The Rebirth of *Beyond Oblivion*:

A Body That Looks Back

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Introduction

Just as the fascination exerted by the beautiful automaton is derived from the mechanical animation of an inanimate object, so the film projector similarly animates the still frames of the film strip for the fascination of the film spectator. And, in the same process, the projector resurrects those ghostly figures, whose stilled gestures on the film strip come alive with its illusion of natural movement.[1]

Vertigo, Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 thriller, makes a habit of (re)animation. *Vertigo* has been retrospectively deemed the director's magnum opus, despite its tepid critical reception on release, in no small part due to its self-reflexive relationship to cinema as a medium. The psychological thrillers' critical acclaim and cultural relevance steadily rose over the course of decades: where it once received reviews that cited its hole-riddled plot, it now possesses unusual prestige and routinely ranks among the greatest films of all time. Ironically, looking down from these heights of cinematic history may induce vertigo in scholars and viewers, and perhaps also déjà-vu. Two years earlier, an eerily reminiscent tale of desire and death was told by the filmmaker Hugo Del Carril. The Argentine ancestor to *Vertigo* was released in 1956 under the name *Más Allá Del Olvido*, later translated to *Beyond Oblivion*. A peculiar narrative parallel runs between these films. Both revolve around romance and mourning, the themes mingling until they become monstrous. This conflict is kindled by misrecognition when a woman is mistaken for the lost lover of the leading man. Grief-ridden, he remakes the idealized "original" using the doppelgänger's body. The romance becomes necromancy in a mockery of Hollywood tropes. And so, each film features the transformation of one woman into a mourning effigy of another as captured through the eyes of her voyeur. Just as Monica becomes the vessel for the late Blanca, Madeleine too, apparently already possessed by Carlotta, is reborn in Judy. While Del Carril and

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[1] Laura Mulvey, "The Metaphor of the Beautiful Automaton," *Haunted by Vertigo: Hitchcock's masterpiece then and now*, ed. Sidney Gottlieb and Donal Martin (Indiana University Press, 2021), 229.

Hitchcock condemn voyeuristic desires, they also capture the destruction of their female leads in key lighting, consecrating visual pleasure. The gaze is turned back, accusatory, towards the audience.

These films refract one another, with stories, styles, and reception that intertwine in ways that must be teased apart to appreciate either. Just as *Beyond Oblivion* and *Vertigo* revolve around voyeurism, so does my study. I argue that both *Beyond Oblivion* and *Vertigo* occupy an ambiguous space, simultaneously paying respect to Hollywood style while verging into self reflexivity. While *Vertigo* has been vindicated in this regard by decades of retrospective analysis, I aim to reveal a similar thread of self-awareness in the oft-forgotten classic, *Beyond Oblivion*. I am primarily interested in how the ambiguity in *Beyond Oblivion* emerges from its formal perfection. My claim stems from *Beyond Oblivion*'s strict adherence to a classical Hollywood technique, a style that effaces itself while elevating the audience's visual pleasure. Del Carril realizes this style with grand sets designed for deep focus filming, glamorous costumes and makeup caught in close-up, a camera that roams to capture the actors in the glow of key lighting, and continuity editing that silently acquaints the audience with the diegesis. But *Beyond Oblivion* also lifts this veil of glamour, revealing it as mere costuming. The film's formal beauty is made dissonant by a narrative that obsesses over death. To guide this analysis, I ask the following questions: Can the architecture of cinematic voyeurism be critiqued from within the constraints of the system? How do formal devices conceived to indulge a viewer's voyeuristic impulses instead disturb them? What looking dynamics are captured in the film and how do they bleed out of the frame? Does the film meet our gaze?

I aim to resolve these questions through a method of close textual analysis and by engaging key writings from David Bordwell, Raymond Bellour, and André Bazin on classical Hollywood cinema. As David Bordwell notes, and I will elaborate through my investigation of *Beyond Oblivion*, the Hollywood paradigm balances industrial standards against individual expression. Within this regulated system, the rules a director adopts and those they bend dictate a film's narrative rhetoric. This project's focus on an Argentinian film may then seem contradictory: *Beyond Oblivion* emerged from an entirely different context of production, as I will detail in the discussion below. But I will argue that the model of classical Hollywood style is relevant to the film's operations and also helps us to recognize the film's distinctive qualities. From within this framework the film's reproduction of its referent, classical Hollywood style, can be recognized, interrogated, and obsessed over- mirroring *Beyond Oblivion*'s plot.

Another essential element of my discussion is Laura Mulvey's notion of the male gaze, considered in its original formulation and in Mulvey's subsequent revisions, as well as the permutations of this idea developed by film scholars Sidney Gottlieb and Susan White. From this influential literature, I seek to develop what I think of as an 'ambiguous gaze' that can be applied to Del Carril's film. Finally, Freud's theory of the uncanny and Kristeva's theory of the abject will serve as navigating concepts in locating viewer responses. Unlike Mulvey, who retools psychoanalysis to illuminate film's role in placating and pleasing the patriarchal unconscious, my project with Freud and Kristeva is linguistic in nature. The theory of the uncanny and the abject give a name and voice to an elusive sensation that serves as connective tissue between the viewers body, that of the camera, and the characters. In other words, these authors lend language

to a study that is aware of and "assumes the embodied nature of film viewing."[2] Thus, my argument centers around the ways that *Beyond Oblivion's* melodramatic beauty destabilizes not only the naturalness of classical narrative structures but the rhetoric that scaffolds them. The films' meticulous attention to detail joins its fixation on duplicates and mirrors, consummating this marriage with an unabashed exhibitionism that does not bow under the weight of the gaze but greets it. Thus, rather than destroying visual pleasure through violating the classical Hollywood style *Beyond Oblivion* over-indulges in it; from its opulent mise-en-scène to portrait-like frames, and seamless editing, *Beyond Oblivion* reveals and revels in its deceit.

As the arguments presented in here are intricate, an overview of the issues that I will discuss may act as a guide. First, I will briefly outline *Beyond Oblivion*'s literary and production backgrounds and the ways that Del Carril's film and *Vertigo* double each other. Second, I consider close textual analysis as a working method in crafting an ambiguous gaze. I develop this framework in light of the rich tapestry of academic literature around *Vertigo*. Mulvey is especially influential in my method of interrogating the looking relations layered within film form. Moreover, "Visual Pleasure" is intimately intertwined with psychoanalytical thought, which also serves this thesis in describing viewer responses. Finally, I apply this scaffolding of theory to *Beyond* Oblivion's cinematography, set design, and editing to open the film up to ambivalent readings.

A Warped Mirror: Hitchcock, Hollywood, and History

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[2] Lee Carruthers, *Doing Time: Temporality, Hermeneutics, and Contemporary Cinema,* (State University of New York Press, 2017), 5.

A brief synopsis may illuminate how *Vertigo's* second half is a warped mirror image of *Beyond Oblivion*. Del Carril's gothic Argentine melodrama begins in the beautiful home of Fernando (played by director Del Carril) and Blanca (Laura Hidalgo) during their last few days of wedded bliss. The credits' role over a still frame of Blanca's portrait. A pan reveals Fernando, the motion smoothly transitioning as he travels through montage from the countryside to the city. Here, at a luxurious hotel, he waits for his wife unbeknownst to her. We the audience are acquainted with Blanca's fragmented and photographed body before we meet the woman herself. A radiogram of her chest delivers her terminal diagnosis before the dialogue confirms it. Likewise, the look the doctor gives Blanca reveals her fate to her when he refuses to tell her. The couple reunites in a delicate lacing of close-ups, weaving one partner's lie (Fernando's surprise visit) into the others omission (Blanca's unspoken diagnosis). Blanca's silent illness binds Fernando to her memory twofold. First, Blanca's lie by omission conceals her health from her husband, embalming herself in his eyes as vibrantly alive. Second, shortly before her death Blanca asks for Fernando's eternal faithfulness, condemning him to a loneliness only consoled by her memory, requesting that he "close this house to the world and wait for the time to be again with you." Fernando obliges. After Blanca's death, however, Fernando betrays this promise. Overwhelmed by her absence he abandons their home to wander listlessly and eventually finds his way to Paris. In a doomed twist of fate, during his mourning retreat he meets Monica (also played by Hidalgo), a cabaret dancer caught in her own web of deceit, who bears an uncanny likeness to his deceased wife. Entranced by her resemblance, Fernando marries her, becoming obsessed with not only making Monica over in Blanca's image but reanimating her in her entire essence. In this final endeavour he fails. Monica, the staff, and seemingly the house itself reject the stranger's presence in Blanca's rightful place. The new lady is deemed an

intruder, treading on Blanca's sacred ground. Fernando too, resigns himself to stealing glances at his new wife while she sleeps to fulfill his necromantic fantasy. Ironically, Monica's waking moments come to fulfill Fernando and Blanca's promise, embodying a living ghost wandering the halls of this strange home. This tension builds to a crescendo in the final act, with Monica threatening to leave before she too falls prey to Blanca's untimely fate. Fernando, unlike the lead in *Vertigo*, finally looks at Monica as herself, not as a failed reproduction, facing "the torment of Galateas who must submit to being sculpted in order to be desired."[3] But moments before the couple's reconciliation, Monica's former lover returns, killing her. Thus, the films, *Beyond Oblivion* and *Vertigo* converge again on the fatalistic ends of a desire rooted in voyeuristic destruction.

The narrative likeness of *Vertigo* and *Beyond Oblivion* is rooted in literary inspirations that are similarly intertwined. The 1892 classic *Bruges-la-Morte* by Georges Rodenbach and Boileau-Narcejac's novel *D'entre Les Morts* released in 1954 inspired *Beyond Oblivion* and *Vertigo* respectively. The narratives are nearly identical, differing only in degrees of irony. Drawing attention to these parallels, both novels canvass a man's desperate pursuit to conquer time by reanimating a dead lover in the body of her doppelgänger. In Boileau-Narcejac's book this plot takes on a dual meaning, with the heroine pantomiming Rodenbach's drama of possession only to fall prey to her own farce in the second half. Renée plays Madeleine as a woman plagued by a spectre of the past and seduced by the protagonist (and pawn) Flavières. Possession then is also curiously doubled in meaning, referencing both patriarchal ownership and an otherworldly, unwelcome occupant. This doubling is then resolved through death: the pair of

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[3] Imogen Sara Smith, "Corridor of Mirrors: The Eternal Return," *The Criterion Collection*, June 11, 2021, https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/5733-corridor-of-mirrors-the-eternal-return.

women are murdered by their obsessive partners, embodying the untimely fate of the 'original' and tying off the open ends of the narrative likeness. While these plots are reconciled in the end, we see the web of deceit and death of *Bruges-la-Morte* played out as a story within *D'entre Les Morts*, with the doomed couples' strings seemingly pulled by Gevigne all while Boileau-Narcejac silently puppeteer. Any direct lineage between these plots, however, is lost to the ebb and flow of 50 years' worth of genre evolution and cultural change: literary representations of memory, romance, and mortality are warped by the lived reality of time marching on. While it's impossible to say whether the latter was inspired by the former, the resemblance is uncanny. Additionally, these resonant narratives are accompanied by prose that seeks to capture and replicate visual spectacle. Rodenbach illuminated his poetic tribute to Bruges, a city built on the page as a living, breathing character, with black-and-white photographs. This fusing of mediums is believed to be a first for fiction books.[4] Narcejac was struck with inspiration for the novel that would be embodied in *Vertigo* while sitting in a dimly lit theatre watching newsreels. Ironically, the novels that aspired to faithful imagery, that paid homage to the only indexical art, were adapted into narrative films that critiqued this same reverence for visual pleasure.

The dream factory as an industry is likewise indicted. Despite the range of these films, in both global dispersion and distinct genres, they retain a consistency of style in line with classical Hollywood conventions. This style privileges clarity and cohesion above all else. These synchronous styles allow for the cross-analysis of visual motifs- like framing, mise-en-scène, and editing- with rhetoric. Classical Hollywood as both an artistic rule and an industrial imperative can confirm the status quo- or offer inconspicuous resistance. Consider, for instance, the

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[4] James Gardner, "Incarnating the World Within," The Wall Street Journal, 2011,
https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970203413304577084323948644182.

codification of conservative values into Hollywood's framework. The Hays code, from 1934 to 1968, delineated industry recommendations and established a rating system that led to the tacit understanding of women's bodies as dangerous territory. In the wake of the second wave of feminism in America, bodily autonomy was deeply embedded in the collective psyche as both a source of agency and anxiety. Hence, Hollywood acted as a politicized co-conspirator to patriarchal hierarchies.

Del Carril was especially attuned to cinema's political potential. He began his career in the sphere of celebrity, parlaying his radio personality into a luminous presence as a screen star, before settling behind the camera. Politics was a catalyst for this final shift. While not his directorial debut, Del Carril established himself as a force in filmmaking with *Dark River* (1952), a gritty neo-realist drama revolving around themes of economic exploitation, class solidarity, displacement, and greed- affirming the same values espoused by the Peronist government in its prime. The actor turned director found himself in a privileged position as an ally to the ruling party, but this was a tenuous status given the political strife in Argentina. As the regime waned from public favour, and finally collapsed under a coup d'état, Del Carril became a victim of state suppression. In 1955, during the production of *Beyond Oblivion*, the director was briefly exiled, and his oeuvre banned. I raise this historical point to highlight a fascinating valence between the inhospitable political sphere and *Beyond Oblivion's* formal ambivalence. Specifically, this study is concerned with the ways that subtlety, required to elude censorship, can synthesize critique. Thus, *Beyond Oblivion* would embody the faltering optimism and ill-health of Peron's reign despite (and in part due to) the classical conservatism of a form imported from Hollywood. This pessimism is especially evident in Del Carril's treatment of corpses. Eva Peron, first lady famed as an advocate for the poor and for gender parity, died in 1952 and had her legacy preserved very

literally, to be paraded around and publicly grieved. As Gonzalo Aguilar's notes "the Peronism embalming technique was an immortality policy and, in the form of Evita's body, it had been successful. It had removed the body from the organic cycle and had turned it into a sacred myth."[5] The body, embalmed or occupied by an interloper, is the locus of *Beyond Oblivion*'s plot. Thus, this harmonious obsession with bodies binds *Beyond Oblivion* to Peron's historical regime; whereby voyeurism connects the camera and the corporeal as political concerns.

The Contradictions of (Close) Looking

Similarly, interrogating the look is fundamental to textual analysis in film studies. Like the two films I discuss in this thesis, the tradition of textual analysis stems from literature. Textual analysis systematically interrogates narrative, technique, and intertextual relationship, translating these components into motifs, themes, and meanings. For film, this requires defining audio-visual devices, like composition, editing, and music, that meaning derives from. Reading a film demands that a viewer not just grasp it on a plot level, digging it out from under its formal devices, but engaging with the intertwining roots of this formalism. Narrative, themes, and motifs are all inextricably tied to both the rich history of film as a medium and the formal system each film creates. This task endeavours to discover the ways that a film's formal systems give rise to meanings that bleed out beyond the frame to infect the audience.

My study emerges from the rich tapestry of filmic textual analysis sewn by fellow authors. Kristin Thompson concisely defines the practice of close viewing as "noting patterns in the relationship of the individual devices in a film (devices being techniques of style and form) to

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[5] Gonzalo Aguilar, "Notes on Some Argentinian Corpses," *Comparative Cinema* 7, no. 13 (2019): 39–46, https://doi.org/10.31009/cc.2019.v7.i13.03. 42.

each other and figuring out why those patterns are there."[6] In practice, this motive is

accompanied by a duty "to understand, not to evaluate"[7] by breaking down a film into its

constituent parts. Costumes, score, and composition are all interwoven with plot and theme, that

can then be unwound and poured over. Thompson continues that the impetus of this practice

stems from how "we can only be entertained and moved by films to the degree that we notice

things in them," and, in the case of this study, those things that speak to "the nature of cinema in

general."[8] Fruitfully, it is those things in *Beyond Oblivion* that force themselves to be known that

synthesize with the voyeuristic impulses of cinema at large, and Hollywood specifically.

Importantly, I do not intend to universalize my interpretation of this film. Notably, for a film that

revolves around the merciless march of time, acknowledging the unfolding, evolving nature of

critical engagement with film is necessary. In this respect, Lee Carruthers' intervention in *Doing*

Time is insightful. As Carruthers notes on film analysis:

> It does not insist on a single, monolithic meaning once and for all: neither does it seek an
> underlying code that is indifferent to the situated play of interpretive activity. While giving
> priority to some interpretations over others- usually, the ones most responsive to complexes
> of textual detail, and to the overlapped contexts that shape them- this practice also stands
> open to future revision.[9]

This project then is in kinship with other authors in the ways that "close analysis can be vital for

writing about film history."[10]

Beyond Oblivion is both sympathetically melodramatic and technically masterful,

adhering to classical tenets of clarity, causality, and character. As a result, time and space clearly

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[6] Tracy Cox-Stanton and Kristin Thompson, Kristen Thompson: Interview, *The Cine-Files* (2013) 1.
[7] Michael Ryan and Melissa Lenos, *An Introduction to Film Analysis: Technique and Meaning in Narrative Film*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020). 2-3.
[8] Tracy Cox-Stanton, Kristen Thompson: Interview, 1.
[9] Carruthers, *Doing Time*, 30.
[10] Tracy Cox-Stanton, Kristen Thompson: Interview, 1.

shape the narrative, but otherwise remaining unobtrusive; mise-en-scène embellishes our understanding of characters and narrative events; editing and cinematography operate efficiently, usually effacing themselves to seem 'natural.' Yet surprisingly, Del Carril established his career inspired by the bleak, incendiary realism of 3rd cinema with *Dark River* (1952). As I will discuss below, the trajectory of Del Carril's filmmaking career over the next half decade seemingly led to an abandonment of his overtly revolutionary ideals for a commercial, Hollywood aesthetic. In *Beyond Oblivion,* Del Carril embraces the embellishments that were once forgone in favour of romantic realism. The result is a beautiful film that feels strangely hollow on first glance. But, Hollywood style, renowned and replicated for its understated beauty and lucidity, can obscure the rebellion hidden in these little discontinuities. Much of Hitchcock's film career, and the acclaim and academia that survive him, reveal this fact. While one may see Del Carril's aesthetic evolution as an inexplicable rupture, perhaps spurred by increasing public scrutiny or industrial imperatives, upon closer inspection seems to show a subtle continuity across his projects that remains starkly political. These apparently incendiary elements are treated like contraband, carefully stowed away beneath the appeal of classical style. In this way Del Carril retools the weapon of the masters- commercial mass consumption.

The contradictions of looking in commercial Hollywood are a key concern for feminist and film theorist Laura Mulvey. In her influential essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Mulvey outlines the politics of the optical within classical Hollywood storytelling. Chiefly, Mulvey advocates for a close looking that unveils (and destroys) this architecture of contradictions. Though this thesis is not explicitly feminist or psychoanalytic, the lens of gender dynamics is inextricable from looking relations. The prevailing spectre of the patriarchy is especially pertinent in discussing Hollywood, the industry that canonized the 'male gaze.' Thus,

the way that power wavers and flows through a films' looks is where my aims and Mulvey's align. From viewer to screen, camera to set, and character to character these superimposed eyelines imply a certain set of politics. Other sources, like Susan White and Sidney Gottlieb, have complicated Mulvey's originally rigid dichotomies to allow for multivalent structures of looking. Ironically, Mulvey's own revision scaffolds *Vertigo* and the film's self-reflexivity within the framework of late style that is caught looking to the past.

The literature on Hitchcock is vast, attesting to his significant legacy as a director for both viewers and scholars. This project is inspired by the work of several scholars who have focused on Hitchcock's films and uses these as models of theorization and analysis. One author of note is Raymond Bellour. From Bellour I take a method of patiently unraveling the formal construction of filmic texts to reveal the interwoven pattern of narrative and technique at its foundations. In the second chapter of his book *The Analysis of Film*, aptly titled "System of a Fragment," Bellour analyzes a scene from Hitchcock's *The Birds* as a sum of its parts. Notably, this film is likewise concerned with how the "allure of the inorganic resonates with the artifice of the mechanical process."[11] His approach entails a persistent examination of each shot in a sequence with a particularly keen eye towards repeating or symmetrical formal elements, like static or dynamic camera movement and near or distant compositions. Perhaps Bellour's most relevant observation for my research is the way Hitchcock's formal compositions (with his mastery of classical Hollywood style) fold over to "echo and oppose one another symmetrically about a center;"[12] a center ruled by the look. Following, these patterns can be reinforced or foiled within the grand architecture of the scene to great effect. In parallel with this method, William

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[11] Laura Mulvey, "The Metaphor of the Beautiful Automaton," 227.
[12] Raymond Bellour, "System of a Fragment," *The Analysis of Film*, ed. Constance Penley trans. Ben Brewster (Indiana University Press, 2001), 27–67. 50.

Rothman's study, *The Murderous Gaze*, recognizes a symbiosis in *Psycho* whereby each minute detail sustains the plot while the plot itself is consumed by the composition. Rather than Bellour's rigid compositional focus, Rothman interrogates the rhetoric of these formal components. To explain, Rothman describes the opening of *Psycho* with "the camera's descent and penetration suggest that it possesses a corporeal presence in the world of Psycho, a body […] violating [Marion's] privacy."[13] These nascent themes of voyeurism and violation compulsively recur throughout the film (and across Hitchcock's oeuvre), with meaning condensed and crystalized by each rewatch. Though Rothman discusses a film outside the range of this thesis, this conscious acknowledgement of the camera as a physical actor in manufacturing the diegesis carries over into my method. From this detailed analysis that seeks to illuminate the many facets of a composition and fracture its smooth and polished surfaces, Rothman and his reader alike can draw out kaleidoscopic meanings from film form. While my study will not match Bellour's in detail or Rothman's in depth, I intend to implement their procedure of patiently unravelling technique to make necessary revelations about film. The synthesis of these theorists, in carefully mapping the dissonance between the man-made image and its multifaceted readings, inspires my thesis.

Reading the Film with an Ambiguous Gaze

Through this sympathy towards an ambiguity my method becomes imbricated with the film's own inner machinery. *Beyond Oblivion* revolves around obsessively fixating on repetitions. My own close textual analysis refers to film history to discover how Del Carril undermines the structural integrity of Hollywood (and its patriarchal scaffolding) through

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13 William Rothman, "Psycho," *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze* (State University of New York Press, 2012), 255–347. 260-261.

recursively returning to the same story. The ways that a film can be revealed through cyclicality, burdened and altered by the spectre of time, is detailed in George Wilson's discussion of Max Ophuls' 1948 melodrama, *Letters from an Unknown Woman.* Importantly, Wilson navigates the ways that the past persists in Ophuls's work, where "'echoing with a variation' is repeated frequently throughout the film, often with the effect of showing the past to be interwoven with the present in ways the characters cannot grasp."[14] This observation illuminates the formal patterning of Ophul's film, but also shines a light on my own method. *Beyond Oblivion's* repetitions make its alliance to the past starkly obvious. Likewise, this thesis is fascinated by the ways that this film is intertwined with the history of film itself. But unlike *Letters from an Unknown Woman,* Del Carril's film offers no privileged surrogate for the director, no "perfect observer of these painful lives."[15] Rather, *Beyond Oblivion*'s auteur and his rhetoric remain shrouded and ungraspable. Instead, I approach *Beyond Oblivion* attuned to moments where the illusion of filmic motion slips, and our mastery over time and narrative falters alongside it. This call for textual analysis, with close attention paid to the oddities of classical form, does not intend to close off lines of dialogue; rather, the opposite is true. The aim of my thesis is to kaleidoscopically refract possible interpretations of Del Carril's film, so as to capture *Beyond Oblivion's* complexity. Drawing on the work of Hitchcock scholar William Rothman, which imagines that "*Vertigo*, for all its irony, nakedly opens Hitchcock to be read,"[16] I intend to lay *Beyond Oblivion* bare. The object of this study is not to crystallize meaning, embalming *Beyond Oblivion* as I see it, but to exhibit the ways it creates simultaneity as a breathing body of work.

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[14] George Wilson, "Max Ophuls' Letter from an Unknown Woman," *MLN* 98, no. 5 (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983): 1121–42, https://doi.org/10.2307/2906064. 1122.

[15] Wilson, "Max Ophuls' Letter from an Unknown Woman," 1141.

[16] William Rothman, *The "I" of the Camera: Essays in Film Criticism, History, and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). 239.

The film's ambiguity invites multi-faceted and fractal interpretations that open up with attention and time. As Rothman aptly concludes, the ambiguity of *Beyond Oblivion* leaves the viewer "condemned to unknownness, not to transcend it."[17]

The often overlooked *Beyond Oblivion* demands this type of reading. Pulling from Thompson's thinking one quote in particular speaks to my desire with this thesis; that a primary goal of film academia is "to make a case that a film is significant and suggest why others should pay attention to it."[18] In my first encounter with *Beyond Oblivion* I was struck by its eerie beauty. The film is adorned with opulent sets, lush costumes, and a rich score that all lend to its strangeness. By this I mean that there are moments in the film that, while offering visual pleasure in Mulvey's sense, also manifest something that is disturbingly unfamiliar— or familiar in a way that is disturbing. Contrary to their benign appearances, the sets consume the characters, costumes become a tool of deceit, and in the final moments of the film the swell of the orchestra seem to mock the whole affair. This dynamic is not to be confused with the excess that melodramas are often charged with, rather these scenes left me with the distinct impression of emptiness; and importantly, performance. Where I expected an homage to the vast history of the cinematic tradition contained within Hollywood's rules, I instead watched a film that seemed tacitly aware I was watching it. Hence, the voyeuristic delight of Hollywood style rang hollow.

The aim of my study is to answer to Del Carril's ambivalent classical style, understanding it as an ambivalence that conceals *Beyond Oblivion*'s self-reflexive depth. In practice, this involves close viewing of the film with special attention to those formal devices, or clashing of devices, that confronted me with artificiality despite the classical facades that attempt

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[17] Rothman, *The "I" of the Camera,* 240
[18] Tracy Cox-Stanton, Kristen Thompson: Interview, 1.

to efface themselves. The doubleness of this style is born from moments that are at once lavishly opulent and self conscious, defying the seamless and invisible hand of Hollywood. This may take the form of eerie resemblances within the frame, obvious and obsessive camera movement, and editing that defies verisimilitude. These formal elements converge, reducing the filmic image to a translucent 2D film strip. I approach *Beyond Oblivion* this way to reveal the hidden worlds buried beneath the Hollywood veneers. I will also argue that *Beyond Oblivion* offers a vital counterpoint to the acclaim and canonization of *Vertigo*. Revealing the layers embedded in the frame and peeling back the false fronts of classically beautiful films not only enriches and deepens the text but also confronts us with our own scopophilic consumption. Whereas Hitchcock reanimates a voyeur's sadistic drive on screen, making the viewer an accomplice, Del Carril is more subtle but no less critical. *Beyond Oblivion* summons a phantom of the film's own artifice that mirrors the voyeur's look.

Theoretical and Literary Framework

Bodily Automaton: The Evolution of Visual Pleasure

Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" is one of the most pervasive and potent pieces of literature in film studies. The essay's influence also extends to the disciplines of feminist media and cultural studies, art history, and psychology. Feminist film scholar Judith Mayne has described the essay's impact as follows:

> It's only a slight exaggeration to say that most feminist film theory and criticism of what might be called the *first* decade, from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, has been a response, implicit or explicit, to the issues raised in Laura Mulvey's ground-breaking article: the centrality of the look, cinema as spectacle and narrative, psychoanalysis as a critical tool."[19]

Mulvey's arguments have been acclaimed and critiqued for their rigorous attempts to reform narrative cinema. On one hand, Mulvey inspired a necessary theoretical practice to topple the architecture of contradictions in Hollywood, and the hierarchies they rest upon. On the other, this genre of analysis threatens to dull the complex, fluid, and multi-faceted spectacle of film to merely the ways it refracts gender dynamics. Beyond the fair critiques of a feminist method that symptomatically assumes men are the creators, curators, and translators of classic film texts, Mulvey remains fundamental in informing the ways we watch films. Underpinning Mulvey's essay is the role of scopophilic viewership in reinforcing the gendered active/passive dynamic perpetuated by Hollywood style; whereby women are robbed of agency over the plot and their bodies. Mulvey then calls for a politicized analysis of narrative form in classical Hollywood cinema that destabilizes these dynamics.

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[19] Judith Mayne, "Feminist Film Theory and Criticism," *Signs* 11, no. 1 (University of Chicago Press, 1985), 48.

However, the mutinous origins of terms like the "Male Gaze" have in certain ways been domesticated by a lax academic lexicon. The generalizing of Mulvey's rationale across disciplines has sometimes reduced the author's most salient arguments to vague suggestions of voyeuristic sexism to gesture at moral authority. Too often, Mulvey's biting critique is tamed to a meagre bark. With these difficulties in mind, my study will both recognize the original text for its radical venom against the male gaze while elaborating it in new ways. This essay aims to reinforce Mulvey's original meanings and elucidate her concept of the gaze in new contexts.

Mulvey wields psychoanalytic theory to dismantle the optical structures of narrative cinema, which systematically animate misogyny for the silver screen. Psychoanalyst Jacque Lacan was influential to Mulvey in placing the act of looking as central to identity formation. Continuing from but contradicting Freud's earlier writing on scopophilia, where sexual pleasure is drawn from pure image, Lacan argues that the self-actualization realized in one's reflection carries over to the darkened cinema space. Mulvey unites these theories; with the fantasy of film simultaneously constructing the objectified female form and the mirror image of male-coded spectators. And so, "psychoanalytic theory is thus appropriated here as a political weapon, demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form."[20] Optically, cinema dynamizes these desires, for self realization and romance alike, through a look that replicates prevailing power dynamics. Mulvey concludes from these illusory and ideological optics that "the satisfaction and reinforcement of the ego that represents the high point of film history hitherto must be attacked."[21]

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[20] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6.
[21] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 8.

Derived from this logic is the impulse to destroy visual pleasure by proposing a new cinematic language devoid of voyeuristic spectacle. "Visual Pleasure" offers a feminist critique of classical film form in its "perfect and beautiful contradiction,"[22] balancing fetishistic spectacle with punishing fatalism. For Mulvey's critique, the formal mechanisms of classical Hollywood storytelling take precedence. Narratively, women occupy passive roles contingent on the activity of the male protagonist. Optically, the patriarchy is replicated in the ways women's bodies are framed, fragmented, and cut together for the pleasure of a male-coded viewer. These themes and motifs were codified by classical Hollywood style and so Mulvey analyzes films produced during the reign of the studio system, *Vertigo* included. Within Mulvey's psychoanalytical framework, *Vertigo* is a functional part of a larger machine producing misogyny, where Judy/Madeleine's "exhibitionism, her masochism, make her an ideal passive counterpart to Scottie's active sadistic voyeurism."[23] In this sense, Mulvey argues, the filmic image printed on celluloid strip serves as a facsimile for misogyny through its visual codes. It is through decoding narrative cinema that Mulvey aims to destroy the visual pleasure that draws on (and feeds into) ruling gender dynamics.

In 1975 Mulvey diagnosed *Vertigo* as symptomatic of a deep-rooted industry rot. As of late, however, Mulvey has reassessed this tension in the fading light of the classical system. In recent writings, Mulvey suggests that certain stylistic tendencies emerged as the golden age of Hollywood entered its golden years. As a result, auteurs such as Hitchcock "achieved a transcendence of genre while still working within it, verging, in some cases, into self-reflexivity."[24] As Mulvey explains:

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[22] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 17.
[23] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 16.
[24] Laura Mulvey, "The Metaphor of the Beautiful Automaton," 220

> Hitchcock fuses the allure of fetishized femininity with the allure and fascination of film, producing the closeness between the two with a degree of irony that takes *Vertigo* into self-reflexivity. In his mediation on his own world and the phantasmagorias he wove so brilliantly, Hitchcock brutally analyzed the symbiosis between the female fetish, the film fetish, and the desire of the male spectator for whom both have been conjured up.[25]

This late style offers an ironic obituary for the studio system, realized in stories that return to death obsessively. It is in this macabre mockery that *Vertigo* blossoms; and the voyeuristic medium of film is laid bare. Mulvey continues, "the masquerade of female deception and the masquerade of female beauty coalesce" in the key lighting of classical Hollywood's luminous illusion. Notably, the magnetic allure of the enigmatic Madeleine is unwound post-mortem, reanimating the processes by which her image was manufactured for the film strip. This physical embodiment of feminine performance erodes Scottie's sanity, and the spectators' escapist phantasmagory. On this latter point, *Vertigo* pierces the veil of a captive, passive viewer reveling in scopophilic delights. As Mulvey articulates, "the artifice of Madeleine's seduction resonates with […] the artifice of the mechanical process,"[26] revealing both. This creates the uncanny for an audience faced with their own complicit look. Moreover, repeat viewership (with retrospective knowledge of Judy and Gavin's scheme) compounds this uncanny effect with contradictory readings that eat away at cinematic satisfaction. Hence, Hitchcock's construction of a beautiful blonde betrays classic Hollywood style.

Other authors have likewise complicated Mulvey's conception of the gaze, with *Vertigo* acting as a catalyst for these refractions. Of interest for both Sidney Gottlieb's study and my own is the film's obsession with the optical. This tendency echoes the syntax of both the screenplay and Boileau-Narcejac's source novel with the "incessant attention to eyes and looks in the

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[25] Laura Mulvey, "The Metaphor of the Beautiful Automaton," 220-221
[26] Laura Mulvey, "The Metaphor of the Beautiful Automaton," 225-227

screenplay [exerting] a centripetal pull."[27] These looks can not be reduced to the necessarily simple reflections of the male gaze Mulvey theorized. Crucially, Gottlieb captures the refractions of the male gaze, complimenting and complicating Mulvey's one dimensional lens on Vertigo. To start, Gottlieb destabilizes the delicate equilibrium Mulvey draws between the passive object and the domineering onlooker. Madeleine, played by Judy (played by Kim Novak), dons the role of both the spectacle and spectator. Her character basks in the key lighting and opulent costuming of a mise-en- scène that seems tailor-made to embellish her beauty. This seemingly effortless femininity is part of her performance, which is itself tailor-made for her spectator. The author contrasts this feminine mastery over the camera against the self-conscious looking and longing of the male lead who "is hardly even the possessor of a gaze, let alone the master of a gaze of possession."[28] Importantly for my study, this diverges from the polar power dynamics Mulvey proposed are ingrained in the film image. Judy, as Madeleine, is well-aware she is being watched; her "to-be-looked-at-ness" is carefully manicured for the camera. In effect, she acts as a willing accomplice to her own exhibition, puppeteering the wanting eyes of the protagonist and the audience alike.

Gottlieb further maps the ambiguity of a filmmaker's motives to express the fractal functions of the gaze. *Vertigo* offers a variety of gazes- from interrogative, introspective, and traumatized- to reveal that "the real and ever-changing landscape of Vertigo is the face, and in particular the face as the bearer of looks that convey what lies behind and beneath."[29] In countering Mulvey's assertions that the camera acts in the political/optical sphere as a surrogate

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[27] Sidney Gottlieb, "The Variety of Gazes in Vertigo," *Haunted by Vertigo: Hitchcock's Masterpiece Then and Now*, ed. Sidney Gottlieb and Donal Martin (Indiana University Press, 2021), 191–215. 195.
[28] Gottlieb, "The Variety of Gazes in Vertigo," 193.
[29] Gottlieb, "The Variety of Gazes in Vertigo," 196.

for the spectator, Gottlieb entangles the gaze with textual analysis. Gottlieb casts a kaleidoscopic lens on cinema with "there is not one master gaze and one masterplot, but multiple gazes, multiple functions and meanings of these gazes, and multiple plots."[30] Contradictorily, Mulvey claims that "in reality the phantasy world of the screen is subject to the law which produces it."[31] My study aims to reconcile this tension. I would argue that the alternative looks that Gottlieb gives a name to remain in alignment with the overarching architecture of the Male Gaze. Consequentially, Mulvey's strict dichotomy, between voyeur and victim, is deepened by allowing simultaneous interpretations. However, the subject of cinematic sexism remains the same.

In this vortex of voyeuristic criticism, the look turns outward. Susan White, in her essay "Allegory and Referentiality: Vertigo and Feminist Criticism," seeks to undermine the notion of a universal reading of the film found through contemporary criticism. White, like Gottlieb, destabilizes the formal dominance structures that act as the foundation for psychoanalytical gender discourse. First, the author attends to Mulvey with the assertion that "Scottie's apparent mastery of the threatening woman is deceptive"[32] throughout *Vertigo*. White contends that Scottie is not the locust of rational narrative control. This protest is evidenced by the protagonist's persistent faith in Galvan Elster's fiction and his reaction to its reveal. It is notable that jewelry strung on decollate undoes the gaze; demystifying what Mulvey diagnosed as a "rigidly dichotomized pattern of male voyeurism and scopophilia."[33] This misappropriated heirloom is innately tied to the maternal lineage and history the Judy steals. During the climax of the film, the necklace adorning Judy's neck accentuates both her role as liaison to this farce as

[30] Gottlieb, "The Variety of Gazes in Vertigo," 214.
[31] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 11.
[32] Susan White, "Allegory and Referentiality," *MLN* 106, no. 5 (The John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 910-932. 912.
[33] Susan White, "Allegory and Referentiality," 913.

well as her lack of rights to inherit the "real" (represented by Carlota's lost objects). For White, the "real" to feminist critics refers dually to filmic facts, like the original Madeleine's legacy, and factitious revisions, like the oedipal root of Scottie's desire. This maternal line manifests as idolatry for the unknown but ubiquitous woman who dictates *Vertigo*'s narrative; she is embodied by Judy's forfeited self, the legacy of the long-deceased Carlotta, the oft-forgotten index of Madeleine Elster, the fraught career of Kim Novak, and even the masochistic female voyeurs in the theatre. Hence, "for both film star and hysteric, the body is the locus of expression for her knowledge"[34] and so the female spectator problematically becomes the "site of textual truth."[35] Just as Judy (and Scottie) threaten to inherit Carlotta's ephemerality, moving from the diegetic reality of male domination and into doomed female identification, feminist critics threaten to dictate narrative "truth" with feminine intuition. In this way, White unwinds the notion of narrative truth from nascent political imperatives, allowing for a more nuanced analysis of these optical meanings. As an extension of White's work, my essay advocates for an ambiguous gaze that recognizes nuance as necessary. Any meaningful examination of the scopophilic gaze must be aware of its own periphery.

Mulvey remains fundamental to film studies for condemning the faulty foundations of the dream factory. For my study, the most salient facets of Mulvey's dissent are the ways in which film welcomes in women's disenfranchisement through looking relations. Generatively, her analysis serves as a tool for interrogating the often overlooked, glossy finishings of Hollywood techniques. As noted by Gottlieb, this dynamic is complicated by the oscillation of the voyeur's sympathy and the ambiguity of the gaze. Namely, moments of identification with the instrument

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[34] Susan White, "Allegory and Referentiality," 914.
[35] Susan White, "Allegory and Referentiality," 920.

of desire, the woman, destroy Mulvey's strict dichotomy. Moreover, Mulvey's reliance on the misogynistic assumptions of psychoanalysis mirrors classical Hollywood's own subconscious regurgitations of sexist tropes. This speaks to White's point opposing the notion that women possess prohibited knowledge; an insight that makes women particularly gifted at navigating a singular narrative truth. It follows that this thesis is particularly interested in the insidious nature of the status quo as canonized by the film industry.

The Optics of an Orchestrated Industry

Mulvey's analysis responds to a robust studio system with certain economic imperatives and industry standards; thus, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" is a response not to the medium of film itself, but to the industrialized dream factory and all it's biased machinations. To understand the logic of the Hollywood system, it's helpful to review David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson's influential study, 'The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960,' which maps cinema's mimesis of antique forms of visual arts, stemming from the traditions of "romantic music or nineteenth century melodrama,"[36] to modern, mass-produced spectacle. The fiction film is governed by narrative logic, time, and space. The latter two dictums bend to the first: favouring a cause-and-effect chain. Importantly, the classical Hollywood paradigm speaks to a range of aesthetic impulses with harmonious motives. The most important of these are narrative continuity and coherence. Yet as the authors state, "no Hollywood film is the classical system; each is an 'unstable equilibrium' of classical norms."[37]

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[36] David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (Columbia University Press, 1985). 3.
[37] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 4.

Yet some compositional rules reign over the studio system. Careful cinematography, key lighting, subtle scoring, curated set design, deep space staging, and linear editing work together to support the viewer's understanding of characterization and cause-and-effect. The issue of what is compositionally motivated and what seems excessive to the story is vital to this study so I will focus on cinematography, mise-en-scène, and editing. In classical framing, for instance, the aesthetic laws of centrality, frontality, and symmetry "directly echo those of academic painting."[38] These principles were adapted to the moving frame with the establishment of patterns like reframing and deep focus to keep the plot momentum centered. Similarly, space becomes subservient to the story. Mise-en-scène, and specifically set design, build on the tradition of theatre to embellish the diegesis and immerse the audience. In this way, Hollywood carefully oscillates between artful spectacle and concealment of its own artifice. Continuity editing bridges this chasm. Continuity editing resonates with the narrative rhythm, eliding and extending scenes according to narrative necessity. In effect, the laws of classical style privilege character progression, with "the sequential codes […] threaded together, suspended, then taken up again."[39] Much like a matryoshka doll, each scene offers a microcosm of the above elements, encompassing (and contained within) the ceaseless drive towards the narrative end.

To bring the two theoretical pieces I have detailed together, Mulvey and Bordwell agree on one issue: the reification of the viewer. Cinema constructs a disembodied spectator-subject who is promised a position of mastery over the camera. Though never focusing on the ideological shadings of cinema, or top-down theories of the spectator, Bordwell succinctly notes that "the camera becomes not only the storyteller but the viewer as well; the absent narrator is

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[38] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 51.
[39] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 66.

replaced by the 'ideal observer.'"[40] This observation resonates with Mulvey's notion of nested gazes, by overlapping the spectator, protagonist, and the omnipresent voyeur that permits the look. Where these authors deviate is in their perception of a passive audience. Bordwell proposes a symbiosis between the spectator and the screen, where "metaphors of knitting, linking, and filling"[41] complete the story. Thus, a mental set of likely scenarios, responses, and resolutions is formed and refined by audience members until all that remains is a single logical conclusion that overlaps with the film's actual conclusion. A viewer's fascination then, is not with a filmic world that encroaches on the real, physical thing, but rather replicates the mental landscape. Here, Classical Hollywood does not construct its own fantasy; it composes a suggestion of one and orchestrates the audience according to its rhythm. So, as Bordwell states, "brick by brick, scene by scene, and inference by inference, the classical film impels the spectator to undertake a particular but not naive work."[42] Bordwell returns to the root of Mulvey's critique, remarking that "Hollywood creates an 'invisible' or 'transparent' representational regime,"[43] or a veneer that reflects the politics of the times. Just as the spectator buys into the illusion of movement cast over still celluloid strips fluttering by, 24 frames per second, they likewise bridge the gaps of the narrative fantasy.

Psychoanalysis & Cinematic Embalming

> If the plastic arts were put under psychoanalysis, the practice of embalming the dead might turn out to be a fundamental factor in their creation.[44]

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[40] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 36.
[41] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 18.
[42] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 71.
[43] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 20.
[44] André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 trans. Hugh Gray, (1960), 4–9. https://doi.org/10.2307/1210183. 4.

As *Vertigo* and *Beyond Oblivion* demonstrate, art seeks to denounce death. Bazin, in his essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," sheds light on arts pursuit across human history to embalm the essence of the subject. The merit of arts "preservation of life by representation of life"[45] is then earned through realism. A realism that, what Bazin refers to as the 'plastic arts,' fundamentally lacks but photography masters. With the introduction of the camera, the artist is automated, the medium mechanized, and the audience fooled by the veracity of the image. These images, as indices, possess an ingrained naturalism, "in virtue of this transference of reality,"[46] that transcends time. But the camera cannot reproduce movement. As Bazin concludes "cinema is objectivity in time"[47] but relies on the illusion of time flowing at 24 frames per second. This study is fascinated by the simultaneity of reality and fantasy in cinema and the feelings this dissonance creates. In naming this feeling psychoanalysis is useful.

For both films, *Vertigo* and *Beyond Oblivion*, a desperate fight against death ignites the diegesis. The necromantic desire to fill a gendered void in the Hollywood narrative manifests as the phantom of a dead woman trapped in the body of another. This body becomes a haunted house. The homestead is also where the concept of the uncanny takes root and rots its foundations. Freud maps the etymological history of the term 'Heimlich' to explain the phenomenon. In its early adoption the word was akin to 'homelike' but much like the home, 'Heimlich' and its definition become haunted when abandoned to time. The etymology withdraws behind its walls, coming to describe veiled evils. Contradictorily, 'heimlich' and 'unheimlich' refer, at once, to both comforts and concealed fears. We can conclude, like Freud, that "heimlich is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally

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[45] Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," 5.
[46] Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," 8.
[47] Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," 8.

coincides with its opposite, unheimlich."[48] Similarly, Freud's description of 'the uncanny' diverges then converges again. First, it is familiar. The subject of this peculiar type of fear is a surrogate for something recognizable, regardless of whether the original was frightening or not. Second, 'the uncanny' is estranged. Through repression and reanimation, a corrupt copy, doppelgänger, or mirror image takes the place of the real. These terms describe the role Judy serves for Madeleine (on first glance), and Monica for Blanca. The fact that these plots repeat, across continents, cultural contexts, and directors, is itself curious. These narratives recur compulsively, carrying over from Del Carril to Hitchcock and all the echoes of *Vertigo*, folding these films into their own critique of Hollywood conventions. This creates a commonality, even an uncanny kinship, between these films.

Related to but estranged from Freud's theory of the uncanny is the abject. Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror*, adopts from Freuds' ideology the notion that repressed desires return. Where the abject strays from the uncanny is in recognition. Where Freud describes something vaguely familiar but distorted, Kristeva argues that "essentially different from "uncanniness," more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory."[49] The rejection of the abject object, on even the most basic level of acknowledgment, is necessary. This is because the abject is a transgression on order and identity. Thus, this "imposter" must be rejected, regurgitated to preserve a resonant sense of self because in the presence of the abject the body is seized and reminded of both its multiplicity and mortality. But this ailment is not without an antidote.

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48 Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," *Imago,* trans. Alix Strachey, (1919), 4.
49 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 5.

Art is inoculation against the abject. Speaking to contemporary literature, Kristeva argues that poetry's arbitrary laws are ripe for subversion, and its lingering sense of lost speech make it a particularly apt medium for the abject. Kristeva continues…

> Nevertheless, it maintains a distance where the abject is concerned. The writer, fascinated by the abject, imagines its logic, projects himself into it, introjects it, and as a consequence perverts' language—style and content. But on the other hand, as the sense of abjection is both the abject's judge and accomplice, this is also true of the literature that confronts it.[50]

Narrative film is likewise bound by bureaucratic rules and obsessed with its own temporal absence. As such, it can be braided into the language of the abject. For instance, the corpses on screen are simultaneously real and fake; as are the laws of classicalism that bind them. The performers corporeal form, full of life, feigns death convincingly. The camera, mise-en-scène, and cutting all collude with the actor. Therefore, in cinema it is not merely language that mediates (and articulates) the abject, but rather a complex anatomy of constructed images misrepresenting the real. The artifice of film contradicts the danger of a physical cadaver, which "does not signify death" but embodies it as "a border that has encroached upon everything,"[51] that can only be contained by art. But in *Vertigo* and *Beyond Oblivion,* this fear bleeds out of the frame.

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[50] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 16.
[51] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 3.

Textual Analysis of *Beyond Oblivion*

Cinematography: A Portrait of Time

Cinema captures time in motion. The dynamism of the medium, in its innate ability to index the passage of time, is the distinguishing feature of film; Contra art forms which are bound to a fleeting moment, like paintings, portraiture, and films' predecessor photography. These are the mediums Bazin refers to as 'plastic' for sculpting reality artificially to create reproductions. According to Bazin, molding the tools of a medium to imitate rather than manifest reality betrays the aim of all art: embalming. The impulse to preserve human history is realized in the anthropomorphism of classical Hollywood cinematography, whereby "the human body is made the center of narrative and graphic interest."[52] Thus, portraiture and cinema overlap by saving the body from the rot of time. In the context of Argentina circa the 1950s, the preserving power of cinema serves political ends. The Peronist government, with a legacy marred by missing bodies and mass graves, tread a delicate line between desecration and reanimation. In this environment the body became the locus of both rebellion and repression. At its peak, a policy of immortality led to the embalming, public exhibition, and theft of the corpse of First Lady Eva Peron. According to Gonzalo Aguilar, this chemical and cultural alchemy "had removed the body from the organic cycle and had turned it into a sacred myth."[53] De Carril was devoted to this mythos. Across Del Carril's work, bodies are at once embalmed by the cinematic process and persist beyond the bounds of their own mortality. Formally, Del Carril nods to classical forms of art as a critique of the voyeuristic tendencies that carry over to the cinematic medium. Specifically, in a film about uncannily familiar faces, the framing compulsively approaches portraiture. I argue

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[52] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema,* 51.
[53] Aguilar, "Notes on some Argentinian corpses," 41.

that *Beyond Oblivion* replicates and rejects classical portraiture through its cinematography; compulsively recalling the constructed nature of film as a refraction of prior artforms. In effect, the film reflects the pretty facades of visual pleasure.

The camera is indebted to movement twofold. First, it captures the action cascading across the screen while it navigates offscreen space to privilege the spectator's perspective of the former. Bordwell notes, on the importance of camera movement, that "the omnipresent narration of the classical cinema situates the spectator at the optimum viewpoint in each shot"[54] as it embalms linear time. Contradictorily, Del Carril employs a restless, roaming camera to settle on statuesque compositions. For example, consider when Fernando and Monica, dressed as Blanca, meet in his room. A match on action strolls across the threshold and politely acquaints the audience with an opulent Parisian apartment. The camera clings to Monica as she preens in the same mirror that captures Fernando in solemn reflection. This framed reflection- which is small, distorted, and trapped by Blanca's likeness- pantomimes the scene's psychological asymmetry. Monica embodies vitality and vibrancy in the absence of Blanca, ensnaring both Fernando and the film with her looks. This framing colludes to "give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world;"[55] Namely, Fernando's grief-ridden obsession, which lingers on Monica's "too-be-looked-at-ness" as a narrative necessity. This assessment does not suggest that Monica is entirely robbed of agency, rather she assumes her role as object of admiration. Akin to Madeline in *Vertigo*, Monica is framed as "radiantly attractive (and to more than men) but also dignified, composed as well as freely mobile, and confident."[56] Consequentially, a disarming, accusatory pan recaptures the pair in a stark replication of Monica's own suspicion. The cinematography,

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[54] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 310.
[55] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 9.
[56] Gottlieb, "The Variety of Gazes in Vertigo," 193.

like Monica's pointed dialogue, questions Fernando's motives. The framing of the vignette follows Monica and her monologue loyally with a pan as she settles into a chaise. She absentmindedly toys with the empty seat next to her. Loyal to Monica's will, a hollow in the frame begs for the visual gravity of a body sinking into plush velvet upholstery beside her. The lingering, lopsided composition is as beguiling as the beautiful Monica and her lewd proposition. Fernando rejects her suggestion, but his body submits to the pull of the frame, sinking next to her with a subtle pan and tilt. This exemplifies how "camera movement could endow the set with a sculptural quality,"[57] beholden to the laws of symmetry and balance. A shot-reverse-shot sequence ebbs away at their bodily separation, drawing closer despite the stillness of the individual shots. Finally, a reframing pan captures their kiss, piercing the stasis. The entire progression of the scene precipitates these statuesque poses: the couple caught in the reflection, Monica on the chaise, and the pair kissing. These scenes speak to this study because of how uncinematic they are. The dissonance, between the motion of film and homage to still artforms, defies the medium. In a sense the framing exposes the origin of film itself. Film, as first a mechanical innovation, is the fleeting by of still images that tricks the eye with the illusion of fluid time. Likewise, Monica's appearances are carefully curated for consumption, by the protagonist and the camera alike, to breath life back into Blanca's corpse. Del Carril unveils both deceits. *Beyond Oblivion*'s portrait-like frames eulogize beauty and beckon in a whisper of its own falsified nature.

If replicating portraiture were not enough of a testimony to the falsity of the image, the mutilation of this medium is. Audiences are especially attuned to formal elements that deviate from the order established by film history. As Bordwell explains "extreme close-ups, canted

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[57] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 53.

angles, silhouettes, whip pans, and other obtrusive techniques differentiate this sort of segment from the orthodox scene."[58] These scenes, tame and sparring enough to remain within the margins of classical style, maintain immersion while stimulating interest. In the case of *Beyond Oblivion* a canted frame coincides with moments that defy the patriarchal voyeurism. Consider an early composition that is echoed throughout the film. It begins with an insomniac camera settling on an equally restless subject, Blanca. She anxiously approaches her husband in his seat as he lounges in the warm light of the hearth, stopping to tenderly stroke his hair. She stands from her brief respite on the arm of the chair, seemingly braving herself to admit her diagnosis before she resigns to a lie by omission and looks away. Here, a return gaze to her husband is owed but withheld. According to Gottlieb, an "averted look" represents how "consummations are devoutly to be wished for in *Vertigo*, but the shifting gazes of the lovers show that such moments are unstable and fleeting."[59] This look that bows under the weight of time unites *Vertigo* and *Beyond Oblivion*. But Blanca will find no refuge in the floors that warp with a canted frame. Even as Blanca casts her gaze down, desperately avoiding her encroaching mortality, the decomposition of time rots the floorboards beneath her. A reverse shot shows Blanca, now kneeling against her husband, in a bent world. The heirlooms and ornaments behind the couple are gnarled and reaching grotesquely to the right. Fernando too, seems to be falling out of the frame. Blanca becomes the visual column supporting this scene from structural collapse. Likewise, through Blanca's lie she becomes the central plot pillar in the film to follow, foreshadowing the spiralling abyss caused by her death. This runs counter to Mulvey's notion that "the presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film,

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[58] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 28.
[59] Gottlieb, "The Variety of Gazes in Vertigo," 208.

yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line."[60] Rather, Blanca becomes intertwined with the narrative by embodying the abject. The collapse of physical space and narrative onto Blanca's body articulates Kristeva's philosophy in that she "is at the border of [her] condition as a living being."[61] A border where her identity bleeds out and the home and her body become one. Through the warped frame, the home, Hollywood, and the homage to prior artforms are rendered unrecognizable.

Certain frames return to haunt the film rather than pay homage to classical Hollywood principles. This phantom doubling verges into self-reflexivity. Note the scene where Monica dons the dual role of lady and gravedigger, unsealing Blanca's room with her newfound role as lady of the house. The sequence begins with odd blocking. The spindles of a banister sever the screen, obscuring Monica and her reluctant accomplice as they approach Blanca's room. A pan-tilt downward encloses the doorway. Monica becomes a voluminous skirt of opulent fabric that brackets the door, a stranger that demands entry. This fragmenting of the female body would usually call for a Mulvey-esque argument of objectification but the motivations here are far from voyeuristic. Instead, the frame hangs heavy with the gravity of her transgression, denying frontality on moral grounds. The door opens to a distorted shrine. This frame and the one discussed above collide as uncanny mirrors of each other. Now, without the grounding force of Blanca's figure to anchor it, the angle of the frame is aggressive and hostile. According to classical theory, "these reinscribed motifs create a vague déjà-vu that becomes gradually more meaningful"[62] as it is corrupted by a gnawing absence that recalls the uncanny. As a necessary precondition of this phenomenon, Blanca remains concealed under the surface, "for this uncanny

[60] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 11.
[61] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 3.
[62] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 44.

is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old- established in the mind that

has been estranged only by the process of repression"[63] Likewise, a slanted, disembodied pan

renders the space inhospitable and strange. Monica is drawn to Blanca's jewels, which Sabina

warns where worn the night she died. The axis inverts as the interloper approaches Blanca's bed,

her resting place. Monica pulls back the curtain, and the relic of Blanca's gown restores the

scale. A tilt-pan recenters the camera and settles on the hollow left in Blanca's pillow. This

sacred place, abandoned as it seems, is still occupied. Like the mechanical processes of cinema

Blanca has left an impression or "transference of reality"[64] across time and space. The recurrence

of these unclassical frames in an otherwise formally conventional film creates a claustrophobic

doubling that is removed from the diegetic time and space and interlopes on reality. Viewers are

caught in a vicious cycle of spectacle; reliving cinema's failed effort to conquer time. The perfect

preservation of cinema remains caught in the past, consecrating the uncanny image.

The motif of portrait-like framing lifts the veil on the cinematic medium. As Bazin

articulates, photography (and by extension cinema) offers funeral rites:

> Hence the charm of family albums. Those grey or sepia shadows, phantomlike and almost undecipherable, are no longer traditional family portraits but rather the disturbing presence of lives halted at a set moment in their duration, freed from their destiny; not, however, by the prestige of art but by the power of an impassive mechanical process: for photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption.[65]

Hollywood standardizes this industry. Film is a medium caught in the past, inheriting the

voyeuristic habits of its predecessors, from preserving the human body formally, to objectifying

the female form. Framing is fundamental to these mechanisms. Rather than privileging viewers'

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[63] Freud, "The Uncanny," 13.
[64] Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," 8.
[65] Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," 8

perspectives, *Beyond Oblivion* pays homage to the preserved and motionless portrait as the origin of film. Coy motion, canted frames, and compulsive repetitions transcend cinema's technological ability to mummify the referent, mirroring the construction of film. Thus, the replica is haunted by the phantom of the real.

Seeing Double: Portraits, Miniatures, and Mirrors

Objects possess an honoured role in film history. Cinema evolved from the tradition of vaudeville theatre, inheriting its painted sets and props. Hollywood soon sought to efface this history. Ornate built sets, elaborate costumes, and custom décor became chiefly tools for enhancing spectacle. But what of a film that revolves around false appearances and objectification? *Beyond Oblivion* begs this question. As noted earlier, while the camera's aperture appropriates classical portraiture, the painted canvas likewise adorns the setting. The optical motifs of portraits, miniatures, and mirrors permeate the space with an air of mutual omniscience. As such, *Beyond Oblivion'*s opulent mise-en-scène does not merely serve as a visual feast but manifests a mirror into the cinema of spectacle. Contemplations of one's reflection, longing glances at a portrait, and a pair of porcelain figures mechanically pantomiming a lovers' dance all allude to romance of the look; but they also look out, reciprocating the viewer's stare. Hence, the allure of looking, of lingering on the ornaments that Hollywood glamour can afford, meets the audiences gaze. Bellour describes this doubling of visual motifs as mise-en-abyme. Internal, or textual, repetitions are revealed as the camera captures the narrative in its purely optical domain, reducing the complex, multifaceted reality to its visual referent. As Bellour suggests, cinema captures a microcosm of the story in "a spectacular construction, constituting the fundamental condition of the textuality of the filmic

system: its striking ability to produce the effect of volume."[66] Synchronously, one story becomes nested in another, and both are told by an object. The following paragraphs aim to discover the ways in which Del Caril's mise-en-scène, especially the set design captured in deep focus, manifest a phantom double of the cinematic process within the frame.

First, Del Carril's use of portraits ushers in a ghostly spectator. The mise-en-scène and its preoccupation with portraits encapsulates the nestled layers of a narrative that meets the viewer's gaze. Just as Carlotta's portrait in *Vertigo* inspires the interlaced plots, both Galven Elester's and Hitchcock's, Blanca's portrait becomes an omnipresent muse in *Beyond Oblivion*. Blanca, as merely an image, is what Madeline imitates- something "disembodied, insubstantial, ghostly, and cinematic."[67] This phenomenon is perhaps most evident in one of the few scenes where Blanca, framed on the mantle, and Monica appear simultaneously, with their exact likeness and eerie dissimilarity held in stark relief. The scene depicts the reveal of Monica as the new lady of the house and her uncanny resemblance to the former lady. Monica and Fernando frame Blanca's shrine in profile but only the portrait maintains its frontality. Blanca's face looms above the newlyweds, oddly illuminated by offscreen lighting, lending an otherworldliness to her face. Monica is revealed to the staff in a reverse shot showing scandalized reactions. The camera then retreats to a long shot with Blanca reemerging in the frame. Monica struts towards the camera through the scene steeped in the lush décor and rich lighting, the staff dissolving into the foreground, their figures becoming embellishments to the frame. Fernando is left standing in his solitude, surrounded by testaments to the past while the forgery trespasses on Blanca's resting place. Blanca stares down at her husband from above the hearth. In this scene, Del Carril realizes

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[66] Raymond Bellour, "Cine-Repetitions," *Screen* 20, no. 2, trans. Kari Hanet (1979), 65-72.
[67] Mulvey, "The Metaphor of the Beautiful Automaton," 222.

and literalizes "the perpetual Hollywood comparison of setting and lighting design with painting."[68] Not only does the mise-en-scène revolve around Blanca's portrait but these formal devices revive her. The camera lends its lifelike motion to the motionless picture. Thus, the still image is animated in an eerie symmetry of moviemaking. The pre-eminence of the portrait reveals the static image as the impetus of film, unmasking the cinematic process as "change mummified as it were."[69] Blanca's (re)animation as a spectator doubles this effect. Blanca's illuminated portrait looms above and beyond the veil, watching the procession in parallel to the audience's perspective. This voyeuristic kinship complicates Mulvey's notion that the cinematic fantasy carefully balances a viewer's suspended disbelief in both "the female body drained of life and the cinematic body imitating life."[70] The image of Blanca is reanimated at the same moment the illusion of movement falters. Thus, the viewer is made aware of (and victim to) their own voyeurism via the mise-en-scène.

Del Carril doubles as a miniaturist in directing *Beyond Oblivion*. Props are carefully curated and meticulously posed to replicate the narrative and its critique. As Bordwell notes "the classical film also charges objects with personal meanings [and] ineluctable psychological import."[71] Take, for instance, the two dancing figurines decorating a clock that twice herald death. On the first occasion, the scene opens on these porcelain figurines briefly before Blanca tries, and fails, to tell Fernado about her prognosis. On top of a clock centered in the frame, a tiny effigy of a man and woman are trapped in an endless repetition, turning away from, then towards each other. As the porcelain husband turns from his lover the camera mimes his motion,

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[68] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 317.
[69] Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," 8.
[70] Mulvey, "The Metaphor of the Beautiful Automaton," 233.
[71] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 54-55.

with an upward tilt and pan left that leads to Blanca posed in the background. Blanca stands, picturesque, as a part of the mise-en-scène. The set design conspires to frame her: the windowsill, to the drapes, tapestries, and doorways all encasing her. This excessively layered framing emphasizes the compositional beauty of the woman in the window, but it also recalls the dolls in the prior shot in its porcelain appearances. She looks to the left, not at the doll still stationed in the foreground but beyond the frame, before looking back out the window. A pan displaces her as it follows a servant into the next room where Blanca's eyeline was interrupted. The camera reveals Fernando in a reading chair. This shot mirrors the last, with the dwarfed doll replaced by Fernando and the living Blanca by her portrait. The look carries over too, with Blanca's likeness staring down at Fernando. The composition reverberates again in a reverse shot where Blanca is staged with a statue. A shared look between Blanca and the servant bridges the severed parts of the scene. The illusion that these characters are imprisoned as mechanized statues is finally lifted, and Blanca approaches her husband. Paradoxically, these parallels challenge the foundations of the filmic illusion. In opposition to Bellour's observation that "the speed at which the film is projected is designed to mask this mechanical repetition, to efface its silent weave,"[72] these manicured compositions recur often enough across frames to trap the flow of time. The dynamism achieved through a montage of minute differences, elided to 24 frames per second, is compounded to single, static frame defined by the two dancing dolls. In effect, Del Carril "denaturalise[s] the unfolding process"[73] of film mimicking continuous time. In composition these dolls consume the mise-en-scène, characters included, remaking them as stilted, porcelain imitations of life.

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[72] Bellour, "Cine-Repetitions," 68.
[73] Bellour, "Cine-Repetitions," 68.

The relevance of these miniatures' bleeds beyond mere formal discomfort. Thematically, these objects personify the Hollywood romance of the Hayes era; a mechanical pirouette consummated by a simple, well-timed look. Ironically, this dance is literally choreographed like clockwork. The miniatures also capture how an "incessant attention to eyes and looks in the screenplay exerts a centripetal pull"[74] on the audience; especially when these looks are withheld where they should be met. Unlike the dolls, whose mechanic's dictate their mutual gaze, this scene is scaffolded around the ways that Blanca's longing looks linger unmet in what Gottlieb deems an observed look. We the audience, and the walls alike, watch this drama unfold. Conversely, each glance caught by the camera's aperture is itself watched by artificial eyes; whether the dolls, portraits, or statues. When the frame captures these unfulfilled but acknowledged looks, we, like Gottlieb in her analysis of *Vertigo*, can conclude that-

> They are instances of Hitchcock's reflexivity as well as his attraction to doubles and patterns of repetition and echoing; they amplify the inescapability and centrality of looking and being looked at, neatly emblematizing the particular kind of panopticon we live in; and they establish a kind of Escherlike vortex that is yet another example of the numerous vertigo-inducing patterns embedded throughout the film.[75]

In a satirical twist on romantic tropes, it is only these inanimate objects that can bear the mutual look. Taken together, these dolls reify the reciprocated gaze while reducing characters to porcelain tropes pantomiming the perfect romance.

Mirrors also refract the films rhetoric. Throughout *Beyond Oblivion* the mirror image simultaneously embodies the double and blurs the boundaries of the self, occupying the uncanny and the abject at once. This subversively reveals how "cinema declares its anthropocentric commitment: Space will signify chiefly in relation to psychological causality,"[76] even when this

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[74] Gottlieb, "The Variety of Gazes in Vertigo," 195.
[75] Gottlieb, "The Variety of Gazes in Vertigo," 200.
[76] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 54-55.

psychological causality revolves around a severed sense of self. In a scene immediately following one with Blanca's portrait, interrupted by the toll of the clock decorated with dolls, Monica intrudes on Blanca's room. The space slowly floods with lights and Blanca seems suddenly overcome with caution. The room is eerily still as she approaches the mirror, turning from the frame as her shadowed face in the reflection appears. Monica pushes forward, her sporadic rhythm matched by the panning frame. Suddenly, Monica's real and reflected body are dissected as the camera dollies in on the necklace decorating the vanity. As she lifts the jewels to her throat, Monica's reflection supersedes her, with only her severed hands remaining visible in the frame. In this ornately framed mirror image Blanca is reborn as the filmic illusion fades. Formally, the presence of the mirrors' frame in the mise-en-scène points to *Beyond Oblivion*'s performative nature. To borrow from Rothman, a "frame-within-a-frame is characteristic of its self-consciousness. And within this setup, both inside and outside the frame-with-in-a-frame, a symbolically charged presentation is about to be inscribed."[77] As a result, the camera replicates the limitations of its own mechanical eye on screen. What is caught by this eye and exhibited is also relevant. In the mirror, Monica and Blanca are superimposed. In a film where these two characters are entwined by their deceptive likeness the reflected image encompasses the entire plot. The one becomes the other, bodies overlapping until they are indistinguishable. In the sense that "the narrative seems to be echoed and reflected following an effect of continuous-discontinuous reverberations, through an interlocking mechanism of the whole back with the part,"[78] this mirror image imitates cinema. But through this homage to the overarching narrative Del Carril reveals his hand as director. The "doubled" presence of the actor pierces *Beyond Oblivion's* necromantic fantasy. In the mirror, Blanca and Monica are not merely similar, they are

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[77] Rothman, "Psycho," 276.
[78] Bellour, "Cine-Repetitions," 70.

the same, and both are a manufactured image. Briefly, Laura Hidalgo becomes herself in the reflection. The coincidental resemblance that underpins the plot becomes a verisimilitude that undermines it instead. Identity is both doubled and dissolved onto the film strip, realizing the double bind of cinematic preservation.

Instead of the mise en abyme suggesting an infinitely recurring sequence collapsed into a single image, trapped by the temporal stuntedness of cinema, it is used in *Beyond Oblivion* to construct a glass case that transparently refracts its own artifice. First, Blanca's transition from life to death, from lady of the house to décor, is caught in a single static image that recalls the technological origins of film. Next, a pair of dolls, in perfect equilibrium but always apart, allude to the objectification innate in Hollywood romance. More than any other aspect of the set design, the mirror destabilizes identity as these metallic surfaces force cinema to confront itself in frame. In effect, *Beyond Oblivion* constructs not merely an immersive space but one that enmeshes the narrative with the mise-en-scène, creating self-reflexivity. Objectification is subverted, and objects gain an omniscient sentience.

The Phantom Hand of Editing

In 1946, Bazin observed that "the evolution of film in the last fifteen years has tended toward the elimination of editing."[79] Effacement, perhaps, is a more apt term. The history of Hollywood is characterized not by the vanishing of editing but the careful concealment of the cinematic hand behind veneers of the real. Hollywood's contradictory goal of realism and clarity requires the establishment of editing rules to maintain this tenuous equilibrium. Editing, then, is

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[79] Bert Cardullo, "André Bazin on Film Technique: Two Seminal Essays," *Film Criticism* 25, no. 2 (2000) 40–62, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44019077, 58.

the most dictatorial of film's formal elements. Consider how the axis-of-action echo's logical spatial orientation while canonized editing cues orchestrate linear time for the spectator. Both are beholden to narrative causality. By fabricating a "plate-glass-window"[80] that peers into the fantasy world, classical editing reflects "the playing space of post-Renaissance bourgeois theater, [making] the spectator an ideally placed onlooker."[81] Hence, in no small part due to its editing, Hollywood classical cinema is revered for its cohesion, clarity, and reserved spectacle. This phantom hand has rhetorical uses as well. The potential for protest through editing has been realized through every era of film history from the dialectics of Soviet montage to the dynamic rhythm of third cinema, and the discontinuity of European new waves. Del Carril reconciles classical continuity and social dissent in *Beyond Oblivion.* First, the film's replication of theatre, with entertainment embedded in both the editing and rhetoric, lends an artificial facade to the image. Likewise, the film concerns the looking relations of a shot-reverse-shot composition, prying into the visual pleasure offered by the constructed image. In this essay I will argue that from *Beyond Oblivion*'s subtle editing of the film strip enables a self-reflexivity that tests the boundaries of classical continuity editing and its' consort, visual pleasure.

According to Bordwell "editing was the earliest rhythmic realm which the classical cinema systematically exploited."[82] By the later years of his career, Del Carril orchestrated scenes according to the classical Hollywood score. In *Beyond Oblivion*, for example, the role of editing establishes a melodramatic rhythm that builds to reminisce on both late 19th century theatrical expression and the personal lateness of the cinematic medium. According to classical form, "if the scene were played on a stage and seen from a seat in the orchestra, it would have

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[80] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 56.
[81] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 58.
[82] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 48.

the same meaning, the episode would continue to exist objectively," albeit the camera presents reality "more forcefully."[83] Structurally, Bordwell delineates the distance between stage and screen, noting that the "crisis/climax/resolution trajectory beloved of late nineteenth-century dramatic theory" is thwarted with a "peculiar domino-linearity."[84] As such, old lines of action are laid to rest while others are resurrected. Del Carril reflects on this evolution as *Beyond Oblivion* maps the similarities between these mediums, evoking the older form to expose the performativity of film. My analysis returns to the earlier scene in the Parisian apartment to see how the Hollywood narrative film inherits certain traditions from the staged drama. The camera parades around the room in step with the misleadingly romantic tryst, careful to mind the 180 rule and mask its own phantom presence. The cuts maintain a match on action, allowing the momentum to reach a crescendo without the appearance of mediation. The veracity of the camera's motion and the depth of the mise-en-scène are lent a theatrical air by the seamless editing. But Bordwell's ideally placed observer becomes an imposter to this bourgeois theatre space via the estranged editing. Consider how the subtlety of the cuts across this sequence lends to a cloying sense of claustrophobia. As the camera and invisible cuts conspire to "give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world," the audience is positioned too close to the performances to ignore the artifice of the film[85]. The scene's excessiveness erodes its dimensionality. As a result, the opulent set is reduced to a stage littered with props, the glamorous key lighting becomes glaringly obvious, and the characters relegated to actors once again. The camera and cutting offer impossibly intimate access to these characters' inner worlds, laying bare the constructed nature of the image along with film's aim of consecrating visual

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[83] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 56.
[84] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 67.
[85] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 9.

pleasure. The translucency of the editing that alludes to theatre threatens to thin the veil of cinema itself.

This reference to theatre resonates with the late style of the film. Bordwell, reiterating and refining Bazin's earlier theory, asserts that the cut must reveal the characters' "relative spatial positions and their states of mind."[86] This relativity includes the filmmaker's psychology. What Mulvey terms a 'late style' reflects Del Carril's own career woes, between the fall of Juan Peron's reign, political censorship, and the fading populist dream. The films produced in the waning days of Del Carril's career, like those of his Hollywood peers, act as "a melancholic liberation as their professional world faced its own end."[87] These movies hold a mirror to the inner workings of Hollywood. For instance, *Beyond Oblivion,* like *Vertigo* in its "lavishly opulent style" [88] and ironic nihilism, it interested in film and its innate objectification. Specifically, the apartment scene resonates with Mulvey's theory of performative femininity. Monica embodies a dual role in this scene; she is both posed as visual pleasure as an exhibitionist while playing the role of Blanca. In other words, she is at once an object, paid for and possessed, while also performing as a fetishistically pure ideal. Ironically, the same features that first bewitch Fernando, the exhibition of her beauty and its ability to be bought, are those that must be buried. Artificial and attainable, like Madeline, Monica "personifies a cosmetic and insubstantial femininity"[89] made real. Often, Hollywood's seamless editing sustains this scopophilic illusion. As Mulvey argues-

> A woman performs within the narrative, the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude. For a

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[86] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 65.
[87] Mulvey, "The Metaphor of the Beautiful Automaton," 220.
[88] Mulvey, "The Metaphor of the Beautiful Automaton," 220.
[89] Mulvey, "The Metaphor of the Beautiful Automaton," 222.

> moment the sexual impact of the performing woman takes the film into a no-man's-land outside its own time and space.[90]

Contrary to Hollywood form, Del Carril's excessively classical editing in the light of the duplicitous narrative unveils the internal conflict in the voyeuristic fantasy. Hidalgo can not play both "pure" Blanca and performer Monica without betraying the memory of the former. We, like Fernando, are confronted with the horror of these superimposed roles. As such, the performance of both character's is impossible to maintain with its contradictions laid bare. The same could be said of classical Hollywood style. When revealed, the plasticity and performativity imbedded in the medium undermines the viewer's simple visual pleasure. Thus, under the glossy surfaces of late style editing is a self-reflexive sentiment that reject's the cinematic male gaze.

In a film that revolves around resemblance, cutting crystalizes these looking relations. Del Carril subverts the Hollywood standard through illuminating the heavily edited exchange of looks that the classical shot-reverse-shot motif relies on. Formally, this framing simultaneously decenters the character, denying the classical law of frontality and symmetry, while it "helps make narration covert by creating the sense that no important scenographie space remains unaccounted for."[91] Ironically, for a film to maintain the presence of the voyeur in its curated fiction, classical editing must violate its own rules. Hence, ambiguity is built into the architecture of Hollywood's shot-reverse-shot editing that *Beyond Oblivion* exploits. This dynamic is most evident when Monica and Fernando first meet. The scene starts draped in the sinful indulgence native to a seedy nightclub, desire hanging heavy over the mise-en-scène like the velvet curtains that conceal the couple. Coy camerawork and darkened set design conspire to draw out the reveal as the man sets his knives ablaze. The woman disrobes. Fernando looks. Finally, Louis (alias

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[90] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 12.

[91] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 60.

Mauricio) throws the knife which impales itself, still lit, precariously close to Monica's face; the face she shares with Blanca. A shot-reverse-shot sequence ensues with Monica and Fernando seeing one another for the first time, intercut by Louis' blades. Monica's look is transparent and triptych in nature. The performers eyes survey the crowd, camera, and cinematic spectator without sentiment; her look divorced from sight. Monica becomes Mulvey's critique that "woman displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire."[92] But Monica's performative mask is pierced by a voyeur who does not fill his role as passively indulgent observer, Fernando. As Fernando backs away, to the score of audience laughter at his outburst, Monica finally meets his bewildered look with acknowledgement. Upon first glance, this scene seems to buttress Mulvey's notion of 'woman as image, man as bearer of the look;' but we, like Fernando, would be falling prey to misrecognition. Vitally, Monica's appearance is uncanny rather than erotic, undermining the patriarchal visual pleasure that underpins Mulvey's arguments. Likewise, Del Carril rejects Gottlieb's romantic interpretation of the reciprocated gaze as a rebirth of "classical and Renaissance theories of vision that discuss it as a flow of particles from the physical world to our sensorium through the eyes" with a mutual look becoming "an interanimation of souls, as it were."[93] Continuing this metaphor, Monica's soul occupies the body that once belonged to Blanca, stealing Fernando's look. This interanimation is necromantic in nature. Pure scopophilic pleasure and fruiting romance rot away in the presence of the doppelganger, whose eerie picture repeats with the shot-reverse-shot editing pattern. Thus,

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[92] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 11.
[93] Gottlieb, "The Variety of Gazes in Vertigo," 209-210.

the uncanniness of Monica's resemblance is crystalized by the editing. In effect, the voyeur becomes the victim of the object and the editing alike.

Bazin imagined that the "the cinema's ultimate aim should be not so much to mean as to reveal."[94] Del Carril contradicts and confirms this sentiment with a classical continuity style that subversively reveals itself. Rather than offering "evidence of the real,"[95] fulfilling films potential as a truthful representation of time and space, *Beyond Oblivion* exposes its own artifice, and by extension the falsity of the medium. Through the translucent lens of the editor- performance, reciprocated looks, and realism are all examined for industry rot. Returning to Bazin's own prognosis on the future of editing in film; the erasure of this preeminent formal element, that which permeates the fabric of the medium itself, is impossible. During his decades observing classical Hollywood, Bazin did not witness the death of editing but it's living burial under the burden of visual pleasure. The freed phantom hand of editing "attempts to erase the boundary line between life and death, or to challenge what's alive as not being sufficiently alive if it doesn't possess that capacity for dedication and rebellion."[96]

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[94] Cardullo, "André Bazin on Film Technique: Two Seminal Essays," 59.
[95] Cardullo, "André Bazin on Film Technique: Two Seminal Essays," 59.
[96] Aguilar, "Notes on some Argentinian corpses," 40.

Conclusion

Del Carril's replica of Hollywood style rots the faulty foundations of voyeuristic delights. Aware of its own allure, *Beyond Oblivion* is doused in ornaments and formal elements that are not only lovely alone but eulogize the glamour of film as a medium, reminding viewers of its own artificial architecture. First, I consider the ways that Del Carril's cinematography reminisces on portraiture, revealing the ways that film refracts painting, statue, and photography in fulfilling its illusion of fluid motion. Next, Del Caril's mise-en-scène of portraits, mirrors, and miniatures echo the themes of the film itself and the motifs of the medium. Finally, *Beyond Oblivion*'s translucent editing faces the necromantic narrative directly, betraying the macabre romance inherent to classical Hollywood form. These meticulous, layered formal constructions cast a cloud of doubt over cinematic reality through compulsive resemblance, recurrence, and the mutilation of the referent. Ostensibly, this creates a matryoshka doll of nested (mis)representations. Narratively, this feminine artifice, then, is layered onto the falsity of the cinematic medium, much like *Vertigo*. *Beyond Oblivion* and *Vertigo* alike unveil classical machinations and reveal the unfamiliar face behind Hollywood veneers. The pair of films' morbid fascination with the past confronts the voyeur and film historian alike with uncanniness, defamiliarizing Hollywood conventions. And so, the narrative becomes uncanny, the objectified body becomes abject, and the replication of visual pleasure becomes desecration. The films, like the ill-fated women in them, are reduced to fragmented images of the past carefully threaded together to reanimate a forgone moment. When confronted with its own reflection, the dream factory decomposes.

What does the death of visual pleasure mean for the voyeur? Returning to a formative source for this thesis, in "Visual Pleasure" Mulvey offers an epitaph for film as it has been and a

christening for a future exalted from the prevailing hierarchy. As Mulvey suggests, a film industry built on the foundations of the patriarchy must be buried. *Vertigo* and *Beyond Oblivion* drive a nail in this coffin through both a hallow reverence for Hollywood form and a hollow reflection on its hierarchies. The pair of films object to Hollywood form by revealing its patriarchal machinations in the classical glow of melodramatic glamour; lifting the proverbial veil of the male gaze, voyeurism, and cinema as a medium. Vitally, these films teach us to look beyond beautiful veneers and interrogate our own viewership. Thus, our gaze is met by what we are meant to objectify, and we must look away or reconcile the mirror image. This complex contradiction of Hollywood form and uncanny effect deserves to be recognized by film history. My desire, then, is to embalm *Beyond Oblivion*, a film that despite its beautiful ambiguity could be lost to the ebb and flow of time and forgotten in the shadow cast by *Vertigo*. This project is my own act of necromancy, an attempt to preserve this film from falling prey to oblivion.

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