclear fission, techno-weaponry, instant "globalization," sensory and memory-management).

The shot of a cut eye in Hitchcock's *Spellbound*, in the Dali-inspired dream sequence, seems to mark several things. Among else, it indicates where a certain cinematic practice brandishes the power to dispel ocularcentrism as such as an Enlightenment trance or spell upon which entire epistemo-political orders would be managed — it indicates, with a cut, the dissolution of a certain model of the "human" associated with the head, the eye, the immediacy of perception, with aesthetic ideology tout court (that is, if we hear "aesthetic ideology" as one name for where the senses are blindly programmed to mistake their hallucinogenic patterns for "perception" or reference).

Spellbound is a peculiar text — the "spell" it names is manifold. It implies the spell of the psychosis that haunts the amnesiac Gregory Peck, who goes into teeth grinding trances at the site of a pattern of *parallel bars*. I will latter suggest that these bars — so many lines or slashes in a series — induce this state for a reason. Aside from evincing the material premise of the cinematic, a series of cuts before any mimetic image can take place, it gives a signature

that is without aura or what Benjamin would call “personification.” It would seem by being without name or place *psychotic*, Hitchcock suggests, by being the minimal performative notation for material semiosis or preinscription — it stands outside all possible identification or metaphor. But the “spell” in question, in a film that officially treats for the first time psychoanalysis (as Selznick affirms for us in his scrolled text), is also of the audience undergoing the cinematic spell (in the audience and more virtually), but then too of the hermeneutic machine operating in the asylum Green Manors — where all would be *interpreted*, controlled, diagnosed, and given a name or phobia or “complex.”



This is how Hitchcock sets up the simulacrum of pop psychoanalysis (which is not to say Freud exactly). And it is also the spell of contemporary ocularcentrism and teletechnic programming in the wake of Enlightenment

tropology — down through the present. The film is made at the end of the second *World War* which is barely mentioned, except in a poster selling *War Bonds* in Grand Central Station — center of all arrival and departure of vectors, trains, tropological narratives — and in “J. B.’s” (that is the Peck character’s name or initials) recollection of a trauma, an accident that leaves a scar and skin graft on his *hand*: he is we hear shot down over *Rome*, capital of the theo-political past and empire, in a “*transport* plane.” But Rome is also the locus of the Holy *See*. This will be the first, and most inconsequential of two recollected traumas that will, perhaps, regift him with a memory, restore as the infantile passive-aggressive homoerotic “Peck” Hitchcock reveals, indifferently, as potentially more lethal than the zero-like amnesiac. I should note that here, at the close of one *world war*, a second will be fought as if between cinema and psychoanalysis — and this too is for control over the world or “global” to come. That is, there is a war between two spectragraphic *pretenders* (cinema and psychoanalysis) for mastery over the archival tapes and the empire-to-come of the “global” epoch whose logic is implied the moment there is cinema and marked in the film as well.⁴

Thus the figure of the capital, “Rome,” comes up again and again — capital not of one nation or another but of the empire on and over which the Western infrastructure lies, the center of the world, of world, as well as the church, the power of spirits. There are three Romes mentioned (that in Italy, that of Georgia, and New York’s — the last in the *empire* state). The *new* Rome, or new Empire that supersedes the fall of Europe, Manhattan, is also a front for the “empire” state — the stationary tele-image — that is already wiring the global-effects to come. The film which should be about psychoanalysis somehow sprints into this focus on *Rome* and an unshaped Empire, albeit one that cinema itself guards and competes ostensibly with pop psychoanalysis for: control of the programming and definitions of the (mass) psyche, of memory, of spectragraphics in its entirety. Control of

4 Hitchcock did not take sides, quite, in his war films — seeing, it seems, the liberal democracies and the fascist models as two extremes in the same spectrum, variants within an Enlightenment template that was itself running on a self-canceling trajectory, that itself was the *ill* represented in the asylum, Green Manors, a sort of *gran mal d’archive* — which would anticipate a “global” war to come against unnamed or spectral others far more totalized than the 20th century imperial wars.



ghosts. The film is uniquely introduced with a quote from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, a work of deflected usurpation and imperial assassination, and a key scene occurs in the lobby of an Empire State Hotel in New York City — a hotel or hôte, perhaps, from which the levers of ideational programs are set. Indeed, the sign before what is called the *Empire State Hotel* is interesting: a rectangle, it reflects traffic in the street, a screen reflecting vehicles and machines of transport or cinematic ghosts. This “psychoanalytic” detective story, if it is one, subjects pop psychoanalysis to a savage defacement and compels a summary suicide by its the criminal “director” of Green Manors. Yet it also, as in a backspin, subjects Hitchcock's cinema to a sort of semiotic psychoanalysis that returns to its prefigural trauma, before any aura or

personification, in the pattern of parallel lines. In addition, it sees itself as a discrete event in a war for spectral domination of the pre-global era.



But when “J. B.” does have his faux flashback to recall the urtrauma of his memory loss, the supposed original of the series of parallel lines as a spiked fence — it is of a *fratricide*. You recall how, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud settles on “Rome” as a model for the archaeological unconscious — really, it is more what Derrida calls a *khora* logic: the site where inscriptions co-habit from which history is phenomenalized. Hitchcock cites Rome as a telearcheology of what Freud announces as a figure of “civilization” — and what are called its discontents, its *ills*, and as something other than a “human habitation”:

let us, by a flight of imagination, suppose that Rome is not a human habitation but a physical entity with a long and copious past — an entity, that is to say, in

which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist along side the latest one. (qtd in Punter 263)

But for Hitchcock, Rome has become less “unconscious,” the intended analogue, than telearchive, *lebor*, where “nothing that has once come into existence” — and here Nietzsche’s “eternal return” is evoked, banalized by the projector’s circles and spools — disappears. The past is not past, it co-habits what is not a “human” site, with a present that is already spectralized by it (“the latest one”).

What is being battled over, usurped, disseminated as world war or that over empires? It is not territory but mastery of a teletechnics or, if you like, spectrographic power at work from the inside: the power to reach into and shape mass media consciousness on a global scale or (pop) psychoanalysis’ usurping power as institutionalized, hiding behind an equally mock-Enlightenment pretense (to be medically affirmed as a “cure” of memory). Each fashions an “ego” to be inhabited, identified with, then generated. The stakes are extreme. This is the mock *face off* between the doubles of Hitchcock, or cinema, and Freud, or psychoanalysis — both involve sciences of ghosts, both invade and rewire memory and perception, but the latter, with its therapeutic promise (made explicit in the film: a recovered memory will “cure” the sane, the opening scrolled text explains), openly pretends to an Enlightenment façade to work its spells. One is reminded of the remark in *The Golden Ass* about two priests not being able to look at one another without suppressing a smile. And the stakes are presented entirely as the supplantation of religious power — with its returns to Rome and Gabriel’s Valley.

Thus there is at one point an attempt to explain Peck’s *illness*, his being aghast by and before light and whiteness, as “photophobia.” *Photophobia* — it is a funny mock-complex: for here the glare of snow does not name a fear of light (or what the text calls “the ‘word’ white”), since what is remarked in the snow is called “tracks,” parallel lines that precede and mark and inform what is called light. It is a fear of what “light” is exposed to be — a prosthetic, rather than in any way natural or luminous, effect, itself an alternation of flickering waves or frequencies, a spectral technic among others. That it, “light,” has no claim to solarity, originariness, illumination — that it, too, is the metaphor for a semiotic effect, and so on. Accordingly, the eye will have to be cut to break this spell — particularly if the “eye” is itself

not an organ of transmission but a mnemonic fable or confabulation which cinema, pretending to service, cannot not put out. This moment is in contact with the blindman of *The Birds*, eyes pecked out by mechanical black wing slashes.

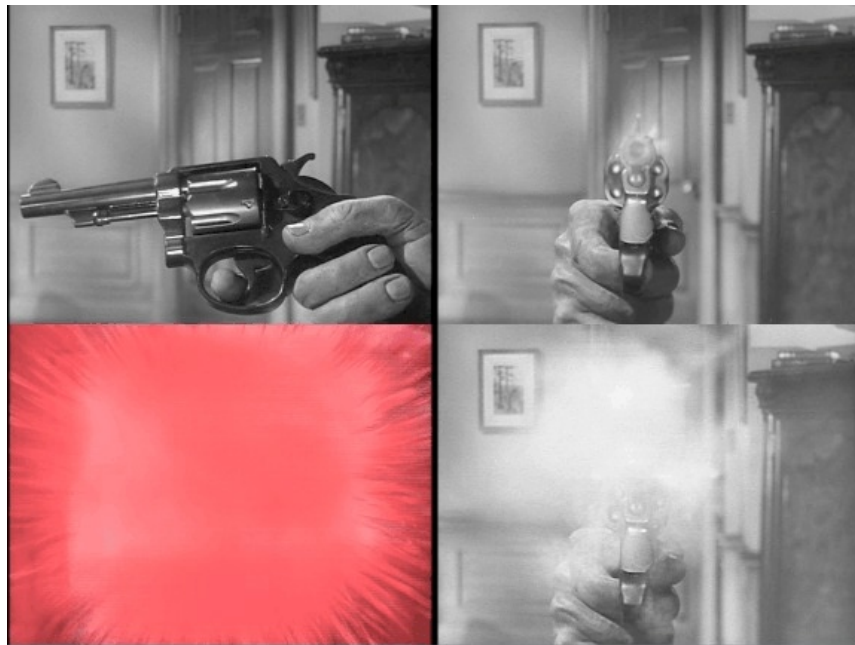


You recall that in what Hitchcock later calls the bird war — the assault of technics and flying animemes against the “human” as such (including family, house, and image) — the birds peck out eyes. That is their mode. In that *bird war*, which is the “war” that Hitchcock names beyond that of mere world wars between fratricidal nation states, these material emissaries or inscriptions attack the school house just when the children are reciting memorized answers and songs in unison — when their herd-like memories are being inscribed, like mynah birds.



Hitchcock routinely used different *fronts* to inscribe cinema's anarchic "blast" or intervention, in Benjamin's sense, into the histories it would accelerate and configure — that "shock," so called, whose trope in Hitchcock would be a bomb, a gun-shot linked to cameras, a weapon of mass destruction born by a character named Mr. Memory. These fronts include a false temple of sun worshippers or a theater like music hall or, in *Family Plot*, cinema as a faux séance. Yet in *Spellbound* it is psychoanalysis — another ghost machine — which is the complex front and double of cinema; fraternal in aims, it seems embodied, recognized, instituted, while cinema is deemed mere low mimetic entertainment (its invisible power to program the world unrecognized). Hitchcock knows cinema will prevail as the premier spectragenic technic of the "modern" to come, which led Godard to say that at one point Hitchcock, as first master of global media, had more power than Napoleon or Hitler over the real. Interesting aside. Hitchcock calls uses the word "empire," here and elsewhere, even if it is doubled — it is both the bad empire of a cultural trance, like that of today's mediocratic America, or the resistance, the assassins and cinematic "villains" of his political thrillers in all their permutations. And this is why *Spellbound* inexplicably sets a story of psychoanalysis to the *theremin* music of grade-b vampire or ghost films. Psychoanalysis — like cinema — is a science of ghosts, an ordering and

naming of the ghosts of a global culture to come: to control these new spirits and simulacra, to assign them agencies, is the very essence of Caesarian power.



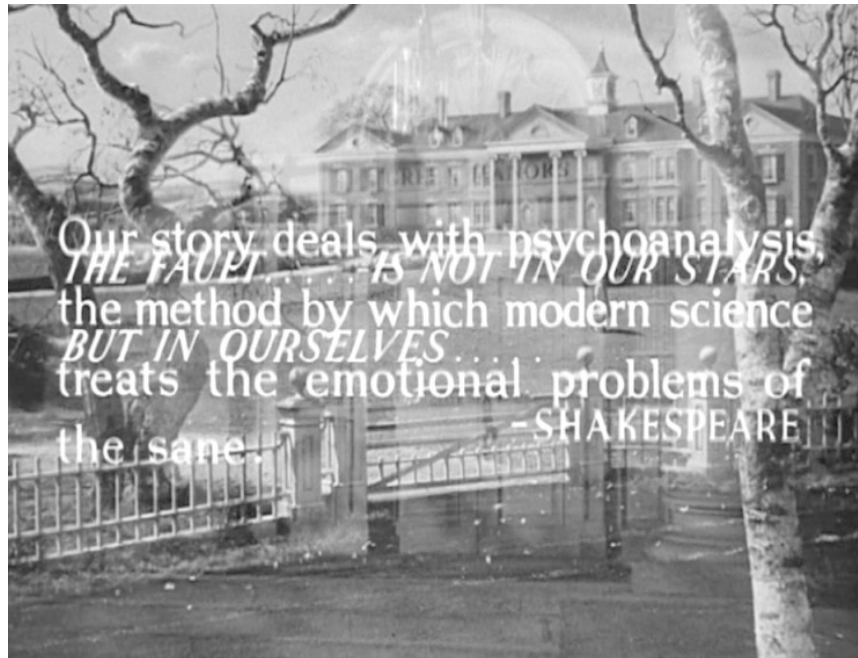
Or *would be*, since this battle leads, instead, to an almost proleptic suicide. It is Dr. Murchison's, the director's, which is represented by a giant fake hand turning a revolver into the eye, into the lens, and firing — as if cinema could only take down itself and the ocularcentric metaphors of psychoanalysis (or its simulacrum), with this hand of sheer technics, this *reel*-like revolver, knowing it, at least, as a ghost without any one body, would of course survive — void, as it is, of aura. It will move from body to body, because it has no one, except the corpulent outline of Hitchcock, perhaps, itself

become host or signature of interlocking circles, cinematic circlets. Indeed, the suicide *shot* (as if by cinema of itself too) will even include the first flash of color, of red, in Hitchcock's black and white cinema, impossibly recording the blood of the eye that is shot amid cinematic smoke (the chiaroscuro of reflected light on suspended particles). Set in the mediatized house of Green Manors, where the surgery room mimics a production set's flood lights, blinding to "J. B.," Murchison's suicide recalls what Derrida has called, in his analysis of "9/11," the suicidal auto-immunity process which guarantees and incorporates self-cancelling logics — like phantom dogfights over the Rome of lower Manhattan. The auto-immunitary process involves a spectral logic, whereby the homeland accelerates the self-cancelling drive it conceals by a double-chase as if launched against its spectral others.

Which may be why the figure of the *labyrinth* dominates the film — as reflected in Dr. Edwardes' circulated and commented on volume called *The Labyrinth of the Guilt Complex*, the book whose autograph betrays Peck's assumed identity to Ingrid Bergman. The labyrinth is that of the image itself, in what Eduardo Cadava, commenting on Benjamin, calls its "citational structure," yet it leads to a minotaur — half man, half animal, a monster which turns on and consumes the pursuer, with or without the string of Theseus. For the Minotaur or primal trauma is here associated with the pattern of parallel lines or cuts — or, after a few runs through *Grand Central Station*, the cinematic image itself, the locus of the world's dematerialization or rematerialization otherwise.

What *Spellbound* performs and covers, simulates and dissimulates the simulation of, is a faux fratricidal event. In the absence of an Oedipal machine or guarantee of transmission or even generational succession, everything is specular usurpation and positioning. Hitchcock and Selznick, Hitchcock and Freud, Hitchcock and "Hitchcock" — usurpation reaches back into a tunnel of similar lateral coups. The film exposes cinema's mastery of spectragraphic frequencies and *epistemes* to come as a sort of Benjaminian machine that, suspending historial time-lines (and looking beyond the premise of 20th century world war into time-lines of which it remained viral angel). It exposes, also, in that it is forced to turn or return to the preoriginary signature that puts into trances and appears like a memory before memory, an urtrauma that precedes the effects of cognition or legibility or mimesis. *Spellbound* returns to a site of inscription without appeal to the great house, Green Manors, which in *Spellbound* is also the house of

Hollywood's corrupt spectragraphic great house (it cites the logo of Selznick's studio *mansion* appearing before the credits).



And this is why cinema positions *itself*, with the pattern of parallel lines, as if in the one position which is the repressed of psychoanalysis, which the latter constitutes itself over again, which is to say, what it calls "psychosis" — and what, in any case, precedes all tropological and auratic premises. In making this preoriginary trauma as if a fratricide of doubles, Hitchcock suspends any Oedipal or, indeed, generational line of descent, any family romance, in favor of the co-eval strike: there are no patricidal impulses where the paternal itself is a mask worn by the other.

I have made this leap from a tangle of legacies in what we call "theory" into still unresolved histories of teletechnics which drive what cannot quite

be called the “planetary” today. In doing so, I am shuffling the problematic I find relevant in de Man into a teletechnic mode — but then, the very premise of terms and frequencies mutate again. What does emerge in this relay — whereby whatever de Man implied by “inscription” is located too obligingly as parallel to the inscription of celluloid before all phenomenalization on the screen of consciousness — is a technic or signature that Hitchcock deploys as a preoriginary if “material” agency. It is so preoriginary that it seems located at a nonsite of disinscription as well. At the site, that is, that J. Hillis Miller inspects under the names and logics of the zero, which as a cipher proliferates throughout Hitchcock as nulls, wheel, circuits, MacGuffins, eyes. The fratricidal bar pattern precedes all marking, all mnemonic programming, indeed, “light.” Elsewhere in Hitchcock, its *khora*-like premise may even be call “mother” — if we hear that term, as in *Psycho*, as without specific gender or place or originariness or voice. It is in the final dissolve in *Psycho* that Norman’s face passes away, through the death grin of mother’s skull, into the inky swamp.



Given de Man's loop through and, as I relayed, oblique dissing of Benjamin ("an over-rated writer"), and given the fratricidal and, I think, knowingly suicidal appropriation of *allegory* by de Man, one can indeed recall that Benjamin played with several names or logics to embody the logic of performative intervention within mnemonic orders which he ineluctably sought — or rather, in de Man's terms, "irreversibly," as a one-way street. These included allegory, but also translation, we know, and ended up in "materialistic historiography," where the premise of this too metaphorical blasting and so on would be positioned. Yet another was *cinema* itself — which, in Benjamin, seems to have implied the contrary of what that "medium" (or media in general) would be taken to be: if, as is the case, the majority of film studies resides in the aesthetic ideology of the visual which it suspends and destroys as aura (Benjamin's term was *zerschlagen*).

Spectragraphics, for Derrida, has to do with mourning, its management and politics. Yet cinema, in Hitchcock's sense, identifies with a site that stands at some point *beyond mourning* — and detaches itself, as its machinal nature warrants, from any personification ultimately. The slashing pecks of myriad flying black suns are animemes without aura that peck out eyes and drive from the house. The spell that would be broken in this *bird war*, again, is not only occularcentrism as such but the teletechnic trance in which the "human" — chasing its spectral terrorists and doubles — occludes the material orders of the biopolitical earth, which telemedia voids from the image. The war bonds of Grand Central Station bind "war" to the mediatized new Rome of sheer tele-transport, where all roads lead, the Empire State Hotel's reflecting surface and framed rectangle.

What Hitchcock displays in this conjuring of a new archival Rome and the suiciding of the director of the madhouse Green Manors — where the doctors are more gone than the patients, according to the logics of its illnesses — is the anticipation, at this close of a world war, the putative moment of the scenario, of coming *wars of reinscription*. Given the *totalization* of media horizons we are not quite witnessing, these will represent the chance of a certain intervention which Benjamin, in a much less *spellbound* impasse, conjured. The war bonds in Grand Central Station do more than signal the imbrication of the ticket paying movie-goer in the generation of war, of world war, to which cinema is bound, or *spellbound*. They locate the site of this war to come in the memory *bands* — and their programming.

Derrida's expropriation of "justice" is tied to his premise of a "democracy to come" that is never coincident with itself nor present — but

which premise and promise sustains the transformative labors of deconstruction's intervention. It presupposes nothing, least of all its arrival as such. Yet if one were in a situation which one could fairly predict a swerve very much in a different irreversible direction, if one could speak, say, of an autocracy to come and of catastrophes no longer structural but fairly calculable, one has perhaps entered a different calculus of horizons before something like a "materiality" that could be referenced to the black holes of oil or water reserves as much as to climate change or extinction events. One approaches this de-anthropomorphic site, as it were, in the backloop of mnemonic programming, in a cinematic mode, without aura, before the settings of any one default mode (say, the "eye"), before wiring the "senses" or "sense" itself to such artifactual immediacy or such a constructed "present." The antememorial returns as prehistorical flying birds or marks that avenge by putting out the blindness of human sight, of the ocularcentric model whose aesthetic default mode feeds the acceleration of self-canceling logics of consumption and capital — the house, the eye, the mimetic image. If political power has migrated into the mediocratic today, its "resistance" lies in this theoretical trace, before the eye or memory bans are installed, the projector bulb of aesthetic ideology flicked on. And one of the covert battle fronts of this resistance involves reinscription, alternative epistemo-economic models that struggle to emerge, virtual, as by a caesurian section initialed by what precedes or cuts to the outer rim of these amnesiac memories — what the bar-series performs and "represents." It would not take much calculation, today, to shake off the spell of daily image-streams and project a future of fortress techno-oligarchic states controlled by a new class divided from disempowered populations for which, given the coming pressures from non-human agencies (disappearing oil, poisoned water reserves, global warming, biosystemic collapse) the economic and political models we are familiar with have no chance of mutating. It has been easy for some matter-of-fact types today to envision sanctioned and passive genocides to come, water wars with local nuclear exchanges and so on — as a recent Pentagon report on climate change has done, anticipating only by two decades. This was before the iconographics of New Orleans arrived as script.

Perhaps the legatees of what was once called "theory" today — that is, the critical effort to transform memory programs locked in catastrophic default modes, to alter the definition of the "senses" themselves — have a slightly altered task, which is somehow broken with the econopolitics of mourning. To be positioned as if beyond mourning — to write as if for or

beyond the catastrophe, rather than as an attempt to make it disappear or be avoided — represents a departure, and rift. It goes to what precedes the eye, the programming of the senses (which is always a hermeneutic program), and seeks where the aesthetic ideology de Man traced in tradition as the very default and “relapse” of ideation, which is now totalized as a mediocratic milieu, opens, again and despite itself, onto the site of disinscription.

What is interesting to speculate on is not the failures of what is called “high theory” to establish academic hegemony, but the stupefaction of historicist and culturalist idioms that, very publicly, took over control of the “political” on the basis of old referential software — their stupefaction, and anesthetization, before the “contemporary” dispensation, before a model that has become totalized. This broad-based critical community — with its focuses on mimetic histories — seems to have sleepwalked and arrived totally unprepared for the machinery and semiotic drugs of the post-global dispensation, where the political appears anesthetized broadly. It has arrived diminished and without strategy in what is occurring “today.” This sleepwalking, that spell, may be related to a turn it did not take.

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