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**The Woman in the Mirror:  
Alternative Models of Subjective Constitution in Popular Film**

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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This thesis explores alternative models of subjective constitution depicted in three popular films. Working primarily within a psychoanalytic framework, the thesis examines representations of subjective constitution in the films *The Bride of Frankenstein*, *Vertigo*, and *The Black Dahlia*.

Beginning with a discussion of the models of normative subjective constitution posited by Lacan and Benveniste, the thesis explores the ways in which three films subvert normative models of subjective constitution, which involve two normatively constituted subjects within a binary relationship, by depicting relationships between one active, controlling subject and one passive controlled subject. These subversive models of subjective constitution produce one subject with a dangerously narcissistic ego ideal and one subject void of any ego ideal apart from the first subject's projections.

The dynamics of these alternative forms for subjective constitution open up important questions about subjectivity in general. In the process of answering those questions, the thesis explores postmodern critiques of subjectivity and attempts to reconcile efforts to understand subjective constitution with postmodern considerations of the death of the subject.

***The Woman in the Mirror:  
Alternative Models of Subjective Constitution in Popular Film***

## Chapter I

After the enormous success of *Frankenstein* in 1931 for both Universal Pictures and the team of actor Boris Karloff and director James Whale, the studio immediately began plans to follow up with a sequel. It took Universal four years both to produce a suitable script and to assemble the same principle actors and crew, and nine writers were ultimately assigned to *The Bride of Frankenstein*. The unmistakable influence of James Whale is evident in every frame as the film marries elements of horror with black comedy. *The Bride of Frankenstein* plays itself out like a proper sequel, the action taking place directly following that of the original film, increasing the body count and mayhem at every opportunity along the way. The Bride herself does not make an appearance until the film's final fifteen minutes, but those last moments are the film's most significant and suggestive.

The scene involving the eponymous Bride of Frankenstein begins with a brief exterior shot of the castle housing Henry Frankenstein's laboratory, shrouded in storm clouds and crowned with glowing torch light. Thunder rolls. The shot fades into the interior action and opens to Henry's assistant Karl bringing in a weather update as he enters the stone-walled laboratory. The scene cuts to Henry and Dr. Pretorius in medium long-shot, listening to the rising storm through strange instruments. The two scientists, at odds in previous scenes due to Pretorius's blackmailing of Henry, now work in concert, their movements betraying nervous excitement. Walking away from their instruments, the scientists no longer block the view of the metal table standing amid various switchboards and unidentifiable instruments of science. The camera gently maneuvers through the laboratory with the two men, opening up the space and forcing the audience's gaze onto the object lying atop the steel table. This object, covered in a

white shroud, bears the unmistakable shape of a female body, and is the object of the two scientists' as well as of the audience's attention. Dr. Pretorius removes the shroud from the figure's face and the scene cuts and moves in to a close-up of what is now quite evidently a human body lying atop the table. In this moment, the film introduces the first of two character triangles that define the narrative's final moments: Henry Frankenstein, Dr. Pretorius, and the Bride. The audience now sees that, beneath the shroud, the figure is mummified in gauze held tightly together by safety pins. As Pretorius speaks of the brain he and Frankenstein engineered and inserted into the skull of the figure before them, a brain Pretorius claims waits only for life, the shots cut back and forth from the trio in medium shot to the original close-up of the wrapped mystery figure.

The next series of shots alternates between Frankenstein and Pretorius, with an additional eye-line match through a nearby window of the brewing storm outside and of Karl rushing about fulfilling Henry's instructions to secure kites topside to conduct electricity gathered from the lightning. This series is interrupted by a close-up of Karl shot askew and from below, reminiscent of the Expressionist films still being exported from Germany at this time. Pretorius and Frankenstein remove the remainder of the figure's shroud as the film's score begins playing "The Bride's Theme," a string melody that will recur throughout the remainder of the film. The entire diegesis of the film up to this point has led up to this moment, when the audience is assured of who lies on the table; the tight gauze clears up any lingering mystery by accentuating the figure's female anatomy. Not only is the female figure mummified, but she is secured beneath steel straps as Frankenstein and Pretorius work around her.

The scene's energy builds up as the editing pace quickens, cutting back and forth between interiors containing the two scientists as they attach various conductors and nodes to the figure and exteriors in which Frankenstein's assistants operate machines atop the castle. Shadows play in open spaces within the castle as a few well-employed cuts and pans coalesce the opposed interior and exterior events into one concerted action. The two assistants stationed topside lower a giant, multi-faceted instrument down to the trio below and point it like God's finger at the bound figure below. A brilliant series of edits consists of medium close-ups and close-ups of the two scientists as well as several insert shots of electric machines, buzzing and humming and sparking in a building crescendo of mad science, the shots set at crooked angles and filled with ominous shadows, again evoking German Expressionism. Instruments in the lab spit sparks as the two shadow-clad scientists attend various levers and knobs. This montage lacks the pace of the film's Soviet contemporaries such as Eisenstein and Pudovkin, but is kinetic enough to create a frenzied narrative space, as charged and alive as the scientists hope to render their creation.

This scene is the sister scene to the one depicting the animation of Frankenstein's original creature in Whale's previous film. An unwritten rule of sequels asserts that, because the audience is already familiar with what transpired in the original film, the sequel must strike a balance between using familiar tropes, reconnecting the audience with aspects of the first film that they loved, and expanding those tropes to ensure that the audience is not simply handed the same product again. *The Bride of Frankenstein* offers a creation-of-the-creature scene that plays out far more intricately than the analogous scene in *Frankenstein*. The "mad scientist's lab" that became ingrained within our cultural consciousness owes much to the generic foundation laid down by this particular revision of the original scene.

The table and the body strapped to it rise on a platform and are exposed to the storm above the castle, sparks cascading down as it ascends. In an exciting and effective moment, the body rises up past the castle ramparts and beyond the structure's highest point on a lift that thrusts itself directly into the storm clouds. Parallel cuts bounce back and forth among the apparatus, Henry's upturned face, and the grim, highly-shadowed visage of Pretorius waiting below.

Suddenly something entirely new happens; entering into this same wind-racked space about the castle from stage right, the Creature, Frankenstein's original creation, lumbers into view and casts his gaze towards the apparatus and the events occurring above him. "Go back! Go back down!" commands Karl, who confronts the Creature, torch in hand. The threat of fire, the Creature's one fear, fails to save Karl this time as the Creature is too maddened to take heed. In a short series of long shots the two figures, Karl and the Creature, silhouetted against the stormy sky behind them, struggle briefly before the Creature seizes Karl, lifts him over his head, and hurls him to his death far below. At this same moment, lightning ignites conductors atop the apparatus and "The Bride's Theme" picks up once more, fuller this time. Below, Henry lowers the apparatus into the laboratory and the camera tracks the entirety of its descent in one unbroken sweep. The film's score ceases, along with the sounds of both the storm and the scientific instruments surrounding them. The next scene is shot from above, as the two men, staged on either side of the still-motionless figure, remove the steel bands securing the figure to the table. An insert shot shows Pretorius's hand on the figure's wrapped arm as her fingers move. Frankenstein and Pretorius exchange excited glances and Pretorius, in another insert, removes



the single strand of gauze concealing the figure's eyes. They are open. The Bride of Frankenstein lives. "She's alive," exclaims Henry. "Alive!"

What follows is one of the film's most defining and iconic images; as "The Bride's Theme" swells again, Henry and Pretorius, stationed on either side of the Bride, divided by her body and hidden within the shadows cast by the spotlight that highlights her, tilt the table upward to a standing position. The Bride lifts her arms straight out in front of her, much like the mummy she still resembles, and gently faints with the eyes of the men on either side fixed on her. The scene dissolves from the scientists unwrapping her to the trio in medium long-shot, the Bride's face visible for the first time. Stripped of the confining gauze and bedecked in a flowing white robe, the Bride very much resembles a woman in her wedding gown. Unlike the Creature, the Bride is beautiful, though macabre. Her face seems untouched by the trauma etched on the Creature's face, but a certain amount of stitching is evident below her jaw line. The most striking and iconic element of her appearance is a huge shock of dark hair spilling back and upward from the top of her head, bisected on both sides by waves of stark white. There is a non-diegetic quality to the bride's appearance, for her face is adorned with makeup and featured in key lighting more in keeping with the generic conventions of drama than with narrative practicality.

From the medium long-shot the film cuts to a frontal medium shot of the Bride, alone within the frame, her vacant gaze directed toward a distant point behind the camera. Another quick cut and the film moves in to a medium close-up of her face from the same angle. Yet another rapid edit frames the Bride in close-up but changes the angle to reveal her face in a 3/4 shot. Now the Bride finally manifests awareness of her surroundings, twisting her neck about in short, jerky, uncertain movements that seem almost birdlike. The camera cuts to Pretorius in

medium shot as his character delivers the titular line, “the Bride of Frankenstein!” Again, “The Bride’s Theme” swells and the film returns to the same medium long-shot that followed the dissolve, again revealing the first triangle of characters. The camera somewhat awkwardly tracks in closer to the three figures before cutting once more in close-up to the Bride, who is repeating the bird-like head-jerks and vacant gazing. She lifts her head up and suddenly her gaze no longer seems distant. Her eyes widen and her mouth twitches. The Bride sees Henry standing before her, and the sight awakens her to the reality of something outside her own existence. In medium long-shot the Bride lurches towards Henry, who takes her hand in his and walks a few awkward steps with her, leading her, their eyes locked together. The Bride appears enamored of Henry, fascinated by the face of her creator, and seems to desire to be near him. She stops and looks away. Something disturbs her, snapping her out of her reverie. The scene cuts to an undisclosed space within the castle and reveals that the Creature has descended from above. He stops and sees what the audience can only assume is the Bride as he gazes towards stage left. At this point, the film plays a trick on the audience and tampers with the cognitive conditioning that classical continuity editing has performed on us by short-circuiting the way we organize and perceive spatiotemporal cues. The next shot shows the Bride in close-up with her head tilted toward stage-right in what appears to be an eye-line match with the previous shot of the Creature. As the Creature moves more fully into the lab space, however, we realize that he is staged on a staircase several steps behind the Bride, completely outside of her visual range. The Bride still looks to her right but seems only to sense the newfound presence. She is agitated, her head darting about, seeking out the source of this new and confusing sensation. Off-camera, the Creature whispers “friend,” and the Bride finally turns to see him. Her first vocalization, a short burst of what could

be described as baby-talk, squeaks out of her throat as she beholds him. At this point, the film provides an eye-line match and we see the Creature as the Bride does; he is ugly, clumsy, and his hands, hands that motion pleadingly to her, are burned, the fingers of the left hand fused together. He descends the stairs, closing the gap between them, and just at the moment his right hand nearly touches the Bride's left arm, the film cuts to a close-up of her as she screams, mouth open wide and head thrown back.

Following this close-up, a quick pan of the camera encompasses the second important character triptych, passing with the turn of the Bride's head from the Creature at stage-right to Henry at stage-left, the Bride positioned between them. Henry takes the Bride's hand like a suitor, inviting her to dance, and he gracefully leads her out of the Creature's distressing presence and onto a seat at stage-right. Henry is protective of the Bride and appears eager to ensure her all-around comfort. The film quickly reassembles this second character triptych as the camera follows the Creature moving across the space and seating himself beside the Bride, who once more finds herself between the two. Pretorius is also featured at far fight, but his presence is superfluous to the remaining narrative. The creature is not yet ready to give up his dream of companionship, and he makes clumsy attempts at courtship, placing the Bride's hand over his own and stroking her fingers. Frankenstein and Pretorius look on, observing the results of their experiment. The Creature smiles lovingly at her, but the Bride does not appear to reciprocate his feelings. She screams once more and falls back into the arms of Henry, who drags her away. "She hate me," growls the Creature. "Like others."

The scene cuts to an exterior shot of Henry's fiancée Elizabeth running through the rain towards the castle door. She pounds to be let in. Within the lab, the Creature, spurned, is on a

rampage, pushing over equipment and threatening the scientists. His arm drapes over a particular lever and Henry, in medium shot with the Bride clutched protectively to him, commands the Creature not to pull it. Apparently, this particular lever triggers a reaction that will destroy the entire castle and, according to Pretorius, “blow us all to atoms!” Elizabeth makes it to the lab door and Henry finally leaves the Bride’s side and rushes to his fiancée. In an act of mercy that Henry seems not to deserve, the Creature commands his creator to leave. “You live,” the Creature pleads. Turning to address Pretorius, however, the Creature says, “you stay. We belong dead.” He reaches for the lever and the Bride, seemingly aware that the Creature at least poses some kind of threat, hisses hatred for him. The Creature sheds a tear and throws the switch, destroying the lab and the castle around it. Roll credits.

The first of the two previously mentioned character triangles, the one consisting of the Bride, Henry Frankenstein, and Pretorius, encodes a form of sexual frustration very different from the one that informs the second triangle, in which the Creature replaces Pretorius. Both triangles feature the Bride at the apex, but the first triangle focuses on the sexual dynamic between Pretorius and Henry, allowing the Bride to serve as mediator between the two men, as a shared object of desire, or point of focus. Previous scenes in the film outline the way Pretorius has become obsessed with Henry’s work, though his own particular interests lie more with alchemy than with science, and the way he has coerced Henry to revisit a part of his life that Henry believed he had left behind after his original creation proved to be beyond his control. The creation of the Bride as a mate for the Creature is the pretense Pretorius needs in order to stimulate Henry’s interest in the re-animation of dead tissue. Pretorius’s plot proves successful, and the scene just described exhibits their concerted effort to create a female creature. Though

the film makes no explicit reference to any homosocial interest between the two men, its formal staging does imply it. Nearly every shot that contains both Henry and Pretorius stages the two men in a way that depicts them working in concert but divided from the audience's viewpoint by the Bride, whether she is on the operating table or standing. Though the Bride remains the focus and ultimate goal of their labors, the work itself that seems to fulfill the men, their mutual energies applied in a way they find satisfying.

The film establishes a much more interesting dynamic, however, within the second character triangle, in which the characters' subjective constitution is at stake. Both Henry and Pretorius arrive into the diegesis as fully formed subjects, with over-determined sociocultural backgrounds that include family, class, religious upbringing, nationality and race.

The second crucial character triangle, which encompasses Henry, the Bride, and the Creature, poses several important questions about individual subjective constitution. The film stages these questions within the few moments before the three characters are first depicted on-screen together in the same shot. The moment when the Bride sees Henry for the first time serves not only as the point at which the film opens its debate on the complex nature of human subjectivity, but it is also the moment in which the film dissolves the first character triangle, casting Pretorius into narrative marginality; Pretorius is present in the following final moments, but does not have any real importance to the remaining narrative.

When the Bride sees Henry, her unconscious mind seems to awaken to the possibility of existence anterior to her own, much as a newborn infant's does at the realization of the mother. Her eyes widen as she takes him in and absorbs him into her limited understanding. In Henry, the Bride finds her (M)other, who will provide for her and fulfill her desires, though she lacks the

language necessary to articulate those desires. In the medium-long shot following the Bride's recognition of Henry's alterity, she makes her first physical movements that have a purpose and object; her previous steps and jerky, furtive glances seem almost involuntary, even instinctual. Her movements towards Henry, however, reveal an agenda; she must get to him in order to find fulfillment in him. Their hands touch and the Bride is willingly led away, apparently anxious to be guided by the will of the (M)other.

At the crucial moment when the Bride discovers Henry, however, another figure enters the narrative space to compete for a place in her widening conscious awareness. The Creature's presence permeates the physical space behind the Bride, distracting her from her newfound purpose in Henry. The Bride, sensing the Creature first, turns and beholds him in horror. "Friend," says the Creature, attempting to win her approval. At this point it seems evident that the Bride's conscious or unconscious subjectivity does not acknowledge any similarity between itself and the Creature. Whether or not their origins are similar is irrelevant to the Bride's response to the Creature. He is a horror, unfit to serve as the Bride's Other or to fulfill any of her desires. What the Bride recognizes in the Creature is not the egotistical extension of her own infantile subjectivity that she perceives in Henry.

Just after the Bride screams in response to the Creature's presence, the film stages its second relational triangle within the *mise-en-scène* for the first time, framing the Bride with Henry and the Creature on either side. It is important to note that the Bride's movements in this quick shot position her between the others, with her back turned to the Creature as she faces Henry. This framing represents the Bride's first infantile use of linguistic signification, as, without vocal articulation, she effectively makes her desires known through her posture: "You,

Henry, are what I want. The Creature behind me is not.” This shot, immediately following the tension of the Bride’s introduction to and initial rejection of the Creature, offers a moment’s comic relief, owing to the look the Bride shoots Henry. Her eyes and stance say to him, “How dare you let that into my presence! Take it away at once!” Henry responds as the (M)other should, once more taking the Bride by the hand and leading her away, this time to safety. The Creature follows and again the Bride serves as the visual centerpiece in this triptych. It is important to note that there is no interaction between Henry and the Creature; both men’s attention remains focused on the Bride and on her responses, which further differentiates this triangle from the Henry-Bride-Pretorius triangle, because, in that first triangle, the Bride served as a pretense for a stirring tension between the two male figures, whereas the second triangle is defined by an interest in the Bride herself. The lack of interaction between Henry and the Creature reflects a shared infatuation with the blank-slate presented by the Bride. Each of the two male participants in this triangle hopes to shape in his own image the the Bride’s as-yet-unformed subjectivity, to inscribe his own desires onto the blank page that she embodies.

The Creature redoubles his efforts and takes the Bride’s hand into his own. The high hopes he has for his future with her are evident on the Creature’s face, and so too is his disappointment when she rejects him in favor of Henry for the second and final time.

This triangulated exchange offers a model for understanding subjective constitution that varies from the normative model maintained by Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. Before delving into what, exactly, Lacanian theory posits as the normative model, it is important to take an even closer look at the admittedly brief relationship between Henry and the Bride. The Bride sees Henry as her (M)other, as the individual from whom she hopes to obtain her own subjective

fulfillment. But how does Henry view the Bride? What can she mean for him? If the Bride is a cipher, a being without a developed subjectivity, it is important to understand why this is so. The Bride is “born” into a truly unique situation; deprived of a childhood, the Bride’s story begins *in medias res*, without the development a typical individual undergoes through the experiences of childhood and a culturally specific upbringing. The Bride’s subjectivity has not been informed by a sociocultural background of any kind; she knows neither religious nor social tradition, nor does she possess knowledge of familial structures or even the induction into language necessary to begin this understanding.

The same argument could be made about the Creature, for he too lacks a formative childhood. The difference between the Creature and the Bride at this point in *The Bride of Frankenstein* is that the Creature has been given time to construct his individuality, whereas the Bride has not. The film preceding this one, *Frankenstein*, depicts the Creature in the same state the sequel constructs for the Bride but then provides him a narrative through which he emerges into autonomous subjectivity. Although still at a crucial disadvantage, the Creature manages to navigate his world and to develop a sociocultural understanding that includes an induction into language and its signifying power.

The Bride is an infant contained within the highly-sexualized body of an adult. The film presents this sexualization of the Bride in no uncertain terms. The feminine contours of the Bride’s body are heavily accented while she is still under wraps, and, once her body is freed from its bondage, a bondage which is already suggestively sexual, she is photographed in close-up in a manner typical of early classical Hollywood’s treatment of its female stars. In addition, Elsa Lanchester, portraying the Bride, dons lipstick and eye-shadow. If, as was the case with the



Creature, the Bride's body is an amalgamation of various deceased fragments, her glamorous appearance contradicts narrative logic. This contradiction, or non-diegetic liberty, allows for the Bride's physical presence to provide scopic pleasure to the audience. In contrast to the Creature, whose awkward lumber, sickly pallor, and limp eyes convey the clumsy horror of a science experiment gone wrong, the Bride remains a vision of beauty. Henry, as her creator, maintains a position of supreme power over the development of her subjectivity – just as a mother's presence bears heavily on the constitution of an infant child's subjective growth. The crucial difference between Henry and the Bride and a mother and her infant is that the Bride is psychically undeveloped but physically mature, a blank slate with a fully formed adult female anatomy. Henry is potentially able to continue the Bride's creation, influencing, even controlling, the development of her ego. Henry has created his personal version of the ideal female body, and is now in a position to shape his personal version of his ideal female subjectivity. For Henry, the Bride is both child and prospective lover and can be made into the mirror-image of Henry's vanity in female form.

The Bride's rejection of the Creature eliminates him as a threat to Henry, for only the (M)other possesses supreme authority over the Bride's subjectivity. Granted, the Creature might attain a lateral, sibling-to-sibling relationship with the Bride and influence her development in that way, but Henry's influence will be dominant within the initial stages of her development.

*The Bride of Frankenstein* implies but does not develop these scenarios, and instead returns Henry, the film's principle protagonist, to the safe and open arms of socially normative behavior within a binary heterosexual union of autonomous beings. This return to normative behavior comes in the form of Elizabeth, Henry's fiancée, who runs to the castle in the film's

final moments and pleads to be let in. With the addition of Elizabeth, the film hints at a third triangle, this time involving Elizabeth, the Bride, and Henry. The film even stages this triangle within shots that mirror the Henry-Creature-Bride triangle. During the film's final moments, as the Creature threatens to pull the switch and destroy everything, a medium-long shot frames the Bride, on the right, held in Henry's arms, while Elizabeth's face is visible through a cut-out in the door behind him and to the left. Whatever conflict Henry feels over whether to remain behind with the Bride or to flee the castle's destruction with Elizabeth is short-lived, as Henry quickly chooses the latter course of action, but the film's formal arrangement does signify, however briefly, a third triangle with Henry at its apex.

The final scene in *The Bride of Frankenstein*, in which Frankenstein and Pretorious create the Bride, presents a major deviation from the Lacanian schema's normative model of subjective constitution. In order to understand the significance of this scene, it is important first to take that normative model into account. Modern Western society conventionally accepts sexual relationships between two independently defined subjects of different genders who come together in a mutually constitutive partnership. Within normative sexual structures, sexual activity is expected between two constituting subjects. Constitution in a Lacanian schema requires two subjects who are in a continuous state of "becoming," who are continuously informed by the unconscious's mediation between the Imaginary ego and the external influences of sociocultural conditions. The two participants in this binary relationship are determined by, and determining for, each other. This mutual constitution occurs through language in Lacan's reorientation of Freudian psychoanalysis. Slavoj Žižek sums this up well in *Enjoy Your Symptom!*:

Is not the fundamental proposition of his [Lacan's] first seminars that intersubjective reality is composed of utterances which, by means of the very act of enunciation, *make* the subject what it asserts to be – utterances of the type “you are my wife, my teacher, and so forth,” in other words: interpellations, utterances whereby the subject, by recognizing itself in their call, becomes what they purport it to be. (37)

A possible alternative to the binary relationship described by Lacan and Žižek involves a participant who is psychologically void, or blank. No longer would we have a pair of mutually constituting figures but would instead find one subject who possesses an identity in construction and a cipher divested of intelligible signification. This combination opens up the possibility that the conventionally constituted subject may be in a position of supreme power with respect to the cipher's significance. By taking advantage of this unique position, the conventionally constituted subject could control the continuing constitution of his or her own identity as well. Žižek, discussing symbolic identification, posits the authenticity of the “false masks” an individual might wear in the various relationships of his or her life. What this means for this hypothetical couple is that the conventionally constituted subject is free to mold his masks in any fashion he or she pleases, as the cipher presents a blank surface onto which he or she may project any desire he or she wishes.

In the final scene of *Othello*, for example, after Othello has killed Desdemona, Iago's treachery has been exposed, and Othello has stabbed himself, he kisses the dead lips of his murdered wife. No longer living, no longer endowed with any subjectivity, Desdemona is no longer whore, wife, daughter, or friend. She becomes the cipher, existing outside the bounds of

continuous constitution, and she now signifies only that which Othello desires. In Othello's final moments, with his lips pressed against hers, Desdemona can be only what he wishes, an ideal she perhaps never truly could have embodied in life. Additionally, Othello acquires the power, through Desdemona, to see himself in ways that he might not have actually represented in life.

In other words, individuals in a binary relationship, or discourse, are defined by one another's utterances, and each in turn dons a mask made in part by these utterances. These two subjects live with a certain amount of misrecognition at play between them, a misrecognition that originates first in the disconnection between a single subject and the mask he or she positions for him or herself. Benveniste proposes a theory of the utterance that Lacan takes up and modifies by applying it to the misrecognition inherent within a subject, which later shapes the subject's relationships with others. Benveniste distinguishes between the enunciation (the act of speaking) and the enounced (what is spoken). These concepts comprise the difference between the subject speaking and the subject who is being represented by the utterance, expressed in the difference between "I who speaks," and "I who am represented within my speech." Lacan's appropriation of Benveniste places a greater emphasis on this distinction, claiming that the subject who speaks of him or herself using the word "I" and in turn identifies with that word will have effected a discrepancy between himself as a subject and the "I" of the utterance; what is absent is the unconscious.

The Imaginary egos created in a discourse between two subjects within normative conditions of subjective constitution correspond to what Žižek means by "false masks." In *The Bride of Frankenstein*, these masks are evident within the character triangle constituted by Henry, Pretorius, and the Bride as a mediating object; the two men exist for each other as

scientists, as adversaries, and finally as allies of convenience. These masks, created by the constituting power of the utterance, are also evident between Henry and Elizabeth in a way entirely different from the way they function between Henry and Pretorius. In the few scant seconds *The Bride of Frankenstein* grants Elizabeth during the final scene, it is evident that the mask Henry wears for her, the “I” he positions between them, hides the dangerous Henry who partakes in diabolical science experiments and cavorts with shady characters like Pretorius. For her, Henry is fiancé and love, a man who can protect her and who in turn needs her care and devotion.

A different discourse exists between Henry and the Bride, one that interrupts a normative subject-to-subject exchange. The Bride stands before Henry psychologically blank. As previously noted, she is bereft of formative childhood experiences. She spends her first few moments of life in what Lacan calls a mirror-stage, only slightly aware of herself as a subject who can be differentiated from her surroundings; as she looks frantically about in her first waking moments, she seems to experience, as an infant would, sensory overload as she attempts to make these distinctions. During this process, the Bride recognizes her Other, the figure that will serve as the basis for reciprocal constitution, in the form of Henry. Before the Bride is confronted with the Creature’s presence, she has already formed an attachment to Henry, clinging to him for support and protection. This action marks the moment the Bride make a successful transition to the Imaginary, forming a distinction between herself and the exterior world; “you are you, and therefore I must be me.” Existing pre-Symbolically as she does, however, the “I” the Bride positions exists within her unconscious and does not yet constitute a fully developed Imaginary ego or “false mask.” Existing in the domain of the pre-Symbolic, the

Bride is never made aware of a paternal authority with which she must compete for the M/Other's love. For her, there is only Henry, who serves in the capacity of the Other, and the Creature, who marks a confrontation with the Real, which the Bride can neither imagine nor symbolize.

For Henry, the Bride is, at least in part, an exercise in vanity. Like the dead Desdemona, the Bride possesses no autonomous subjectivity. Desdemona's subjectivity lies behind her, her corpse relegated to the status of pure object. The Bride's status as infant born directly into adulthood consigns her unformed subjectivity to a future she is not permitted to enjoy.

Henry's escape into the arms of Elizabeth represents the film's escape from the questions it has thus far posed. With the destruction of the castle, the Bride's latent subjectivity is annihilated, and the potential for Henry to mold his ideal woman from the unformed clay of her ego is swept away. If the film successfully asks its audience to consider the consequences of such an incestuous coupling of parental and spousal roles, it leaves a question for other films to answer. *The Bride of Frankenstein* presents an alternative to the Lacanian model of normative sociocultural subjective constitution, but it falls short of answering the provocative questions it raises. Most popular films in the classical Hollywood style repeat the same pattern, but there are those, including Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) and Brian De Palma's *The Black Dahlia* (2006), that pursue this line of questioning more thoroughly while still falling short of developing this alternate, potentially subversive, way of understanding subjectivity.

The questions about subjective constitution that *The Bride of Frankenstein* raises but then evades recur throughout twentieth-century film. *The Bride of Frankenstein* merely skims the surface of the potential that alternative models of subjective constitution hold for understanding

the complex relationships that can develop between two individuals. *Vertigo* (1958) and *The Black Dahlia* (2006) both feature one or more fully realized subjects that shape the subjectivity of one that is unrealized, much as Frankenstein's Bride who has been deprived of normative subjective constitution. The fully realized subjectivities in each film, by attempting to create an ideal subject, by attempting to create ~~The~~ The Woman, produce mirrors of their own ego ideals. Though both *Vertigo* and *The Black Dahlia* successfully and thoroughly interrogate non-normative forms of subject constitution, they also, like *The Bride of Frankenstein*, re-establish the primacy of the normative model of mutual subjective constitution by their conclusions. This bolstering of normative models occurs to varying degrees in the two films, and De Palma's more contemporary film abandons the alternative model much more readily and totally than does Hitchcock's, due to its seeming need to establish a resolution more in keeping with classical norms.

## Chapter II

*Vertigo* has been thoroughly discussed from a multitude of perspectives, most notably, perhaps, from the perspective of psychoanalysis in Laura Mulvey's 1975 *Screen* article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Mulvey uses *Vertigo* and *Rear Window* (Hitchcock 1954) among other films, to lay out her famous argument about the dominance of the male gaze within the Classical model of Hollywood filmmaking and the relegation of the female to the status of object. Mulvey maintains that the male unconscious has two avenues of escape from the threat of castration that the female represents. The first involves what Mulvey calls a "preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma...counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment, or saving of the guilty object" (453). The second avenue of escape involves turning the female object into a fetish, "so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous" (453). Mulvey associates this first avenue with voyeuristic sadism, arguing that the male's pleasure derives from the affirmation or denial of the female's "guilt," which grants him a degree of control over the female. The subject, Mulvey implies, is the judge and therefore represents the "Name of the Father," constituting the paternal metaphor that guarantees symbolic law. This mantle, which Benveniste calls the subject of the enounced, saves the subject from castration, just as the central male character is ultimately freed from castration in *Notorious*. Mulvey associates the second avenue of escape from castration, which involves turning the female object into a fetish, with fetishistic scopophilia and the building up of physical beauty into an object that supplies the subject with satisfaction in its own right. *Vertigo* utilizes both of these avenues to great effect as Scottie, the film's protagonist, navigates the various psychological challenges, particularly the challenge of subjective identity, his character faces.



Mulvey does not address the effects of these avenues of escape on the construction of mutually constitutive subjectivity, but these effects are essential to the subjective constitution that takes place in *Vertigo*. Understanding the effect these avenues of escape have on normative subjectivity is essential in order to appreciate their role in the constitution of unconventional subjectivities. How can the fetishized female, who has been being relegated to the status of object by the male gaze, attain any subjective self-identity, and how does fetishization affect both female and male ego ideals? Mulvey is concerned with the way Classical Hollywood cinema supports patriarchal order, but her argument also sheds valuable new light on subject formation, especially within binary heterosexual relationships. The female, after being relegated to object, is unable to maintain any subjective self-identity, and the female ego ideal is nullified. In his *Three Essays on Human Sexuality*, Freud positions the fetish, understood in this instance in the more traditionally anthropological sense of the word, as an index of the subject such as a particular hair color or piece of clothing that functions as substitute for the true sexual object, as “the longing for the fetish passes beyond the point of being merely a necessary condition attached to the sexual object and actually *takes the place* of the normal aim, and, further, when the fetish becomes detached from a particular individual and becomes the *sole* sexual object” (20). In Mulvey’s model, however, the fetish and the conventional sexual object, the individual in question, are the same thing. The fetishization of the female object subsumes her subjectivity beneath an idealized image of The Woman, distorting her to the point at which she becomes a cipher; in the process the female subject becomes a fetish to herself. This is what Lacan means when he says, “The Woman does not exist.” Jacqueline Rose elaborates, arguing that Lacan’s position is “the corollary of his accusation, or charge, against sexual fantasy. It means, not that

women do not exist, but that her status as an absolute category and guarantor of fantasy (exactly ~~The~~ woman) is false” (48). The fact that ~~The~~ Woman is a false category does not prevent it from functioning as an ideal in the escape from castration that Mulvey posits in her article.

Maintenance of ~~The~~ Woman, of the fetishized female subject, results in her ego ideal being buried and forgotten.

*Bride of Frankenstein* illustrates Mulvey’s second avenue of escape for the male unconscious quite well, and quite literally. The Bride is a science experiment, a consciousness created from disparate bits of somatic tissue. Because she is denied her formative childhood years, the Bride’s subjectivity is shaped not by any sociocultural ideals accumulated through lived experience, but is rather invented by her creator, Henry Frankenstein. The Bride is truly ~~The~~ Woman in the Lacanian sense, exalted and fetishized by her creator. Because her subjectivity is controlled by Frankenstein’s ego ideal, the threat of castration that she might otherwise pose is nullified. The moment in *Bride of Frankenstein* when the Bride clings to Henry when confronted by the Creature is analogous to the moment in *Vertigo* when Judy acquiesces to Scottie’s unfair and fetishistic request that she dress and behave in exactly the way he remembers Madeleine. In both films, control of both parties’ future subjective constitution in these binary heterosexual relationships is confined to one party, the male, while the other party, the female, is reduced to an empty vessel waiting to be filled with the idealized projections of the male partner.

A similar but more subtle creation and fetishization of ~~The~~ Woman occurs in *Vertigo*. Mulvey claims that Hitchcock’s “heroes are exemplary of the symbolic order and the law ... but their erotic drives lead them into compromised situations. The power to subject another person to the will sadistically or to the gaze voyeuristically is turned onto the woman as the object of

both” (454). Mulvey is chiefly concerned with the imbalance of power between traditional American gender roles as they are represented within classical Hollywood film, but the peculiar relationship between the principle characters presented within *Vertigo* deepens the debate over the possibility of alternative models of subjective constitution because this relationship does not simply represent the objectification of women in American society, but takes it to its conceptual extreme. The film depicts the creation and maintenance of a female character who is controlled by the fragile ego ideal of the principal male character to the point of mutual destruction. This fabricated female character is pure object because she is more than a female subject whose subjectivity is ignored, or bypassed, by the male gaze, as occurs in *Notorious* and *Rear Window*; rather, she is constructed entirely from the raw material of the male ego and made into a mirror of the misrecognized and misrecognizing male. Together, these two figures, one constituting the other but only being falsely reflected in return, represent the alternative model of subjective constitution implied in *Bride of Frankenstein*.

Madeleine/Judy is the object of Scottie’s gaze, but her status as an object is unusual in comparison to that of female characters in some of Hitchcock’s other great works, including *Notorious* (1946) and *Rear Window* (1954). In *Notorious*, Cary Grant’s Devlin, an agent of the American government, falls in love with Ingrid Bergman’s Alicia, a woman with a distinct, notorious background. Alicia is a socialite with a morally ambiguous past that includes a father who worked as a Nazi spy in the United States. The American government employs Alicia because of her particular past and because her relationship with her father connects her to another high-ranking Nazi officer whom the American government is anxious to apprehend. For Devlin, Alicia represents the ultimate castration threat, because Devlin has, or at least feels that

he has, no control over Alicia's decisions or subjectivity. She is a headstrong woman with strong opinions of her own and an implied history of multiple lovers, which could easily intimidate a man. At one point Alicia offers Devlin the chance to alter her future by admitting his love of her and forbidding her to carry out her assigned task. She invites him to employ a degree of control over her that he only has to accept. Devlin fails the test and remains silent when a declaration of his love would keep Alicia from exposing herself to the morally compromising process of seducing the Nazi officer at the center of her mission. Devlin is afraid to confess his love to Alicia because of the threat she represents to his ego ideal. Devlin desires Alicia to need him. He fears she will damage his ego ideal, and he therefore needs her to need his protection.

By the film's end, however, the narrative delivers a satisfying, classically-motivated and conventional finale by providing Devlin with exactly the control over the continued constitution of Alicia's subjectivity that he desires, thus validating his ego ideal. Devlin wraps the physically and emotionally helpless Alicia in his arms and carries her away, recuperating from any damage she has previously inflicted on his ego ideal. Only when Devlin gains power can he admit his love for Alicia, who is now, in the Lacanian sense, the object of his love. The "I" Devlin speaks to Alicia, his own misrecognized ego ideal, receives its long-sought validation when the "I" that Alicia speaks back to him articulates a need for Devlin's protection. Devlin's "mastery" of Alicia's subjectivity illustrates Mulvey's claim about the dominance of the male gaze in mainstream film; with Devlin's ego ideal firmly in place, the homogeneous audience that Mulvey presupposes can walk away from the theater assured of their own identities as well.

The principle female character in *Rear Window* is also objectified in the Mulveyan sense and simultaneously made into an object in the Lacanian sense. This film begins with Jimmy

Stewart's Jeff deprived of physical power: his leg is broken and casted. His girlfriend, Grace Kelly's Lisa, to whom Jeff has cooled, is, as in *Notorious*, a threat to his masculinity because she provides for Jeff in his incapacitated state, potentially compromising the male ego ideal much more significantly than does *Notorious*. As Jeff begins unraveling the mystery behind what he believes to be a murder occurring in the building across the street, he sends Lisa, as his proxy, to investigate. Mulvey's article treats *Rear Window* as a metaphor for cinema in general, as Jeff, who watches Lisa's actions in the building across the street through his window, which Mulvey compares to the framed confines of the theater screen, playing the role of the cinema audience. Mulvey notes, "when she [Lisa] crosses the barrier between his [Jeff's] room and the block opposite, their relationship is reborn erotically. He does not merely watch her through his lens, as a distant meaningful image, he also sees her as a guilty intruder exposed by a dangerous man threatening her with punishment, and thus finally giving him the opportunity to save her" (455). This moment in *Rear Window*, which can be read as a metaphor for the relationship between audience and film, also depicts the operation of a patriarchal ego ideal. Just as in *Notorious*, the threat of castration is arrested only when the female character is objectified and surrenders control of her own subjectivity to the male ego ideal. Jeff's ego is only healed when he regains a position of authority over Lisa; only then is he once more free to love her.

The difference between the relationships depicted in these two films and the one presented in *Vertigo* has to do with constituted subjectivity and the evasion of the initial castration threat felt by both Devlin and Scottie. In *Vertigo*, the "Madeleine" object does not, in fact, exist in any true sense – she exists in Judy's impersonation of her for Scottie's benefit, in fulfillment of the plot designed by Scottie's old college friend Gavin Elster. Madeleine is, in this

sense, also a projection of Scottie's desires. Alicia and Lisa come to Devlin and Scottie as normatively constituted subjects, replete with sociocultural experiences formed throughout the course of their lives; these subjects whom Devlin, Scottie, or any other individual encounters in life, can be deprived of their threatening alterity by manifesting the platonic chora, a blank slate onto which one can project one's own ego ideal and see it reflected back, distorted though it may be. This is what occurs in *Vertigo*.

Scottie, hired as a private investigator to follow Elster's wife Madeleine, embarks on a quest that threatens to unravel a subjectivity already bruised by a previous trauma. According to Elster, Madeleine is possessed by the ghost of a dead countess from the nineteenth century named Carlotta Valdes. Scottie's initial investigation reveals that Madeleine spends her days retracing the paths of Carlotta's life, imitating her and obsessing over her. As Scottie shadows Madeleine, he begins to fall in love with her – or with the mystery that she represents. One evening, when Scottie has followed her to a secluded spot on San Francisco Bay, Madeleine, seemingly possessed by the countess, throws herself into the bay. Scottie jumps in after her, rescues her, and brings her back to his home. After spending more time together, they gradually acknowledge a mutual attraction, and Scottie swears to cure her of her fatal obsession with Carlotta Valdes. His attempts to accomplish this task serve as the foundation for the unconventional relationships that follow.

In *Organs without Bodies* (2003), Žižek divides *Vertigo* into three distinct parts, each centered on one of Madeleine's "deaths," and he fits them into his schema of the triad of the Real. He supposes that each of the three formative phases of subjectivity, the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real, are also contained within the real alone. In other words, there exists an

Imaginary Real, a Symbolic Real, and a Real Real. This model, which represents a modification of the original triad, asserts that the three categories are not mutually exclusive but instead nebulously co-mingle. Žižek defines the first category, the Imaginary Real, as an emphasis that provides structure to the Imaginary, such as a structure within a dream that becomes a focal point of horror within that dream, changing it into a nightmare. Such focal points serve as Imaginary markers of the Real and also provide an impetus to flee the dream and return to waking reality. Žižek first makes a correlation between Madeleine and this Imaginary Real. In this respect Madeleine appears to Scottie as fragile, pure appearance, centering around her fall into San Francisco Bay. He has pursued her to the point at which he has already begun to fall in love with an ideal of her. At this point, Scottie and the audience believe he is following a Madeleine who believes she is Carlotta Valdes. Žižek calls her “an imaginary presence at the site of the real,” suggesting that the vision of Madeleine standing at the edge of San Francisco Bay signifies, for Scottie, the misrecognized ideal that each subject encounters, both in the mirror and in the form of the “Other,” before induction into language. Saying she exists “at the site of the real” implies that the mystery surrounding Madeleine evades the successful formation of this image; as a result Scottie must struggle with the reality of her image before him. Madeleine’s plunge into the bay provides Scottie with the impetus he needs to exit the Imaginary Real and to plunge deeper into the mystery surrounding her. His role as rescuer and her role as a victim needing to be rescued immerses them both in a world of linguistic identification and of law. This recalls the scene in *Notorious* in which Alicia grants Devlin control over her because she is physically incapable of rescuing herself. She needs Devlin to take her into his arms physically and emotionally and to carry her safely out of danger. His ideal of her is restored, and so is his own misrecognized ego

ideal, the “I” he utters to Alicia. A crucial difference, however, lies in the fact that Devlin and Alicia’s mutual utterances have been idealized earlier and then dissipated over the course of the plot, before being reaffirmed at the end. Madeleine’s relinquishing of control to Scottie early on solidifies their roles at the onset; Judy, in the Madeleine guise, hands the false promise of *The Woman* to Scottie on a silver platter.

Žižek’s second category, that of the Symbolic Real, refers to vague linguistic systems or codes that in and of themselves are meaningless and serve only as backdrops against which our reality is formed. Žižek refers to the entire system of Capitalism, for example, as the backdrop for our current historical moment. Within the textual confines of *Vertigo*, this second phase, the Symbolic Real, ends with Madeleine’s staged suicide from the bell tower at San Juan Bautista Mission. Madeleine provides the meaningless Symbolic backdrop upon which Scottie’s reality is constituted, and she also stands as a signifier for the barred Other, for the object that both motivates and castrates Scottie. Since Scottie is aware neither that Madeleine did not actually leap to her death nor that she is a fictitious construct, her apparent death cripples his ego, resulting in his temporary stay in a mental hospital. The control Madeleine gave to Scottie in the first of the film’s three segments is abruptly stripped away. This loss of access to the mystery-to-be-solved that Madeleine represents is also, for Scottie, a loss of access to the symbolic, and this loss bars Scottie from the Other and effectively castrates his ego. With Madeleine’s death, the mystery surrounding her obsession with Carlotta Valdes is destroyed, and so too is Scottie’s ego ideal. Denied access to his idealized Other, Scottie effectively “dies” to himself and to the symbolic network he had constructed around himself and Madeleine. Žižek discusses “death” outside the symbolic community in *Enjoy Your Symptom!*, indicating that when a subject



experiences this death, his being now “materializes the Nothingness of the hole, the void in the Other . . . designated, in Lacan, by the German word *das Ding*, the Thing, the pure substance of enjoyment resisting symbolization” (9-10). In other words, when a code that lacks inherent meaning, representative of the Symbolic Real and represented in *Vertigo* by the mystery of Madeleine, is stripped away Scottie is left with nothing but the void of the Other and unfulfilled desire.

The third category, that of the Real Real, is defined by Žižek as “the shattering experience of negations.” This third category seems inseparable from the Lacanian concept of the Real, that which exists in a state that is impossible to either imagine or symbolize. Madeleine’s status as the void, *the objet petite à*, the thing that is left over once its lie has been removed, provides a succinct example of the Real itself. For Scottie, the Real is all that is left upon Madeleine’s third and final death. Whether or not Scottie continues to see the misrecognized Madeleine ideal or Judy as a legitimate subject during their final confrontation with the truth on the bell tower at San Juan Bautista is unclear in the film. However, the look on Scottie’s face when she falls, this time with no resurrection following, is not one of closure. More than at any time in the film prior to this last moment, Scottie seems confused, unable to understand what has occurred. Even during his previous state of catatonia he seemed less affected than during the film’s final moments, for then, cut off from the symbolic network, Scottie’s own ego ideal shut down, making no further attempts to cope with the situation involving Madeleine’s apparent death. Here, confronting the third death, Scottie’s ego ideal has not shut down but seeks to imagine that which cannot be imagined and to symbolize that which cannot be symbolized. The death of Madeleine and Judy together is not something that fits into Scottie’s schema. Žižek states that

“what ultimately interrupts the continuous flow of words, what hinders the smooth running of the symbolic circuit, is the traumatic experience of the Real” (27).

Applying Žižek’s categories to the three sections that comprise *Vertigo* is helpful not only to understanding Madeleine as a construct, but to analyzing the various states of mind that drive Scottie from his initial obsession with Madeleine as the Other to his perverse need to impose his already false ideal of her on Judy.

Kriss Ravetto-Riagioli, who argues that “both the gaze and the spectator’s alleged identification with it are contingent on figures of the past and objects of desire that never existed,” asks how “we can erect theories of the Real on the powers of the false without revising what we mean by the Real” (125)? Discussions of a psychoanalytic concept such as the Real and a structure as amorphous and intangible as the unconscious raise important questions about the nature of “reality” itself. Madeleine exists for Scottie, and their mutually constitutive relationship is very much real. Scottie, in love with a woman who, from his perspective, truly exists, is driven insane by her death, and the fact that she has not actually died does not affect Scottie’s belief that she has. In *Enjoy Your Symptom!*, Žižek, discussing what he calls the “fiction of reality,” argues that “psychoanalysis thus conceives ‘reality’ as something constituted, ‘posited’ by the subject” (57). Applying Žižek’s definition of reality to Scottie’s relationship with Madeleine, it becomes clear that her reality within the confines of his unconscious mind is no less genuine than is Judy’s or even his own reality.

For a period of time that the film does not specify, Scottie’s subjectivity also seems to have died as he languishes in a mental hospital, having regressed into a kind of pre-symbolic state, devoid of language and unable to relate to those around him in any meaningful way. In the

absence of Madeleine, Scottie finds himself face to face with the Real, which he is able neither to imagine nor to signify. The masks Scottie created to represent himself to Madeleine, his ego or the “I” who is represented in his speech, are shattered by his failure to save her from death.

Almost from the beginning Madeleine, or, rather, the character Madeleine fabricated by Judy and Elster, represents death, as Scottie is led to believe that she in some way embodies the spirit of the dead Carlotta Valdes. Madeleine’s three deaths, combined with Scottie’s relentless pursuit of her, provide a succinct example of the Freudian death-drive, as reconceptualized by Lacan, in action. Lacan, having resurrected a generally unpopular theory originally conceived by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, emphasized that for Freud the drive towards death was not an innate human drive towards externalized violence, but should be understood as an internalized violence originating in the constant tension between a subject and his or her ego.

Robin Wood associates Madeleine with the death-drive, claiming that she is “continually associated with death” and that she “represents a wish-fulfillment on a deeper and more valid level . . . she has evoked in us all [the audience] that longing for something beyond daily reality which is so basic to human nature” (85). For Scottie, Madeleine embodies a fatalistic death-drive that leads him through what Ravetto-Riagioli calls “the portals of the past.” Despite the fatalistic, even destructive nature of Scottie’s relationship with Madeleine, and despite the fact that Madeleine does not actually exist, their relationship follows fairly normative patterns. The fact that Madeleine is a fiction created by Judy and Elster does not alter her status as the Other through whom Scottie focuses his desire. As Žižek and Benveniste suggest, our presentation of ourselves to others is always already a fiction, and in this respect Judy’s performance as Madeleine is no more a fabrication than any other individual’s presentation of self to others. The

fact that Scottie's subjectivity begins disintegrating as he pursues a relationship that is, unknown to him, contrived does not invalidate the very real exchange of utterances between the two.

The relationship between Scottie and Judy is completely different. Scottie does not realize until much later that Judy is the same woman as Madeleine, and his every exchange with Madeleine takes place between mutually constitutive subjects. Scottie and Judy subsequently embark on what could also be a normative, mutually constitutive relationship, but soon Scottie once again falls victim to the death-drive that Madeleine catalyzed. Richard Boothby elaborates on Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud's death-drive concept, which helps to explain Scottie's desire to recreate his relationship with the dead Madeleine: "The death drive as Lacan reads it is, in effect, a mythical expression of pure desire, the effects produced in the psychical structure by vital forces that remain active and striving beyond the bounds of representation" (70). Judy, as Madeleine, genuinely falls in love with Scottie, but when she confronts him in her authentic persona, she doesn't stand a chance. Žižek notes that Judy is "a proto-entity, an incomplete, formless slime, a kind of Platonic *chora*, a pure receptacle for the sublime Idea of Madeleine" (*Organs without Bodies* 161). Judy is a cipher who unfortunately wishes for Scottie to love her as Judy, but Scottie instead embarks upon a subversive experiment in subjective constitution, which Judy foolishly allows. Instead of wearing the mask of Judy and of speaking the "I" of Judy, she dons the mask of Madeleine the cipher and allows her subjectivity to be controlled entirely by Scottie's desires. Judy, wearing the mask of Madeleine, becomes Plato's simulacrum, a perfect copy of that for which no original exists. Judy wore the mask of Madeleine wearing the mask of Carlotta Valdes in Elster's plot. When circumstances no longer require this deception and Judy is allowed to abandon these masks, she finds herself voluntarily wearing the

mask of Madeleine again and becomes an exact duplicate of a woman who does not exist. When, in the film, Judy finally gives in to Scottie's insistent demands to dress and wear her hair as Madeleine did, she relinquishes all control of a normatively constituting subjectivity and becomes *The Woman*, capable only of absorbing the misrecognized reflection of Scottie's own ego ideal.

In a less literal fashion than occurs in *The Bride of Frankenstein*, Scottie constructs Madeleine from the dead tissue of his desire and from Judy's own fragile subjectivity. The result is yet another cipher, another stand-in for an authentic subject. Madeleine represents, for Scottie, *The Woman*, the object of his desire, for only in creating what does not exist can he hope to find satisfaction.

In summary, Scottie creates a relationship in which he, as a fully constituted subject, constitutes the subjectivity of his partner. The cipher figure, Madeleine, is a blank subject, deprived of the internal energies of the unconscious, for though Judy possesses an unconscious, Madeleine is a puppet, the ghost of a dead woman who never lived, a copy without a model. Like the *Bride of Frankenstein*, Madeleine lacks the sociocultural conditioning that over-determines individual subjectivity. Neither Madeleine nor the *Bride of Frankenstein* possesses formative childhood experiences or, indeed, past experiences of any kind.

The construction and maintenance of a fabricated Other has only deleterious effects on Scottie's subjectivity. Scottie manufactures Madeleine to meet a personal need, making her up as he goes along, and the utterances he receives from her are no more than echoes of his own ego. This phantasmic relationship, in turn, prevents Scottie from entering into a more normative, mutually constitutive relationship. The result, the film suggests, may indeed be Scottie's insanity.

Fredric Jameson, utilizing Lacan's definition of schizophrenia to provide a useful aesthetic model of the forces at work within certain postmodernist works of art, identifies its principle feature as a break in the signifying chain, a destruction of the relationship between signifier and signified along the syntagmatic track. Jameson maintains that "when that relationship breaks down, when the links of the signifying chain snap, then we have schizophrenia in the form of a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers." He argues that, "with the breakdown in the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers" (26). Scottie's stay in the mental hospital following Madeleine's second death and possibly his life following her third and final death are founded on Madeleine's absence from his life as an organizing principle, which results in his inability to continue to lead a normal life within the symbolic community. Lacan's model of schizophrenia as a break in the signifying chain that results in a subjectivity cluttered with unfocused, continually shifting, meaningless signifiers provides an apt description of Scottie's mental state as he struggles to deal with Madeleine's absence. In the final scene, as Scottie recreates Madeleine's fall from the bell tower, he seems to oscillate between being aware of Judy as a separate person and perceiving her as Madeleine. When she finally does fall to her death, the film does not indicate what the future might hold for Scottie: who does he believe, in the end, has fallen to her death?

For a film made during the more intensive years of the Hays Production Code, *Vertigo* is surprisingly brave in its depiction of this non-normative binary relationship. The level of fetishism displayed by Scottie towards Judy as he tries converting her into Madeleine evokes what is traditionally called sexual perversion, which was not easy to connote at that time. The film, however, still does not affirm the development of that relationship in any enduring way. In order

fully to explore where a relationship of the type Scottie develops with Judy/Madeleine could go, Judy/Madeleine would have to survive the film's ending and return to the life she and Scottie had developed, continuing to live within the confines of Scottie's experiment in the resurrection and maintenance of Madeleine's false subjectivity. Judy would have to continue allowing her own subjectivity to be subsumed beneath the Madeleine persona. Instead, with Judy's and, thereby, Madeleine's death, the film abandons this alternate model of subjective constitution. What *Vertigo* also does not do is reassert normative constitution. It is not only the ideal Madeleine construct but Judy as authentic subject that is lost to Scottie. Scottie is left alone atop the bell tower at San Juan Bautista, denied both the misrecognized object of his desire and any hope for a relationship with either the Madeleine ideal or Judy.

### Chapter III

Among the subgenres of the thriller, including neo-noir, police procedural, and crime film, Brian De Palma's *The Black Dahlia* (2006) can also be described as a nostalgia film. Like Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974) before it, *The Black Dahlia* presents a pastiche of 1940s Americana, particularly of the vice, corruption, and disenchantment lurking in the shadows cast beneath the HOLLYWOODLAND sign and discovered by the star-struck hopefuls flooding into California during the "golden" Hollywood era of the 1930s and 1940s. The nostalgia film should not be confused with the documentary, or with projects in historiography. The nostalgia film depicts not historical events but rather an imagined past interpreted through the prism of present-day ideology and sensibilities. Fredric Jameson notes that nostalgia films "restructure the whole issue of pastiche and project it onto a collective and social level, where the desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past is now refracted through the iron law of fashion change and the emergent ideology of the generation" (19). The nostalgia film employs an ideology, accepted in the present, to understand the past. Todd McGowan offers another, simpler formulation of the way that the nostalgia film performs, noting that "the basic function of ideology . . . concerns the past rather than the present. It works to define the past solely in terms of the present. This is because the past – a time when things were different – represents a greater danger to symbolic authority than the present itself. If we remember a past when things were different, it is easier to act politically to create a different future" (152). The nostalgia film seeks, in a similar but seemingly less overt manner than the Stalinist historical revisionist project, to create an altered vision of the past through the prism of present ideology. In *The Black Dahlia*, the chosen past is Hollywood in the 1940s. As if it were an Otto Preminger film, *The Black Dahlia* presents men as



stoic as Dana Andrews, women who are femmes fatale on par with Gene Tierney, and cigarettes that always taste that damn good.

The nostalgia film, however, has more to offer than this historical revision. McGowan claims that subjective investment keeps ideology alive and working, and that the subject, not some giant Other behind the Other of ideology, “provides the key to the functioning of ideology” (153). If there is truth to the psychoanalytic claim that who we become as subjects is determined by the generative mechanisms at work in society around us, the power of ideology within each subject’s sociohistorical moment provides the constitutive force through which each individual’s subjectivity is constituted, and the individual subject’s acceptance of the fantasy provided by the Other of ideology in turn helps to consolidate the power of that ideology. Additionally, the discourse created between a present-day aesthetic and the appropriation of an idealized or misrecognized past affects subjectivity, particularly with regard to the construction of a collective or social ego ideal. Todd McGowan and Žižek claim that social change must occur at the level of the individual before that change can spread among the masses. McGowan claims that “there is no authentic political act without a prior traversing of the [Lacanian] fantasy. Thus, psychoanalysis – and the psychoanalytic critique of ideology – leads us to political action” (168). In other words, that which changes social consciousness is first changed within the individual consciousness; this point serves as the bridge between psychoanalysis and Marxism. “In psychoanalytic terms,” says McGowan, “there is no difference between the individual act and the collective act because any individual act necessarily has collective implications” (147). If this is true then it follows that social consciousness can be analyzed in much the same manner as an individual subject’s. The nostalgia film, therefore, can be read as not only a means of reconciling

the past in terms of the present, but as yet another way in which normative subjectivity, either at the level of the individual or collective, is constructed upon the fantasy provided by ideology.

Though the normative mutual constitution of two independent subjects, existing as misrecognized ego-ideals, is founded on the fantasy created within the social ideology that maintains and is maintained by those subjects, this is not the only possible model of subjective constitution, and *The Black Dahlia*, as a nostalgia film, offers another possibility. The model of subjective constitution offered by *The Black Dahlia* involves a binary relationship between a normatively constituted subject with complete formative childhood experiences and a conventional position within the symbolic network, and a second figure stripped of symbolic investment and invented, either by or in collusion with the first subject, as a stand-in for the ideal Other of the first subject, a masturbatory mirror projection that reflects the misrecognized ego ideal of the first subject. This model of subjective constitution includes none of the mutually constructive discourse at work in Benveniste's model of utterance exchange, in which the "I" posited by one subject defines that subject for the other within boundaries carefully constructed by that subject's ego ideal and in which the "I who is represented by my speech" is met in return by the "I" of the enounced, posited by the Other. In a conventional relationship between two people, this mutual exchange of utterances defines each subject, altering the masks of their respective egos until they reflect each other's desires and ideals as much as possible. This alternate model of subjective constitution posited by *The Black Dahlia* presents the conventional constituted subject filling the second subject, as empty vessel, with his or her own utterances and receiving in return only the distorted mirror reflection of him or herself – much like the relationship established between Narcissus and Echo.

*The Black Dahlia* offers several interesting binary pairings. One, between two male vice detectives, establishes itself through a normative track of mutual exchanges, though it is interrupted by the central figure of Elizabeth Short, a character brought into the diegesis D.O.A., onto whom these two detectives project wildly differing ideals. This triangle serves as the basis for this analysis of the film's alternative model of subjective constitution. A second important character triangle in the film serves both as an example of conventional subjective constitution and as a means of escape for one of the main characters into conventionally accepted social structures.

Two very different detectives are assigned to investigate the savage murder of a young girl named Elizabeth Short, the eponymous "Black Dahlia," in 1940s Los Angeles. As the investigation develops, both detectives find themselves assigning meaning to the object that is the girl's corpse. For both men, these meanings have a decidedly sexual aspect. Both men, to varying degrees, assign to Short the status of ~~The~~ Woman and use her in fulfilling their own ideal fantasies of what that figure means as placeholder for the fulfillment of desire. Elizabeth Short, already dead by the time she enters the detectives' lives, can no longer be experienced as a product of formative childhood experiences. Short's life is a mystery to both men, and only when the detectives supply their own interpretations of what she represents in the signifying chain of their own personal narratives can she play a role in their own continuing subjective constitution.

The narrative that Detective Bucky Bleichert constructs around the dead girl takes the form of an affair he has with a woman who is considered a "Dahlia look-alike," one of several women who, fascinated with the infamous murder, begin dressing like her and letting themselves be seen at nightclubs the Dahlia frequented. The look-alike is an example of a subject who, like

Judy in *Vertigo*, willingly undergoes the transition from conventional, socially established subject to cipher, divested of ego ideal and subsumed under the misrecognized image of another figure. In both *Vertigo* and *The Black Dahlia*, the cipher figure, the blank image of the Other's ego ideal, is fashioned not by one conventionally constituted subject, as occurs in *Bride of Frankenstein*, but by two subjects engaged in a collusion to create an unconventional third who serves as a sponge, absorbing their own misrecognized selves. One difference between the look-alike and Judy is that Judy strips herself of her own identity and dons the mask of Madeleine the benefit of Scottie, becoming a mirror for Scottie's own egotistical vanities. The look-alike in *The Black Dahlia*, on the other hand, makes the same change without first finding the Other for whom she could serve as mirror. Instead, the look-alike is in a relationship with herself and with an ideal of the deceased Dahlia until her meeting with Detective Bleichert, which allows, in Benveniste's terms, the "I who speaks" to be stripped of identity and the "I who is represented by my speech" to become Elizabeth Short as narrative construct. When the look-alike and Bleichert meet, their relationship is established in a way opposite to the Scottie/Madeleine/Judy relationship in *Vertigo*. In *The Black Dahlia*, the relationship is initiated by the cipher rather than by the subject who allows his or her ego ideal to remain intact. In *The Black Dahlia*, the look-alike seeks a pairing with Bleichert, using the Short construct to facilitate this pairing. She allows herself to serve as the mirror to Bleichert's ego ideal because she herself desires to represent the Other rather than to be represented by the Other. In other words, Judy is unwillingly subsumed beneath the image of the dead figure and forced into collusion with Scottie, whereas in *The Black Dahlia*, the look-alike chooses to superimpose the dead figure upon her own identity, allowing herself and, later, Bleichert to exploit Short's posthumous significance.

Lacanian theory, in an attempt to reassert the primacy of the death-drive in Freud, claims that the physical destruction of the self, and even a fascination with bodily dismemberment, whether of oneself or of others, represents the desire of the unconscious, or “true,” subject to rid itself of the false projections of the ego ideal. The example of the look-alike in *The Black Dahlia* does not qualify as body-horror in the manner of David Cronenberg, whose films’ relationship to alternative subjectivities begs analysis, but her voluntary disregard for her own ego is a willing traversal of the Freudian death-drive, although it is not her unconscious but a yet deeper level of misrecognition provided by the ego ideal that is battling for supremacy.

Detective Bleichert’s affair with the look-alike is founded upon his own fascination with the image of Short. He finds himself drawn into the mystery of the look-alike because of their mutual attraction to the ideal that Elizabeth Short represents for them both. Bleichert, when presented with the Other in the guise of the dead (the look-alike) or with the dead in the guise of the Other (the body of Elizabeth Short), begins redefining the look-alike’s subjectivity and his own around a dead object that has been divested of a subjectivity of its own. The fact that Elizabeth Short had her own determined subjectivity in life does not affect the influence of her body as object has on Bleichert, for he had no knowledge of Elizabeth in life; she exists for him in death through the look-alike as a romanticized ideal of ~~The~~ Woman. So much does the look-alike represent Bleichert’s imagined picture of Short that, when the look-alike finally does allow some of her own ego ideal to emerge from beneath the mask of Short, Bleichert is disgusted with her because she no longer fits into his carefully crafted ideal. In the film, Bleichert and the look-alike have met for sex. Afterwards, as they lie in bed smoking, the look-alike, whose name we discover to be Maddie, nervously reveals to Bleichert a bi-curiosity that led her into a lesbian

experience with Elizabeth Short some time before her murder. At first, Bleichert believes she's making it up, and he laughs it off. When, after looking at her closely, he realizes she is not lying, he springs from the bed and leaves her, uncomfortable with what was then a much less accepted form of sexuality and with the fact that the experience occurred with the real Elizabeth Short, which prevents Bleichert from continuing to see the look-alike as Short.

The film's second detective, Blanchard, constitutes an imagined subjectivity around the dead Elizabeth Short in a completely different way. Though Blanchard lives with a woman, Kay, the two are not sexually involved with each other, and Blanchard, unlike Bleichert, find no empty canvas onto which to paint his own imagined ideal of the dead Short's subjectivity. For reasons that can only be inferred from the film's text, Blanchard is an extremely sexually repressed individual, and his own relationship to and appropriation of Short takes a masochistic route. Freud's definition of masochism in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* is germane to Blanchard's experience. Masochism, Freud writes, "comprises any passive attitude towards sexual life and the sexual object, the extreme instance of which appears to be that in which satisfaction is conditional upon suffering physical or mental pain at the hands of the sexual object" (24). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud takes the concept of masochism further, claiming that human aggression has its origins in the internal conflict between the subject and its own ego. Detective Blanchard's severe sexual repression manifests itself in masochistic outbursts.

One scene in particular manifests Blanchard's masochistic tendencies: Blanchard and Bleichert are in a room full of other detectives with a small movie projector. They are watching a stag film they have discovered featuring Short before her death, searching for evidence. As

Short's blunt sexuality is exposed, it becomes obvious that Blanchard is the most uncomfortable person in the room. He cannot even watch certain scenes that reveal Short's vulnerability and obvious reluctance to participate in live sex, and, before the stag film is finished, Blanchard storms out of the room, furious and hysterical, off to commit violence against himself and others.

The narrative Blanchard constructs around Short seems to be one of vulnerability, perhaps associating her with the victimization his platonic girlfriend Kay experienced before she met him, a victimization from which he rescued her. In Short, Blanchard may see another Kay, one whom he failed to rescue. This, combined with guilt he feels over witnessing and possibly deriving unexpected pleasure from Short's sexual victimization, leads Blanchard to sublimate his desires beneath his masochistic tendencies.

Blanchard's own ego ideal begins disintegrating due to the hysteria this repression causes. With no one onto whom to project his ideal other, he attempts to sublimate his desire into an intense, masochistic focus on his work, sparking a chain of events that lead to his violent and unnecessary death. Unlike Bleichert, Blanchard is unable adequately to process a relationship with Short as *The Woman*, because he is unable to imagine the manifestation of an ideal female counterpart for himself.

*The Black Dahlia* utilizes Kay Lake, Blanchard's Platonic girlfriend, to effect Bleichert's escape back into normality. Throughout the film, she and Bleichert establish a more socially acceptable love affair than the one Bleichert has with the Short look-alike. Kay facilitates Bleichert's admission back into the symbolic community. In an especially important scene reminiscent of similar formal stagings in *Bride of Frankenstein*, Kay, positioned on one side of Bleichert, with the look-alike staged on the other, points at the look-alike and says, "She looks

like that dead girl. How sick is that?" At this moment Bleichert confronts the ultimate choice either to maintain the narcissistic relationship with his own ego ideal as reflected back by his idealized projection of Elizabeth Short or to return to the symbolic community by pursuing a socially sanctioned relationship with Kay. In its final moments, the film shows this character triangle again as Bleichert sees Kay standing before him, in a doorway representative of conventional domestic space, surrounded by a strange, non-diegetic luminescent halo while behind him, in what we can only assume is a hallucination, lies not the look-alike, whom Bleichert has killed in a preceding scene, literally destroying the Short construct, but an image of Short's murdered and discarded body on the lawn, a large black bird pecking at her dead flesh. Bleichert shakes the image off, dissipating and conquering it, and turns to Kay, his salvation, who welcomes him back into normality with open arms. Bleichert chooses to return to the symbolic community along the normative pathway of the conventional heterosexual relationship. Whether or not the ghost of Short's image, which he at least temporarily manages successfully to shake off by film's end, returns to haunt him in the future remains uncertain. All we know with certainty is that Bleichert voluntarily chooses to return to the fantasy of ideology and constitute his subjectivity within those boundaries.

With the death of the look-alike, the final rejection of the image of Elizabeth Short, and Bleichert's acceptance of a more socially acceptable relationship with Kay by film's end, *The Black Dahlia*, as an experiment in alternatively constituted subjectivity, dismisses the continued exploration of alternative models of subjective constitution, eschewing them in favor of socially normative constitution. *Vertigo*, which conducts a similar experiment in establishing alternatively constituted subjectivities, likewise abandons its project by film's end but is not so quick to re-



position its principle characters in a satisfying heterosexual romance consistent with classically constructed Hollywood narrative conventions. *The Black Dahlia* much more thoroughly defines Bleichert's relationship with the look-alike as something that must be eliminated in order for Bleichert to return to the symbolic community. *The Black Dahlia* does this by framing the look-alike within the mechanisms of Short's murder, implicating her directly in the violence done to the real Elizabeth Short. Bleichert, as a police detective assigned to Short's case, effectively has no choice but to strike the look-alike from his life, not only rejecting the continued exploration of the ideal Short construct they have created, but punishing her before the eyes of the symbolic community as well, for, though he falls short of delivering her to the judgement of the judicial system, he does shoot and kill her, removing her forever from her alternative subjectivity as Short and her own subjectivity as Maddie.

If the nostalgia film depicts not historical actuality but rather an imagined past interpreted through the prism of present-day ideology and sensibilities, then one may view *The Black Dahlia* as an experiment not only in positioning individual characters within an alternative model of subjective constitution, but also as an effort to position an entire historical moment within this model. In this case, the text of the film is the cipher figure, "born" into its particular sociohistorical moment but divested of any significance save for what is projected onto it by the ego ideals of the filmmakers and the audience. Our mutual desire with regard to this type of film, a neo-noir detective film, is to view the past in terms of the present. The audience projects its collectively misrecognized idealization of 1940s Americana onto the film and receives in return fuel to maintain that misrecognition. The anxiety that a collective consciousness brings to a film of this nature engages such questions as, "what events in the past have informed this present?"

Much like the aims an individual consciousness brings to the potential Other within the binary relationships described above, a collective consciousness in the presence of a nostalgic text such as *The Black Dahlia* seeks confirmation of a misrecognized ego ideal. In other words, an ideal present that is informed by a distorted perception of the past is analogous to the ego ideal of one subject that is reflected back by the Other as mirror; the misrecognized individual subject and the ideological fantasy supported by the collective consciousness are indistinguishable.

## Conclusion

Who we are as constituted subjects is determined by the multitude of generative mechanisms at work within our sociohistorical moment. A proper understanding of the constitution of the subject deepens our understanding of the function of the Other for each individual. The normative model of subjective constitution, in which two distinct individuals exchange a series of utterances, each constituting and being constituted by the other, provides a useful model not only of the continued development of the ego in each individual but also of the tricks the ego plays on the unconscious, or “true self,” in order to maintain itself. Beginning with what Lacan calls the I-Ideal, a precursor to the ego ideal proper, the infant and potential subject misrecognizes itself in the mirror in a way that precedes even the first image of the (M)Other. Of the I-Ideal and the primal misrecognition perpetrated by the infant, Juliet Mitchell states:

The first ‘I’ of the newborn baby, unable to distinguish himself from the world, is not [an] essential self for . . . though we *speak* of this baby as absolute subject of its world, it cannot really be this at all – quite the contrary. What the baby knows at this stage is, rather, the *asubjectivity* of total presence. The infant is at first not yet One, but Zero . . . for One to exist at all, two are needed, even if the second is in fact the reflection in the mirror. Zero is not identical with itself, whereas One, like all objects, is. Zero indicates the lack, it is a situation of non-relationship in which identity is meaningless, but because it makes the lack visible, it sets in motion the movement forward (385,386).

From the infant's most primal inability to distinguish itself from its surroundings, the ego begins making claims about itself, trying to define the lack within itself that desires to be filled-in by the Other.

As the individual continues the development of its own subjectivity, passing from what it can imagine to what it can symbolize linguistically or assign significance to, it begins the process of mask-wearing, donning various forms of the ego ideal based on the particular masks worn by the Other and on the series of exchanges between two subjects. Bakhtin, ahead of his time, offers a similar account of subjective constitution based on an exchange of utterances that includes not only *langue* on the broader scale, but *parole* in all of its sociocultural and historical specificity. Bakhtin includes in his account of linguistic significance the phenomenon of heteroglossia, which is, in Robert Stam's words, "the interanimation of the diverse languages generated by sexual, racial, economic, and generational differences," and *tact*, which consists of "the ensemble of codes governing discursive interaction" (17,18). Bakhtin's interpretation of human subjectivity as governed by dialogism, which is roughly equivalent to Benveniste's mutual exchange of utterances, has broader implications for subjective constitution than even Lacan's. As Stam claims:

The Lacanian intervention makes subjectivity dependent upon the recognition of an irreducible distance separating self from other, and in so doing, turns psychic life into a series of irremediable losses and misrecognitions. But while Lacan seems to see human beings as eternally susceptible to . . . a desire than can only lead to an impasse of dissatisfaction, Bakhtin foregrounds the human capacity to mutually "author" one another, the ability to dialogically intersect on the frontiers

between selves. One becomes “oneself” . . . by revealing oneself to another, through another, with another’s help. (5,6)

Is the question of how we come to be as subjects still relevant in the postmodern age? Postmodernism asks questions about the nature of subjectivity that call its value into question. Fredric Jameson, for example, calls subjectivity as an authentic discourse into question throughout *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). Jameson argues that contemporary theory decenters the subject, or psyche, from culture itself and that it calls for “the end of the autonomous bourgeois monad or ego or individual” (15). Discussing Munch’s *The Scream*, Jameson posits a textual interpretation of the homunculus:

The homunculus’s expression requires the category of the individual monad, but it also shows us the heavy price to be paid for that precondition, dramatizing the unhappy paradox that when you constitute your individual subjectivity as a self-sufficient field and a closed realm, you thereby shut yourself off from everything else and condemn yourself to the mindless solitude of the monad, buried alive and condemned to a prison cell without egress (15).

Later in the book, Jameson addresses the death of the subject once more and claims that our current postmodern period calls for “the end of individuality, the eclipse of subjectivity in a new anonymity that is not puritanical extinction or repression but probably not often either that schizophrenic flux and nomadic release it has often been celebrated as” (174).

Questions surrounding the “death of the subject” are important to consider, but ceasing to seek understanding of subjectivity is not the answer, nor is the exploration of subjectivity only as an outmoded theoretical category. Subjectivity, or the existence of the individual monad, has

never been “a self-sufficient field and a closed realm,” but results instead from an amalgamation of competing sociocultural conditions. A subject, like a text, is constituted by the continuous dialogue between itself and the external world and is constantly in flux as that dialogue shifts with changes in ideology. Questions of authorial intent within a textual analysis can become questions of subjective intention in the analysis of the individual. Postmodern textual considerations, perhaps beginning with Foucault’s *What is an Author?* (1969), demand that we treat the text as the product of a multitude of ideological and sociocultural mechanisms, the least of which is “what the author means?” The same can be said of subjectivity in that the individual monad, which, like the text, is an overdetermined idea. The subject possesses no more authorial control over him or herself as a product than does the author over the work. Just as the significance of the text changes from period to period and from reader to reader, the subject is also in a continuous state of constitution. Postmodernism does not necessarily call for the end of individuality so much as it asks us to pose new questions of it. When the text within postmodernism “ceaselessly reshuffles the fragments of preexistent texts, the building blocks of older cultural and social production, in some new and heightened bricolage,” as Jameson claims, the postmodern subject likewise stands as a ceaseless reshuffling of preexisting textual fragments, an inchoate product of more sociocultural mechanisms than can be enumerated.

The model of subjectivity proposed in the previous pages exists outside the bounds of normative constitution because it involves only one constituted/constituting subject rather than two. In the normative model a mutual exchange of utterances proves mutually beneficial to both subjects. The alternative model positions one subject as a parasite in a narcissistic relationship with him or herself only, as the second figure, whom we may refer to as the cipher figure, does

not exchange utterances, but merely reflects them for the first subject. This model, compared to the normative model, is deleterious to both parties. For the first, constituted subject, the ego ideal is catered to in a way that appeals to the subject's sense of fantasy, but does not develop him or her in any meaningful way. *The Bride of Frankenstein*, *Vertigo*, and *The Black Dahlia* all represent this first subject as a male seeking the satisfaction of creating The Woman. Lacan demonstrates that The Woman is an impossibility, an empty signifier without referent. What the male subject does in this situation is feminize his own reflection, using the cipher as mirror. He engages in a series of utterances that are met neither with a contrasting nor with a complementary series of utterances from the Other; instead he positions himself in such a way that all he receives in return is an echo.

The cipher, on the other hand, deprived of constituting childhood experiences, either in a literal fashion as occurs in *The Bride of Frankenstein* or through the erasure of these experiences beneath an identity constructed by the first subject either with the reluctant acquiescence of the cipher (*Vertigo*) or through mutual collusion between the two (*The Black Dahlia*). This second figure receives no subjective constitution but functions instead as a mirror for the first subject. In *The Bride of Frankenstein*, the Bride is a result of Henry Frankenstein's scientific vanity and is born into adulthood without any formative childhood experiences; Henry Frankenstein is given the opportunity to create his female ideal from scratch. A similar phenomenon occurs in *Vertigo*, as Scottie is so singularly obsessed with a female ideal that he forces that ideal onto another subject, completely displacing that subject's original subjectivity. The newly developed subjectivity that the cipher now inhabits is not given rein to develop in any new way and must remain within the constraints imposed upon it by the first subject. In this way, normative,

mutually constitutive subjectivity is not allowed to proceed along a conventional path even from the point of its perversion; the model remains parasitic.

Is the cipher, however, truly a cipher, or is the apparent erasure of formative sociocultural experiences simply another projection of the ego ideal? In order for this alternative model of subjective constitution to operate, the cipher must be devoid of subjectivity. Though it may seem that the ideal subjectivity forced upon the cipher is just another mask of the first subject's ego ideal, *The Bride of Frankenstein*, *Vertigo*, and *The Black Dahlia* show that the ciphers' original ego ideals are truly subverted to the point of nonexistence and that there is no mutual exchange of utterances on the basis of which subjective constitution can proceed. This reveals the process as one-sided. Though Lacanian Psychoanalysis claims that all subjectivity is essentially false, with each mask a response to a misrecognized image of the self, a continuous process of constitution, or changes, affects that ego ideal. For the cipher, the assumed ideal, or mask, worn for the benefit of the first subject receives no further constitution and functions only as the fantastical reflection of the first subject's misrecognized ego ideal.

These are but a few of the films that explore an alternative model of subjective constitution. *The Bride of Frankenstein*, *Vertigo*, and *The Black Dahlia* all present a male subject exerting complete subjective control over a female cipher, which confirms Mulvey's contention about the patriarchal bias within classically motivated film. Examining possible alternative models of subjective constitution, however, not only raises new questions about the nature of subjectivity in general, but it also affords a deeper understanding of the particular mechanisms at work within the normative model. Short-circuiting the subject-to-subject model of mutual



constitution with a narcissistic subject granted complete control and a passive cipher who relinquishes any control helps to demonstrate the power of the utterance.

The positions of Lacan and Benveniste can readily be understood to explain how every two people or groups who share any kind of interaction continuously live out the normative model of subjective constitution. This continuous dialogue, which transcends the limits of speech and reaches into what Bakhtin calls translinguistics is a function of normative, mutual subjective constitution. When that one-to-one relationship breaks down, as is the case in an alternative model of constitution, attention is called to elements of the model that normally pass unmarked. Within the alternative model posited here, a particular understanding of the power of the individual utterance emerges. If, as in *Vertigo*, a singular subject possesses all of the control over translinguistic significance and exerts that control over a second figure who neither possesses nor attempts to exert any significance in return, the power of the individual utterance outside of a mutual exchange becomes clear. This parasitic mode of subjective constitution reifies the ego ideal, illustrating the power, both creative and potentially destructive, of the misrecognized subjective image over any true, unconscious self.

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