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## *Hitchcock and the Found Footage Installation: Müller and Girardet's The Phoenix Tapes*

This essay discusses the appropriation of films and images from Alfred Hitchcock's *oeuvre* in contemporary visual art and focuses on one work in particular, a 45-minute video by German filmmaker Matthias Müller and German video artist Christoph Girardet, entitled *The Phoenix Tapes* (1999), a work commissioned for the 1999 exhibition "Notorious: Alfred Hitchcock and Contemporary Art," at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford.

### *The Moving Image Installation*

During the 1990s, as museums, galleries, and festivals in North America and Europe began showcasing moving images in installations with increasing frequency, films and videos in the gallery space became familiar "attention-magnets," often contributing to the "circus environment of the big international survey show."<sup>1</sup> What tends to draw the spectator's attention in many of these installations is the exploration of both cinematic narrative and the cinematic representation of space.<sup>2</sup> In 1996, critic Chris Darke noted that the works included in London exhibitions such as the Hayward Gallery's "Spellbound: Art and Film" and the Institute of Contemporary Arts' "Pandaemonium: The London Festival of Moving Images" "put into play an articulation of selected cinematic elements—some attenuated, some recognisable, others deliberately absent" in order to ask the "spectator to consider what it means to make a 'cinematic' spectacle of an image."<sup>3</sup>

Often, this mode of questioning developed through the multiplication of visual representations, accomplished by using more than one screen, and through the fragmentary representation of narrative scenarios. Since display formats vary—incorporating large-scale videos (either shot on video or transferred to video from film) but also on occasion 16mm or 35mm film (more expensive to maintain as ongoing installations and therefore less common)—this type of installed art can be labeled the “cinematic moving image installation.”

The emergence of the cinematic moving image installation intersects with a recent historical development that should be of interest to Hitchcock scholars. In the 1990s, when Hitchcock’s cinematic corpus became fashionable source material for artists working in a variety of art forms and media, their work, in turn, became fodder for a few curatorial projects mounted at prominent modern art institutions. Notable exhibitions include the aforementioned “Spellbound: Art and Film” (which was not exclusively Hitchcock-centered) and “Notorious: Alfred Hitchcock and Contemporary Art”; the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art’s “Art and Film since 1945: Hall of Mirrors,” in 1996 (also not exclusively devoted to Hitchcock); and “Hitchcock: Art, Cinema and . . . Suspense” (which included both the traveling version of the “Notorious” exhibition and a new exhibition called “Moral Hallucination”), at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2000.<sup>4</sup>

The following is a selective, chronological list of a few Hitchcock-oriented film and video projects. The first three appeared in the “Notorious” exhibition.

Stan Douglas, *Subject to a Film: Marnie* (1989)

In this installation, a film loop projector continually repeats Douglas’ black-and-white, six-minute remake of the robbery scene in *Marnie* (1964), which is set in a distinctly modern office. Douglas manages to make nine shots and a dissolve look like one tracking shot. A splice in the film audibly punctuates the moment when Marnie finds the

combination to the safe and closes the drawer. This otherwise silent remake ends after this splice, immediately looping back to the beginning.

Douglas Gordon, *24 Hour Psycho* (1993)

Gordon's large-scale video projection slows down *Psycho* (1960) to a running time of approximately 24 hours and removes its soundtrack. Gordon makes use of an obsolete industrial VHS videotape deck, which has a "jog" mechanism that creates a seemingly-crude (often jerking) slow-motion effect, operating with (relative) consistency at a speed of 2 frames per second. The screen for *24 Hour Psycho* is suspended at an angle, so that it looms over the viewers.

The personal anecdote Gordon provides when discussing the work is well-known by now: while watching a video recording of a television broadcast of the original *Psycho*, the artist came to think that he had seen a shot of Janet Leigh unhooking her bra, in the scene in which Anthony Perkins takes a painting off the wall in order to spy on her. Video technology afforded him the opportunity to check whether the shot was indeed present in the broadcast version or merely an imagined fragment. (This shot, which was not included in the theatrical or broadcast version of the film, can be seen in the documentary *The Making of Psycho* on Universal Studios' *Psycho—Collector's Edition* DVD.) Gordon's anecdote points to his interest in the relation between public and private memory, between the more familiar shots from the shower scene, for example, and the unconfirmed bra shot which may be the product of the viewer's own voyeuristic proclivities. *24 Hour Psycho* asks the viewer to find, in the degraded images and erratic rhythms of the slow-motion version, another *Psycho*, a cinematic text being "screened" as if through psychological filters. A number of contemporary artworks centered on Hitchcock explore the themes of public/private memory and desire (see Huyghe's and LeVeque's work, below), but Gordon's installation appears to have achieved emblematic status.

Pierre Huyghe, *Remake* (1994-95)

Shot on 16mm film and screened on video, *Remake* is a shot-by-shot remake of *Rear Window* (1954), set in a suburban area of Paris that is undergoing construction. Deliberate "errors," such as audible directions for the amateur actors, are included in the new version, which was produced over a two-week period with little rehearsal, after Huyghe screened the original for his cast. Huyghe writes, "The spectator can compare the difficulties encountered by the performers of *Remake* with his own memory lapses, and his own mental reconstruction of the Hitchcock film."<sup>5</sup>

Les LeVeque, 2 *Spellbound* (1999) and 4 *Vertigo* (2000)

2 *Spellbound* submits *Spellbound* (1945) to two primary modifications: 1) re-editing and accelerating all of the original film's shots, in order to condense its 111 minutes into 7½ minutes, and 2) reversing every other frame along its vertical axis, creating a mirrored-image or kaleidoscope effect.<sup>6</sup> A techno-music soundtrack enhances the forward momentum of the piece. With 4 *Vertigo*, LeVeque continues the dual-modification method, submitting *Vertigo* (1958) to: 1) a re-edit which duplicates each frame four times, for a total frame duration of two seconds, and 2) a reorientation of each second, third, and fourth duplicate frame along its vertical or horizontal axis, producing a denser kaleidoscope effect.

Pierre Bismuth, *Respect the Dead* (*Vertigo*) (2001)

This video is one of a series of works entitled *Respect the Dead*. Each piece in the series is an edited version of a popular film (others include *The Godfather, Part II* and *Jaws*), ending after the first murder takes place in the narrative. *Respect the Dead* (*Vertigo*) presents the first four minutes and forty-two seconds of *Vertigo*.

## The Phoenix Tapes

Müller and Girardet's *The Phoenix Tapes* can be placed in the general category of Hitchcock-oriented moving image projects exemplified by the works listed above. *The Phoenix Tapes* appropriates footage from forty Hitchcock films, re-editing a large number of shots into six sections. The entire work can be seen in a variety of configurations and display formats, including a five-monitor and single-projection installation version (with each of the first five sections displayed on its own monitor and the sixth viewable as a projection), and single-projection or single-monitor versions in which each section appears sequentially on one screen.

The films, videos, and techniques that fall under the category of "found footage" form a second, broader context for *The Phoenix Tapes*.<sup>7</sup> Generally identified as a tradition of appropriating previously-shot footage in experimental film and video, found footage began as a film-based practice, tied to earlier traditions of collage and montage in visual media.<sup>8</sup> Within the subcategory of found footage films and videos that explore psychological issues, the transformations wrought by mental processes are suggested through the deployment of various optical processing techniques, as in Austrian filmmaker Peter Tscherkassky's *Outer Space* (1999). Tscherkassky's black-and-white film desaturates and darkens a series of color shots from Sidney J. Furie's 1981 horror film *The Entity* in order to convey states of anxiety and fear, as well as the female protagonist's sense of living in a distorted reality. When the film reveals sprocket holes and the flatness of the filmstrip, the material of cinema becomes suggestively expressive, as if the woman were trapped not only in her own home but also in the film frame itself. *The Phoenix Tapes* is not only a cinematic moving image installation but also a work that belongs to this psychological tradition within found footage practice.

Even a cursory review of the careers of Müller and of Girardet is sufficient to make the point that their collaboration has its roots in more than one discipline or practice,

bridging experimental film, video art, and gallery-based moving image art.<sup>9</sup> Until recently, Müller has been aligned more closely with found footage practices in film (in the super-8 format) than gallery-displayed moving image art. Active in German and Austrian experimental film communities since the mid-1980s, Müller co-founded the *Alte Kinder* ("old children") film co-operative in 1985 and organized the first German festival of found footage films in 1996.<sup>10</sup> Much of his earlier work constructs ambiguously personal, fragmentary, and sometimes erotic narratives out of footage which he subjects to various processes of optical modification. Working in the medium of video, Girardet uses techniques of repetition and looping to transform the representation of the human body in shots from narrative films. He has also produced, with Volker Schreiner, a video installation entitled *Subsoil* (1996), in which the projection of moving images (beginning with the depiction of a male figure jumping onto, walking through, and falling into the earth underneath his feet) onto the gallery floor draws the spectator's attention to the ground as a significant architectural and sculptural element. Müller and Girardet's past pursuits are indicative of the multidisciplinary challenge that their collaborative work, which continues beyond the *Phoenix Tapes* project, presents to the critic or historian.<sup>11</sup>

Its first section, entitled "Rutland," deals with the representation of space (mostly inhabited by male characters who are either being pursued or acting as pursuers); the second, "Burden of Proof," is an inventory of objects in close-up (usually in "insert" shots) and of the behavioral tics and gestures of various actors; the third, "Derailed," connects dream states, anxiety, and repetition, placing particular emphasis on trains; the fourth, "Why Don't You Love Me?," foregrounds men, their mothers and girlfriends, and sexual desire; the fifth, "Bedroom," focuses on the representation of women in private moments and spaces (suggesting the importance of interiority, both psychological and spatial) and in violent scenarios; and the final section, "Necrologue," consists of a slow-motion close-up of Ingrid

Bergman crying on her pillow, appearing to be suspended between sleeping and dying. Orchestrated through patterned montage structures, the tempo of the work as a whole develops in an arc-like trajectory, building very gradually at the outset, climaxing with "Derailed" and "Why Don't You Love Me?," and winding down to almost complete stillness by the end.

A number of the critics who wrote about *The Phoenix Tapes* when it first appeared in the "Notorious" exhibition noted that its six sections "seemed—with story and character distilled away—to extract a pure essence of Hitchcock, capturing the core obsessions and excitements of his cinema."<sup>12</sup> That "pure essence" is frequently described in psychological terms, with strong emphasis placed on the sexual or erotic themes and symbols that appear in the director's work. In "Derailed," "Why Don't You Love Me?," and "Bedroom," the psychosexual element is readily apparent, but the remaining three sections also lend themselves to psychoanalytically-oriented interpretations. Within such interpretations, the shots of actors in pursuit found in "Rutland" could be said to highlight the theme of anxiety, while the close-up depiction of symbolic or representative objects and movements in "Burden of Proof" could suggest fixation, fetishization, or compulsion. Thus, by the time the viewer reaches the "Necrologue" single shot, both its profilimic content (Bergman's face) and its formal qualities (close camera placement, extended shot duration) might appear to be thoroughly infused with implicit meanings of a deeply sexual nature.

Any or all of the above can be connected to more specific ideas about the representation of gender in Hitchcock and in classical Hollywood cinema. "Bedroom," for example, resembles one of Müller's best-known works, *Home Stories* (1990), a 6-minute short film in which a number of well-known actresses (such as Kim Novak, Tippi Hedren, Doris Day, Lana Turner, and Lauren Bacall) are seen inhabiting the domestic spaces of classical Hollywood films. In *Home Stories*, the selection of shots tends to foreground the actresses' facial

expressions and body language, as the women perform various simple tasks involving household objects (such as windows, lamps, and doors), make sudden turning movements, and look out longingly (or anxiously) in the direction of offscreen space. In "Bedroom," the tone of foreboding is developed further, as a general sense of fear, anxiety, and despair becomes less ambiguously motivated and more intense in the presence of visible acts of aggression and violence. Both pieces can be seen as homages to the figure of the classical Hollywood actress; as critiques of the ways in which the women have been "trapped" within narratives shaped by heterosexual masculine fears and desires; and as provocative examples of the power of reinterpretation. (*Home Stories*, in particular, has been linked to a "camp sensibility."<sup>13</sup>) Similar observations could be made in response to the modified shots from *King Kong* (1933) that appear in Girardet's short video *Release* (1996), where the woman in distress is a bound Fay Wray, placed inside a computerized loop sequence of futile writhing movements.

It is usually in their discussions of sexuality in *The Phoenix Tapes* that critics broach the important question of whether the video can be reduced to a "thesis" about implicit psychological meanings in Hitchcock's body of work or about the director's own psychology. (This issue is rarely raised in discussions of found footage film and video, in part because relatively few practitioners have elected to appropriate the work of popular auteurs.) One critic notes that the montage of strangulation scenes in "Bedroom" "tells you more about Hitchcock the man than all the psychological studies ever written about him."<sup>14</sup> Another writer asserts that the video is "more than a tribute or study guide," since it provides "a critique of Hitchcock's outdated attitudes and psychology."<sup>15</sup> The artists are aware of this issue: according to Müller, he and Girardet did not want "to illustrate the words of film theorists and to simply produce another work about him,"<sup>16</sup> and according to Girardet, they sought to avoid the production of "another didactic 'highlight compilation.'"<sup>17</sup>



Other viewers and critics, attending to more theoretically-oriented issues, might argue that *The Phoenix Tapes* has value precisely because it illustrates critiques and concepts developed in influential texts about the director's work.<sup>18</sup> Following up on Jonathan Romney's point that "Hitchcock has been repeatedly 'remade' by critical commentary, from *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 1950s to Slavoj Žižek, via countless psychoanalytic, feminist and deconstructionist theorists, not to mention the occasional artist-theorist such as Victor Burgin,"<sup>19</sup> it could be asserted that Müller and Girardet's video affirms the theoretical claims of various academic writers. Some viewers might suspect that the first section alone has been influenced by Raymond Bellour's study of the "layering" of "enigma, act, and symbol" in Hitchcock's system of alternating elements, Pascal Bonitzer's theory of the "object-which-makes-a-stain," and Žižek's Lacanian theory of the "Hitchcockian blot."<sup>20</sup> This suspicion might seem to be confirmed by the centrality of the cropduster scene from *North by Northwest* (1959) to both "Rutland" and all three of the aforementioned texts.

The claim about the video's illustrative value develops from the observation that, as the video accumulates examples of similar images and sounds, it appears to be employing the techniques of montage in order to build an "argument" from the bottom up, implying the general "thesis" through a patterned collection of specific shots and sounds. But when *The Phoenix Tapes* is depicted as a test or didactic demonstration of a particular theory, a crucial aspect of the work is overlooked, as the passage below illustrates. In a negative review of the video, one critic claims that the work has merely "found" what writers have described already (although he also points to those features which distinguish the video from directly discursive texts):

Unfortunately, while Müller's methods are certainly engaging, even innovative, what he has found in Hitchcock is that which psychoanalytically bent film critics have been carping about for decades: a man

both obsessed with and oppressed by the feminine, and an artist given to a definite repetition compulsion.

The only difference here is that Müller allows Hitchcock to hang himself with his own rope.<sup>21</sup>

If the video succeeds or fails by virtue of the value of its implied analytic theses, then its "engaging, even innovative" methods do not matter. But since viewers and critics rarely value works of art irrespective of their formal qualities, it seems that the critic has neglected to notice the importance of what he calls "the only difference," a term referring indirectly to the various ways in which the video conveys psychoanalytically-informed ideas. The critic manages to devalue both the video's innovative form (by denying its importance) and, more generally, embodiment itself (by failing to see that each work of art that expresses a shared notion has value as a singular embodiment of that idea). In an instructive indicator of his views on form and embodiment, Müller states that "we wanted our project to go beyond a mere dissection and analysis of the 'corpus Hitchcock.' We always wanted it to be strong and autonomous enough to stand on its own."<sup>22</sup>

### *The Formal Structure of "Rutland"*

Composed entirely of reviews in periodicals, the literature on *The Phoenix Tapes* has been consistently focused on 1) various sexual issues as they pertain to the video, Hitchcock's work, and the director's psyche; and 2) the notion that the video acts as a didactic commentary (this is emphasized even in reviews that mention the importance of its formal properties). It seems undeniable that the topic of sexuality, especially as conceptualized within psychoanalysis, should be central to any interpretation of the video as a whole. In the interest of bringing to light other aspects of the video, however, the remaining sections of this essay delve into "Rutland," providing an analysis which might serve as

a supplement to other, predominantly psychosexual interpretations and as one of many possible investigations into the work's formal specificity. Three general topics dominate the discussion that follows: the role of ambiguity and opacity in the "shaping" of spectatorial experience in "Rutland"; its allusions to modernist cinema; and its evocation of a classical Hollywood model of narrative structure. These analyses are predicated on the interpretive claim that the placement of "Rutland" at the beginning of the video (in the single-channel versions, at least) is significant because it allows for other themes and concerns to be explored, prior to the more explicit treatment of sexuality in later sections.<sup>23</sup>

The dominant audio-visual patterns in "Rutland" are signaled in its first few minutes, which present a series of shots from the cropduster sequence in *North by Northwest* and one overhead shot from *Torn Curtain* (1966). Covering less than two minutes of "Rutland," the following description nevertheless indicates the complexity of its formal structures. (All time descriptions are approximate, usually accurate within half a second. The intervals referred to in what follows are all black frames of varying lengths, as indicated.)

- 1) Two seconds prior to the appearance of the first image, while the screen is still black, rustling is heard on the soundtrack.
- 2) This sound is followed by a four-second shot of roadside fenceposts receding toward the right side of the frame. This shot is the first of seven successive point-of-view shots appropriated from the beginning of the cropduster sequence, without Cary Grant's reaction shots.
- 3) A three-second interval of black frames follows, during which the rustling sound is heard again.
- 4) This image also appears for four seconds, displaying another, more lateral view of the arid roadside landscape.
- 5) The rustling begins to sound like shoes on dirt or gravel during this three-second interval.

- 6) During this shot, the rustling or shuffling sound gives way to what seems to be the distant engine noise of the cropduster. This three-second shot, the video's fourth image, is also dominated by yet another view of the road, with the addition of a plane visible above the horizon line, on the extreme left side of the frame.
- 7) The cropduster sound continues into this black-frame interval, which lasts six seconds, and is combined with the shuffling sound.
- 8) Both sounds continue into this two-second shot, another roadside view, with a mailbox on a post in the center of the frame. The next two shots complicate the game of identifying sound sources, however.
- 9) The fifth image, as immobile as the previous four, shows the road receding far into the distance, but during its four-second duration, the sound that seemed to belong to the cropduster begins to resemble that of an approaching motor vehicle.
- 10) Just as the distant car begins to appear in that shot, a two-second interval breaks up the viewer's sense of visual continuity while maintaining aural continuity, as the sound continues to grow progressively louder, leading directly into the next image.
- 11) This image is simply the same shot, with the car slightly closer to the camera, which begins to pan in order to follow the car. This two-second shot seems truncated, since it ends just as the car is beginning to outpace the panning camera (but before it has entirely disappeared from the frame).
- 12) Another two-second interval follows, with the car sound beginning to recede.
- 13) This image shows the barely-visible car disappearing into the horizon.
- 14) The sounds of the car receding give way again to the shuffling sound during this interval, which lasts five seconds.

- 15) This shot breaks from the *North by Northwest* series by presenting a bird's-eye view from *Torn Curtain* of Paul Newman in a museum. The shot begins with the distinct sound of shoes on a hard surface, which contrasts with the denotative ambiguity of the previously-heard shuffling sounds. The ornate symmetry (facilitated by matte painting) of both the interior set and the shot composition differs markedly from the dry, minimal look of the preceding images. Newman walks to the center of the room, stops, turns his head to the right, and then to the left, at which point this nine-second shot is cut.
- 16) During this black-frame interval, five seconds long, a new set of approaching-vehicle sounds is heard.
- 17) This image returns to the *North by Northwest* sequence with an overhead long shot of the road, in which a bus can be seen approaching in the distance. The shot, which ends after the bus stops near the center of the frame, lasts seventeen seconds.
- 18) The sound of the bus opening its doors is heard during the four-second interval that follows.
- 19) The *Torn Curtain* shot is reprised, but cut off at an earlier point, after Newman turns right.

"Rutland" thus begins with a configuration of shots and sounds that depict or connote activities—seeing from a distance (watching movement), waiting, stopping at a particular place. Also suggested, through an assortment of camera angles, is the point-of-view shot, here removed from a narrative context which would reveal the observing character. Moreover, just as the look represented by the shot loses its fictional bearer, sounds are periodically disconnected from their imputed causes within their diegetic worlds. Readily identifiable noises are hardly absent from "Rutland," however, and it is unlikely that the viewer will abandon the process of linking sounds with their sources. More likely is the development of a modified process of anticipation and expectation: the viewer becomes aware that empty or negative

space might or might not be transformed by a camera movement toward an object or figure, or by an object or figure entering the immobile frame, and that offscreen sounds might or might not become recognizable. Much of "Rutland" is predicated upon the denial of the full degree of information needed for a "grounding" of the spectator's experience in either the conventions of narrative progression or basic forms of audio-visual reference.

Also evident throughout the first section are patterns of alternation between opposed elements (which could only be viewed as neo-Bellourian in spite of the fact that Girardet has never read the writer's work). These include: silence/sound, empty/occupied space, interior/exterior space, movement/stasis, flatness/depth. In addition, the viewer apprehends shifts within and between more abstract pairs: distance/proximity, presence/absence, continuity/discontinuity, similarity/dissimilarity, familiar/unfamiliar (or defamiliarized).<sup>24</sup> Tracking shots and soundtrack techniques will serve as useful examples of these patterned developments.

Of the six shots with camera movements included in "Rutland," five are tracking shots (the sixth being the lateral pan from *North by Northwest*). Shots utilizing the track include: Stewart's point-of-view shot as he walks past two brick walls toward a wooden fence, in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*; Hedren's point-of-view shot as she ascends a staircase with a flashlight in *The Birds* (1963); and the famous reverse exit down the staircase and out of the building in *Frenzy* (1972). The excerpted portion of the *Frenzy* shot begins with the sound of a door being locked and ends just as the camera passes the front door of the building, thus limiting the track to an empty, narrow, interior space (it opens out onto a populated street in the original film); the shot is followed by a black-frame interval, comprised of seven seconds of realistic harbor sounds (foghorn, waves). After the exterior world is referenced sonically, it is made visible in a stylized long shot, from *Marnie*, of a residential neighborhood, with a matte painting of the harbor in the background. Thus, the kinesthetic representation of an interior space, conveyed by the camera

moving in close proximity with the surrounding architecture, is followed first by the aural suggestion of an absent exterior space and then by an immobile and decidedly unrealistic representation of architecture and landscape. If the track and the interval's sounds provide phenomenological immediacy, the matte shot brings distance and artifice back into the frame.

Yet the *Frenzy* shot is an anomaly, since it is the only tracking shot in "Rutland" that is not subjected to a pattern of breaks in which a continuous track is repeatedly interrupted by black-frame intervals. Each set of visual interruptions works against the moving camera's construction of a volumetric and temporally continuous space, just as it denies the viewer the uniquely absorptive effects of commonly anthropomorphized camera movements.<sup>25</sup> But since the black-frame intervals are not accompanied by silence, the soundtrack, which includes either environmental sounds or Bernard Herrmann's music, allows viewers to supplement aural continuity with their own imagined visuals.

The viewer may also notice that the experience of anticipating, picturing, or recalling missing visual information corresponds with aspects of the Hitchcockian protagonist's experience. For example, in Hedren's point-of-view shot from *The Birds*, which moves through a dark interior space toward a door, the viewer hears the sound of ruffling wings very briefly, before one black-frame interval and during another. Possessed of even less information than the unseen character whose visual field is represented by the shot, the viewer must shift between the camera's surrogate vision and the interval's opacity, between not seeing enough and seeing nothing. The act of listening, in this context, becomes an intensified process of identifying and remembering frequently defamiliarized sounds. In other moments of sonic indeterminacy, as when the distant scratching noises of aging celluloid film seem to merge with a shot's "room tone," or when one unseen actor's footsteps shift imperceptibly into another's, the listener is guided toward the primarily sensual and subjectively evocative aspects of aural experience.

*A Modernist Aesthetic*

Once the viewer who has some familiarity with Hitchcock's work begins to notice that recontextualization and reordering in "Rutland" often serve to deny or frustrate the process of following a narrative or identifying the source of a sound, he or she might begin to consider what the video's montage-based strategies reveal about the director's films. That "Rutland" proceeds by developing analogies, parallels, and rhymes through audio-visual montage is perhaps first suggested by its modified repetitions of the aforementioned *Torn Curtain* shot. At least four more shots, from *North by Northwest*, *To Catch a Thief* (1955), *Rear Window*, and *Marnie*, are repeated, often with slight variations, functioning as recognizable motifs in the section.<sup>26</sup> Even though the shots in the video have been removed from Hitchcock's original montage structures, they do bear the recognizable features of shot types (establishing shots, for example, are usually identifiable as such), and within those types, one can discern stylistic tendencies specific to Hitchcock.

The first Hitchcockian tendency is related to shot composition: the shots establish a setting, yet in a minimal fashion, providing a representation of space that emphasizes emptiness. Indeed, in the *Torn Curtain* shot and in others seen later, such as the *Marnie* shot in which Tippi Hedren enters the Rutland & Co. building, the human figure is dwarfed by the surrounding space and is often rendered more object-like by the camera. The second tendency involves duration: shots of particular places and/or of characters in alienating settings seem longer during moments of narrative uncertainty or indeterminacy. For example, the sequence from *North by Northwest* establishes atmosphere with shots of the field and the roadside and with shots of men standing in place, shuffling their feet.

Both tendencies are part of what Richard Allen has identified as "the creation of connotation and metaphor through the design and juxtaposition of images, together



with the use of montage to delay narrative outcome'' in the director's films, which ''is frequently in Hitchcock related in a very Freudian way to the presence of hidden, obscene, or perverse meaning.''<sup>27</sup> Whereas later sections of *The Phoenix Tapes* place more emphasis on intimations of the obscene and the perverse, the first section connects Hitchcock's spaces to the atmosphere of ineffable existential alienation and dread found in the work of directors such as Michelangelo Antonioni. In other words, the video's images of landscapes, of architectural interiors and exteriors, and of men and women reduced to anonymity within geometrically precise compositions, all call to mind the ''hidden'' meanings commonly associated with modernist cinema.<sup>28</sup> Populated by traversals of space—either immobile long shots of actors in movement or eye-level tracking shots<sup>29</sup>—which draw the viewer's attention to desolate, sterile, or arid environments, for example, ''Rutland'' contains a stylistic allusion for the cinephile. Using montage to highlight graphic similarities, Müller and Girardet suggest that Hitchcock engages with the ideas and representational conventions of modernist filmmakers.<sup>30</sup>

For our purposes here, it will not be necessary to review the vast array of stylistic features that could be ascribed to filmmaking labeled modernist. A brief discussion of Antonioni, however, can help us link the representational norms of a specific instance of modernist cinema with hidden meaning in greater detail. David Bordwell has pointed out that the aesthetic of ''political modernism'' Antonioni developed from 1957 to about 1966 was distinguished by a repertoire of ''dedramatizing'' effects deployed during moments of narrative intensity. This collection of effects includes the long shot, often depicting figures in landscapes, quiet ''stretches of dead time,'' and subdued performances marked by sustained poses.<sup>31</sup> Antonioni's films of the period serve as a useful frame of reference for the removal of the main line of action from the cropduster sequence, for instance, in favor of long shots of actors standing immobile in the landscape.

The comparison between Antonioni and Hitchcock also illuminates some of the more general comments made by Müller about the "simplicity" of Hitchcock's visual style, such as his claim that the director "succeeded in creating compositions absent of all superfluous ornaments."<sup>32</sup> In "Rutland," those minimal shots and sequences constituting "moments of a refreshingly innovative and audacious use of cinematic means—spaces of experimentation,"<sup>33</sup> in Müller's words, tend to come from films made after 1955.<sup>34</sup> This might lead some viewers to expect that the video will piece together more direct connections between Hitchcock and the modernism of Antonioni's films (or the postwar aesthetic model he influenced). But given that none of Müller's or Girardet's statements about the video makes such a claim, or even touches on related issues, and given that the rest of the video draws upon Hitchcock's pre-1955 filmography quite heavily, it is far more likely that the modernist Hitchcock interests the artists because he intersects deeply with the psychoanalytic Hitchcock. Through its selection of images and sounds, "Rutland" attempts to show that sequences marked by absence and distance can have a deeply reverberative quality. Since Hitchcock himself professed to be interested in the creation of images loaded with implicit psychological significance, Müller and Girardet's concerns can be said to run parallel to the director's, and thus Müller points out that *The Phoenix Tapes* "is the result of a collaboration with Hitchcock."<sup>35</sup>

#### *Film Form and Erotetic Narration*

It might seem to be the case that *The Phoenix Tapes* will likely communicate only to viewers familiar with films directed by Hitchcock and/or the "art cinema" modernists. But Müller and Girardet's selections are designed to have a broader relevance as well, seeking to engage viewers with some understanding of classical Hollywood cinema. Watching *The Phoenix Tapes* tends to involve the apprehension of aural and visual "textures"; the discovery of the video's unique

configuration of shots and sounds; the recognition of repetition within that configuration of montage elements; the development of anticipations or expectations based upon previous experiences with Hitchcock's films and/or with classical narrative cinema; and anticipations or expectations based upon a developing understanding of audio-visual motifs and patterns evident within the video.

This kind of spectatorial experience is adumbrated by Müller in a few statements. In an essay published prior to the production of *The Phoenix Tapes*, Müller discusses German and Austrian experimental films "composed in mosaic fragments," which "require an active recipient who completes the empty spaces in these works," and he makes the more general assertion that experimental films "invite the audience to an 'open and plural reading'" (quoting a phrase of Tscherkassky's).<sup>36</sup> Such rhetoric, which propagates the idea that the viewer somehow "completes" the work, is no less popular for being highly general, having persisted and thrived since at least the era of the French new novel and the emergence of American minimalist sculpture. Müller's claims can be usefully considered alongside another statement made in an interview, in which he maintains that the shots in *The Phoenix Tapes* form "a surreal, crude patchwork that suggests a narrative, then breaks it."<sup>37</sup> These threads can be linked in a more precise manner if one considers some of the intersecting norms and conventions of classical narrative and experimental cinema.

The pertinent features of the normative experience of following a classical Hollywood narrative have been outlined by theoretician Noël Carroll. Following V.I. Pudovkin, Carroll identifies an "erotetic" model of narrative structure that is predicated upon "a system of internally generated questions that the movie goes on to answer." Within this system of more and less salient ("macro" and "micro") questions, scenes "either raise questions or answer them, or perform related functions including sustaining questions already raised, or incompletely answering a previous question, or answering one question but then introducing a new one."<sup>38</sup>

As Carroll acknowledges, his formulation describes a dominant system that viewers with even a basic knowledge of logical inference understand intuitively. "Rutland" draws upon a related intuition of sorts: the viewer's tendency to associate certain kinds of shots with certain types of questions and answers. An establishing shot answers a question about location while delaying an answer regarding action, for example, while a point-of-view shot down a back alley or up a dark staircase poses questions about lurking dangers. As it demonstrates the ways in which the posing and postponing of questions and answers can occur visually, without dialogue, in Hitchcock's films, Müller and Girardet's selection of clips evokes experiences of anticipation and sometimes frustration, which are common to both the director's thrillers and narrative cinema in general. Thus, the effectiveness of "Rutland" is not entirely contingent upon a strong grasp of Hitchcock's *oeuvre*, given the widespread psychological resonance of the erotetic model and its shot conventions. Müller and Girardet's video does not constitute a pure "break" from that model, since it alludes to its iconographic and structural norms.

"Rutland" can be characterized as quasi-musical, generating its tempos and rhythms through sound, shot duration, movement (camera and profilmic), and intervallic spacing. For the viewer, the pleasure of perceiving those arrangements, as well as individual images or sounds, can be augmented by or combined with a new experience of apprehending motifs and patterns not commonly found in classical narrative structures. The consistent isolation of shots within black-frame intervals and the measured image-sound recurrences in "Rutland" are designed to place the viewer in an exceptionally receptive and anticipatory position, but if the video initially seems to promise the sorts of systematic or rigidly schematized structures that can be spatialized simply in the viewer's mind, it ultimately fails to deliver them.<sup>39</sup> Rather, "Rutland" is designed to actively engage those mnemonic processes that help the viewer make sense of experimental structures, while simultaneously evoking those

associated with the erotetic model. As it solicits the viewer's capacity for recognition and recollection, Müller and Girardet's video creates a space for thinking about the different uses of memory in spectatorial experience.

The multivalent nature of Müller and Girardet's constructions is perhaps best captured in a final example. Midway through "Rutland," a black-frame interval of traffic sounds gives way, after seven seconds, to four shots from *I Confess*. Each black-and-white shot depicts a different street sign with the word "DIRECTION" printed in black inside a large white arrow. Dimitri Tiomkin's score runs throughout this thirty-second micro-sequence of arrow shots and intervals. Each visual shift, from black frames to a new arrow shot, is accompanied by a corresponding musical shift, from the persistently low and ominous line of the brass section to a sudden, brief emergence of staccato string figures (typically connoting anxiety and suspense). By situating black intervals immediately before Tiomkin's high-pitched strings, Müller and Girardet accentuate the visual and aural play of presence and absence. Moreover, their modification of the arrow sequence actively directs the viewer's attention, while the sign's printed word suggests, metaphorically, that the "direction" of the spectator is a principal task of *The Phoenix Tapes* and of Hitchcock's corpus.

It is this formal intricacy, indicative of an incisive understanding of the ways in which the viewer's attention can be guided, that distinguishes the video from those cinematic moving image installations that cater to the contemporary artworld's "circus environment." In contrast, "Rutland" demonstrates "the precision, the dense intensity of the short form," through a layered assemblage.<sup>40</sup> In a manner quite different from that of *24 Hour Psycho*, which explores the effects of a particular kind of temporal distension, *The Phoenix Tapes* builds up the connotational richness of Hitchcock's sounds and images in individual units.

During one of his interviews, François Truffaut tells Hitchcock that, for the viewer of his films, "it's obvious that

each shot has been made in a specific way, from a specific angle, and to run for a specific length of time." Truffaut makes this comment after Hitchcock recalls that producer David Selznick "complained about what he called my 'goddamn jigsaw cutting,' " by which he meant Hitchcock's tendency to "shoot the one piece of film in such a way that no one else could put the pieces together properly."<sup>41</sup> I hope to have conveyed, in a selective contextualization of *The Phoenix Tapes* and an analysis of "Rutland," how viewers of different sorts, including but not limited to the Hitchcock enthusiast, might value this relatively obscure video for its purposive reordering of the jigsaw's pieces.

#### Notes

I thank Richard Allen and Sid Gottlieb for their detailed comments on earlier drafts of this essay. This material was first presented at the second Cinephilia Symposium, held in June 2003 at the University of Amsterdam, where various audience members offered thought-provoking responses.

1. Michael Kimmelman, "The Art of the Moment (and Only for the Moment)," *New York Times* (August 1, 1999), section 2, p. 1.

2. For an overview of recent cinematic video art, see Françoise Parfait, "La vidéo fait son cinéma," *Video: un art contemporain* (Paris: Ed. du Regard, 2001), 289-322.

3. Chris Darke, "The Shape of Things to Come," *Artists Newsletter* (June 1996), 7.

4. For retrospective surveys of contemporary art that explores aspects of Hitchcock's work, see Stéphane Aquin, "Hitchcock and Contemporary Art," in *Hitchcock and Art: Fatal Coincidences*, ed. Dominique Païni and Guy Cogeval (Montreal and Milano: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and Edizioni Gabriele Mazzotta, 2000) and the exhibition catalogue *Notorious: Alfred Hitchcock and Contemporary Art*, ed. Kerry Brougher, Michael Tarantino, and Astrid Bowron (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, 1999).

5. Quoted in "Remake," *CTRL [SPACE]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother*, ed. Thomas Y. Levin, Ursula Frohne, and Peter Weibel (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 283. See also

Huyghe's comments in Pia Viewing and Pierre Huyghe, "A Conversation between Pia Viewing and Pierre Huyghe, Paris, October 1995," *Paletten* 4 (1995), 21.

6. In a statement on *2 Spellbound*, LeVeque includes the following quote from Freud: "Normal forgetting takes place by way of condensation. In this way, it becomes the formation of concepts. What is isolated is perceived clearly." See "Video Data Bank: Video Art and Video Artists," [www.vdb.org/smackn.acgi\\$stape\\_detail?2SPELLBOUN](http://www.vdb.org/smackn.acgi$stape_detail?2SPELLBOUN).

7. One context I will not be discussing is that of German experimental film and video. For an introduction, see the collection of essays in *Millennium Film Journal* 30/31 (Fall 1997) and the catalogue *Der deutsche Experimentalfilm der 90er Jahre* (München: Goethe Institut, 1996).

8. The list of books on the use of found footage in experimental film and video is short: William Wees, *Recycled Images: The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1993); *Found Footage Film*, ed. Cecilia Hausheer and Christoph Settele (Lucerna: VIPER/zyklop, 1992); and *Desmontaje: film, vídeo / apropiación, reciclaje*, ed. Eugeni Bonet (València: IVAM, 1993).

9. It should be noted that contemporary scholarship tends to focus its analyses on either experimental film and video screened in theatrical venues or gallery-based moving image art, and that it is the rare practitioner who displays a strong awareness of shared concerns or affinities. Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* is a representative example of the divide that exists between the practices of contemporary art and those of experimental film and video. Perhaps as a corrective to the artist's own ignorance, Amy Taubin links Gordon's installation to some of the canonical works of American experimental film, in her essay "Douglas Gordon," *Spellbound: Art and Film*, ed. Philip Dodd with Ian Christie (London: British Film Institute & Hayward Gallery, 1996). Her analysis neglects to place *24 Hour Psycho* within the context of video art, however.

10. In addition, "Müller has toured with a found footage program, introducing and leading discussions on films by Peter Tscherkassky, Martin Arnold, and others," according to Alice A. Kuzniar, *The Queer German Cinema* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 287ff.

11. For a description of Müller and Girardet's most recent collaborative piece, entitled *Manual* (2002), see Graham Parker,

"Christoph Girardet and Matthias Müller," *Art Monthly* 255 (April 2002), 32-33.

12. Tom Lubbock, "Why Clichés Are Important," *The Independent* (London) (March 5, 2002), 10. See also Tom Lubbock, "Through the Rear Window," *The Independent* (July 13, 1999), 10.

13. Alice A. Kuzniar, *The Queer German Cinema*, 214.

14. Richard Dorment, "Homages to the Master," *Daily Telegraph* (London) (July 21, 1999).

15. Ted Shen, "Memory Works: Film and Video by Matthias Müller," *Chicago Reader* (March 24, 2000), section 2, p. 16.

16. Matthias Müller, personal correspondence with the author, November 17, 2003.

17. Christoph Girardet, personal correspondence with the author, November 15, 2003.

18. Responding to my queries (in the correspondences listed above), Müller and Girardet note that during their preparation process they read a variety of texts on Hitchcock, naming Robin Wood, Slavoj Žižek, Camille Paglia, and Donald Spoto, among others.

19. Jonathan Romney, "A Hitch in Time," *New Statesman* 12, no. 564 (July 19, 1999), 36.

20. Raymond Bellour, *The Analysis of Film*, ed. Constance Penley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 81; Pascal Bonitzer, "Hitchcockian Suspense," in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (New York: Verso, 1992), 15-30; Žižek, "The Hitchcockian Blot," in *Alfred Hitchcock: Centenary Essays*, ed. Richard Allen and Sam Ishii-Gonzalès (London: BFI, 1999), 122-39.

21. Jason McBride, "A Hitchcock Frenzy," *eye Weekly* 9:27 (April 13, 2000), available at [www.eye.net/eye/issue/issue\\_04.13.00/film/mueller.html](http://www.eye.net/eye/issue/issue_04.13.00/film/mueller.html).

22. Matthias Müller, personal correspondence with the author.

23. It is certainly possible to retroactively reinterpret "Rutland" in terms of sexual concerns. As I stated earlier, the first section can be seen in psychoanalytic terms as exploring anxiety, sublimation, or repression. But I maintain that a strong degree of ambiguity about these issues is cultivated in the first section, partly in order to enhance the tone of tension and uncertainty.

24. The shifts from one element in a pair to its opposite are more readily apprehensible with repeated viewings, which the looped, multiple-monitor version of *The Phoenix Tapes* facilitates.



25. My points about tracking shots are indebted to John Belton, "The Bionic Eye: Zoom Esthetics," *Cineaste* 11:1 (Winter 1980-81), especially 21-22, and David Bordwell, "Camera Movement and Cinematic Space," *Cine-Tracts* 1:2 (Summer 1977), 19-26.

26. The reprised shots present: the arrival of the bus in *North by Northwest*; an empty room shifting from well-lit to dark and shadowy in *To Catch a Thief*; a fadeout on a shot of neighbors' windows in *Rear Window*; and the long shot of the Rutland & Co. building and its parking lot in *Marnie*.

27. Richard Allen, "The Lodger and the Origins of Hitchcock's Aesthetic," *Hitchcock Annual* (2001-02), 56.

28. According to Laura Marks, "Müller says that while Hitchcock subsumed his virtuosic technique to the service of the story, just a little decontextualization reveals that he was arguably a modernist, even an experimentalist." See the brief discussion of *The Phoenix Tapes* in her "Images of Intermedia," *Afterimage* 28:1 (July/August 2000), 5.

29. "Rutland" includes the following shots of actors walking: a man crossing a street and turning to look back, followed by Jimmy Stewart in pursuit (*The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1956]); Tippi Hedren walking away from the camera and down a train platform (*Marnie*); Stewart walking toward the Roman columns of the Palace of the Legion of Honor (*Vertigo*); and Joseph Cotten crossing a street and turning back before continuing on, followed by two men in pursuit (*Shadow of a Doubt*). In these shots and others, the individuality of each actor is suppressed by costuming and camera placement, suggesting the prevalence of doubles in the director's *oeuvre*. All shots are subjected to some kind of visual (e.g., shortened, bracketed, or disrupted by black frames) and/or aural modification.

30. For another analysis of the modernist Hitchcock and his relevance for contemporary art, see Kerry Brougher, "Hitch-hiking in Dreamscapes," in *Notorious: Alfred Hitchcock and Contemporary Art*.

31. David Bordwell, "Modernism, Minimalism, Melancholy: Angelopoulos and Visual Style," in *The Last Modernist: The Films of Theo Angelopoulos*, ed. Andrew Horton (New York: Praeger, 1997), 14.

32. Stefanie Braun, "Talepiece" (interview with Müller and Girardet), *Creative Camera* 359 (August/September 1999), 50.

33. Matthias Müller, personal correspondence with the author.

34. The exceptions come from *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) and *I Confess* (1953).

35. Matthias Müller, personal correspondence with the author.

36. Matthias Müller, "The Cinema of Difference," *Millennium Film Journal* 30/31 (Fall 1997), 3, 5.

37. Quoted in McBride, "A Hitchcock Frenzy."

38. Noël Carroll, "The Power of Movies," in *Theorizing the Moving Image* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 89.

39. The process of spatializing the structure of an experimental film is analyzed by James Peterson, who suggests that the process of perceiving those patterns that govern an experimental film as a whole often involves the formation of a mental representation of the film's structure, a "remapping of a temporal order into a spatial array." According to Peterson, spatialization encompasses the noticing of formal symmetries and parallels and the remembering of shot arrangements (which become parts connected to a whole). See *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the American Avant-garde Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 104.

40. Müller, "The Cinema of Difference," 3.

41. François Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (London: Granada Publishing, 1978), 194-95. At that point in their discussion, Hitchcock and Truffaut touch on the topic of visual symbolism, making mention of the arrow shots in *I Confess*.