Beyond Internalism and Externalism: Husserl and Sartre’s Image Consciousness in Hitchcock and Buñuel

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One of the dualisms dominating recent debates in the philosophy of mind and epistemology concerns internalism and externalism. The former posits a subject immersed in a mental life that functions as the source of truth about the world. The latter suggests that the subject’s knowledge is largely dependent on environmental and physical factors where the truth about reality is to be found, rather than in the subject’s mind. However, experiences of art and film indicate ways to move beyond this impasse, especially when examined in the light of Husserl and Sartre’s phenomenology.

The subject comes to film with various predispositions to recall or create mental images activated during cinematic experience. Anyone who has read a book that describes a face, a blade of grass or a rabbit with a pocket watch cannot doubt that these mental images arise in conjunction with reading. Film has its own peculiar ways of stimulating mental envisioning even while we are busy reading cinematic images. We need only to consider

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1 The duality has its roots deep in Western philosophy but its recent manifestation comes in the form of philosophers identified with the externalist view: Armstrong (1981), Dretske (1983), Goldman (1986), Platinga (1993) and Putnam (1975); in this vein there is an interesting theory of cognitive extension in Clark (2008) (and countered by Bartlett, 2008). For internalism, see Chisholm (1977), BonJour (1985), Lehrer (1990), Pollock (1986), Conee and Feldman (2001) and, more recently, a defence by Farkas (2008).
the simple convention played out in the opening sequence of many films where we see someone stepping out of a car and firmly planting their feet on the ground. We observe their shoes, their style of walking, their attitude, but by now, many of us have already formed a picture of the rest of their body, their face, even their personality. In fact, such devices play on our expectations, our knowledge of who is starring in the film to prime the process of mental envisioning.

Particularly successful films mediate a viewer’s natural inclination to sustain various mental images while watching a film. And while a film sequence can affect the rhythm, intensity and configuration of mental images, this envisioning is, in turn, responsible for making sense of film, uploading it into complex semantic structures without which film would remain a random flicker of light and dark. A film playing to an empty theatre exists in the world in the most rudimentary sense but it becomes meaningful only when one is able to process and detect the ‘external marks’ of those who have lodged meaning into it as a series of signs. For a painting to be more than a confusion of splodges, and for a film to rise up from a pile of frames, there must not only be some interaction between the object and its viewer in the way I have described, the cooperation of different kinds of vision must also occur. Sight directed at the film’s information-rich field (edge, shape and colour detectors, spatial and temporal monitoring) must combine with processes of semantic and conceptual production, involving the interpolation of remembered or imaginary images, in order for film to be film. In a phenomenological sense, the viewer works ‘on the fly’ with the film’s mise-en-scène which often purposefully invites the mental envisioning of the viewer. It is this reciprocity that creates meaning and a heightened consciousness of its constructs.

At least for the viewer, the ‘external’ world is an extension of the image-making capabilities of the mind which, in turn, are stimulated and refined by the exposition of cinematic images. This is a feedback loop that some films, remarkably, make us aware of while we are watching them. We watch the things film characters are shown watching, and observe their
actions based on visual evidence which we are party to; we are made to see what they appear to think by following their lines of sight and their focal points, signalled to us by various framing devices: rear-view mirrors, framed pictures, windows, computer monitors, cinema screens. It is a rapid, often silent and elegant communication. With the aid of flashbacks and camera angles we also 'see' the mental images of the characters’ daydreams and the world of their imagination. When we remember such sequences walking in the park, or falling asleep, it seems that the mental images of others are intertwined with our own. Such films represent (and activate) the switchback mechanism between optical and mental images as a way to articulate plot development and suggest the thought processes of the characters. But this switchback mechanism that the characters are shown experiencing may very well be what the audience is actually experiencing: the depicted perceptual activity appears to be a visual activation of the perceptual activity at work in the viewing subject. In this way, the complex process of visualising involved in the experience of film is reflected back to the viewer during the experience of viewing. This takes us beyond the limited logic of internalism and externalism, particularly because inherent in a film’s exposition and organisation is its reception.

In what follows, I discuss the nature of mental imagery as theorised by Husserl and Sartre. This philosophical introduction, aided by the latest cognitive studies of vision, provides a basis for understanding a number of films by Hitchcock and Buñuel which similarly probe the subtleties and uses of mental imagery. Thus, one of the ways the viewer can enjoy these films is to see them as explorations of ‘visual phenomenology’ which allow us enact, as well as reflect upon, mental images as part of the film experience.

**Mental Imagery**

A common misconception is that one sees with the eye. In fact, it is the basic apparatus of the eye along with specialised areas of the visual cortex which process stimuli in the visual field. But seeing also involves the cooperation of other brain areas. The scanning of the eyes (‘saccadic rhythms’), moving
from one detail to another, conducts an information reconnaissance in cooperation with memory, imagination, reasoning, interpretation, self-monitoring and emotion. But such saccades are also searching for patterns in the visual field that relate to mental image schemas, the details of which are disputed (Ellis 1999, 163; Jacob and Jeannerod, 2003). These mental images are a sustained by a cooperation of several brain areas. They help us to recall and imagine, as well as interpret, what is seen, and work in cooperation with the detection of shape, colour and movement. The depiction of a character looking at an object depends on montage techniques that exploit these two kinds of operations: we have the physical sight of a character that seems to launch a gaze at an object, and we then see the object of the gaze. We do not literally see the action of gazing. It is the interpolation of our own mental images arising from the editing that conveys the image of a gaze happening in time.

Another way of explaining these cooperative ways of seeing is to consider perceptual constancy: we can see objects ‘through’ a series of idealisations or schemas which are retrievable in our memory (Zeki 1999, 76-96). These need not be fixed memories of experience but memories of what we have imagined or logically infer, immediately assembled as working sketches rather than stored as elaborate images. There is a perceptual constancy in a wall painted red. We see it as red even though it will be infinitely patchy and marked with gradations; the marks are subsumed into the overall experience of a red wall. Similarly, digital photography simulates ideal colour constancy through look-up tables. In the same way, we can

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2 Recent cognitive research has revealed that seeing relies on at least two kinds of vision, this is called the dual visual systems (DVS) model, see Milner and Goodale (1995). Vision relying on the ventral stream with strong connection to memory, is more active analysing the abstract, spatial and locational dynamics of the visual field while the dorsal stream is occupied with coordinating sensorimotor actions or registering those of others. Cooperation between these two streams may be also necessary for sustaining what we call mental images, bridging the action between mirror neurons, memories and image schemas (of disputable complexity), all of which would be involved during the rapid succession of images in the film experience. See Clark (2009) for an incisive overview of developments on the subject of DVS.
order the vast array of chaos in the external world into abstract order by referring to our memory and inductive reasoning and this is a kind of seeing. This perceptual constancy is in evidence with many other examples of object perception such as faces, trees, rooms, artefacts and their appearances in film.

It is important to note that mental images are not stored as picture-like images that can be hung on a wall and we do not need actual eyes inside the head to see them. Different types of mental images are stored or made accessible in different ways, from the topographic and schematic to the symbolic (Pinker 1997, 284), or as predispositions for distinct neural firings, relationships and routines. In the process of scanning the world, which is also a way of constructing it, these images are codified using different brain areas as well as codes. During this scanning we also make use of aspects of pre-existent engrams in our long and short term memory. We find the raw material for our imaginary images outside in the world, but the world may have these images, or features of them, ‘ready made’ for us to find, we do not need to duplicate the world in all its detail but sometimes the mental images we consider to be ours are made with the cooperation of the world. This is especially so in art and in films which depict the mental images of dreams or fantasy settings which seem familiar to us. In some ways, what we discover is what we were looking for and what we recognise, in conjunction with what seems new and this reciprocity characterises the experience. This is consistent with the enactive view of engagement with the world (and film).

Even realism in film is a transformation of mental images projected by another: editor, producer, director, actor, cameraman, scriptwriter. Post production is a process of constructing the editor’s mental imagery in conjunction with what is available and the mental imagery of other players in the film production process. The camera aperture is an editing choice, cutting out what is left outside and creating an image of whatever is judged to be

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3 There is no singular mental faculty responsible for their activation or storage. Against crude representationalism, it is likely that there are combined processes (analogical or propositional) by which different formats of mental images are enactively engaged in the world of which the mind is part. For an overview of mental imagery, see Thomas (2008).
ideal or appropriate—but appropriate to what? Part of the answer is that in creating a composed image or sequence, the film director (or other agents) are negotiating expectations and processing judgments about composition and meaning. The film director captures part of the world because these judgments appear captured in the world as a form of what seems appropriate, or they are manufactured in order to be discovered. And this process is re-enacted by the film viewer whose judgements and predispositions also seem captured or discoverable in the world.

Mental image schemas may be shared: they are intertextual and made intersubjective in and through film. Filmmakers are able to tap into images or symbols that have resonance for a mass audience or that reflect back upon the viewer’s own modalities of sight, parodying or otherwise referencing such processes. The film’s images seem external to us ‘in the world’ and yet we see them with an intentionality that gives them a character intimately linked to the recesses of our identity. Both mental image formation structured by the brain and enacted with images of film (similarly produced by brain processes) are ‘in the world’, ‘co-present’ during the experience of film, as much as I am in the world while I watch the film of my choice.

It is important that this entire process can be made known to us not only through philosophical reflection but during the experience of film viewing itself. Apart from the minutiae of film techniques that rely on triggering mental image formation, often nonconsciously, some films explicitly depict mental images as a theme in cooperation with higher levels of consciousness and self-awareness. A recent example of this is *The Number 23* (Schlesinger, 2007) and one sequence in particular, where the main character (Jim Carrey) is reading the book, *The Number 23*. The character sees himself as the author having a flashback. This flashback is the staging of a sequence of mental images structured as a series of frames, windows-in-windows, through which we penetrate revealing moments of the author’s past. Also on display is the reader’s imagining as he sees himself in the role
suggested by the author. The frames-in-frames shown as part of the film’s unfolding anticipate trajectories and stages of mental envisaging, but they also reference the medium of film, the frames of its hidden substrate. It is this very structuring of the mise-en-scène with the frame-in-the-frame that allows the feedback loop between viewer and world to operate. At times, the film viewer can appear to find in her visual field a character that is depicted engaging in the same activity as she is. This is a common scene in art where an artist is shown painting a picture:

[T]he represented perceptual activity at work in pictorially representing our artist interpenetrates (Durchdringt) the perceptual activity that is actually performed with regard to the thinglike picture. (Marbach 1992, 140)

The viewer engages in both mental image formation and optical processing, but the difference here is that this engagement appears to be mirrored by the depiction. Husserl might have described this as a situation where the film viewer is looking “straightforward and reflexively” (Husserl 1983, 148), but I would add that the viewer is looking straightforward and reflexively at a character in the film who is also looking straightforward and reflexively. In such circumstances, simply to assume that our perceptual activity amounts to an internal, mentalistic attitude sealed off from the wider world in which it is situated seems to be a woefully inadequate way to describe the nuanced experience involved in viewing scenes of this kind.

Husserl’s Dresden Gallery Picture

In terms of philosophy of mind, Husserlian phenomenology has much to offer in helping us to understand the intersubjective experience that bridges image production and reception. Despite Husserl’s interest in image

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4 In the film’s dénouement, we discover that the reader is suffering from amnesia and is, in fact, the author reading his own book, and so his mental projections are not imaginary but are really his own. In this way, the film parodies the authorship of mental envisioning and our tendency to personalise film characters’ flashbacks.
consciousness, and subsequent research on this subject (Marbach 1993), the philosopher has not made as much of an impact on our understanding of art or film as could be expected (Di Pinto 1978; Sepp 1988; Uzelac 1998; Lotz 2007; and for film, Casebier 1991). Husserl attempted to provide an account of how consciousness is connected to objects in the world beyond internalism and externalism. For Husserl, a picture in the Dresden Gallery, a painting by David Teniers the Younger (1610-1690), articulates just such a relationship. Teniers painted the scene of a gallery with around fifty paintings crammed into it. The painting presents a monadic arrangement where, within the matrix of the painting is implied the larger, physical environment of the gallery. This inside-out/outside-in structure allows Husserl to argue against the essentialist binary of external physical world and internal mentalism. The structure of the painting mirrors the structure of consciousness attending the painting, and this symmetry illustrates how consciousness is part of the world which is reflected back to it. We are dealing here with levels of representation and their relations, and levels of consciousness and their relations. The Teniers picture is not a simple representation of a gallery, but an object containing within it many levels of representation, analogous with the series of conscious (and sometimes unconscious) mental states processing these different levels. The real, external space of the gallery is depicted inside the internal space of the painting, and within this internal space there are more paintings. It is a visual diagram that questions simplistic internalist and externalist epistemological claims. The following diagram attempts to explain and supplement Husserl’s Dresden Gallery example, elaborating the relation between consciousness and intentional objects in the visual field:

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5 I would like to thank Firuza Pastakia, Dr. David Angluin, and Professor Eduard Marbach, Institute of Philosophy, University of Bern, for reading this paper and for providing insightful comments.
6 For supporting arguments that it was Husserl’s intention to question the dualism of externalism and internalism, see Zahavi 2004.
Fig. 1 Schematic of picture consciousness extrapolated from Husserlian formulations.

(A) is a picture-in-a-picture, similar to the Teniers picture in the Dresden Gallery, which Husserl evokes in us; it also suggests physical immersion in a gallery environment by appearing to duplicate what is going on around it and in front it, with someone shown looking at it. In Husserlian terms, it is an image of the picture thing as seen by B, an image of the Bildding, the picture’s material substratum, paint on canvas for example. The Bildding is only part of a composite structure, for there is also present here the picture object, or Bildobjekt, the picture identified as a possibly meaningful object before its meaning is extracted. Then there is also the subject, sujet, the thing the picture represents within its matrix. The sujet is seen through both the Bildobjekt and the Bildding, the latter two becoming apperceptions, and these three interpenetrating aspects are repeated by D, the whole image reproduced here. Note that these stages of the image are not fixed, the Bildobjekt can become the sujet for example, from the point of view of D. These different kinds of seeing are distinct mental states which appear to converge in the visual experience when we try to hold in our minds the picture as a composite whole. Note that the series of frames marks each stage of consciousness of the Bildding, Bildobjekt and sujet, stages which we
experience while watching this experience represented as happening before us.

(B) Husserl does not mention this and going beyond him, B denotes the viewer and her physical, inverted retinal image, deflected light shining in upon the fovea; it is a reflection of the object, literally internal to the perceiving body. Something of this is happening with our own retinal image when we look at the diagram. B references us, viewers of the diagram.

(C) This is the mental image which has no existence as an image. It is an image in name only, produced by mechanisms of memory or imagination which we see in our ‘mind’s eye’ without a retinal image, as we might imagine how something feels to the touch without touching it. C reflects B’s relationship to A, and gives the depicted viewer an image of how he must look, from somebody else’s perspective (ours), standing in front of the painting. It also reflects what we are seeing or ‘seeing’ as viewers of D.

(D) The letter D denotes the material substrate of the picture thing, framed to highlight the picture thing (the material substrate, in this case, a digitally scanned image of a drawing of pen and ink on paper, the Bilding). A distancing effect emphasised by the framing allows the picture thing to be presented to consciousness. This also indicates the physical context in which the picture is found (the room or gallery) and makes us aware of the surrounding space of D (the space surrounding Figure 1, the page on our computer screens and the rooms in which they may be situated). Both spaces index each other, as well as the space inside A, to create a serial, recursive effect. The image just inside the frame of D appears to reflect the macro-consciousness of the viewer, cooperative with her peripheral vision, representing these external referents pictorially. We have a ‘reversible monadic’ arrangement where one external reality, the place in which the representation is placed, is indexed internally in the representation; the representation is external to us yet also indexes us and our mental
envisioning. This also happens when we watch film, and is precisely one of the ways in which we have an experience that spans the internalist-externalist divide.

The cinematic experience is the site where physical sight and mental images appear to co-emerge and interact, forming an interconnected series in order to constitute experience. The viewer’s series of states seems to track and be tracked by the reversible monadic exposition of frames, views, windows, doorways in film. I could just as easily visualise the relation between the mental images I am having while watching a film’s presentation of its images, as two walls either side of a staircase. Both walls have pictures on them. The pictures are not the same on each side of the stairs but the pattern of their seriality and unfolding provides us with a conscious experience of a seriality or optic flow in two places at the same time. The image of the staircase shares structural similarities with Husserl’s use of the Dresden Gallery image as hierarchically intelligible, reflecting an organisation of conscious states with levels and appearances of the object continually refreshed by the framing devices of cinematography. But Husserl’s model of phenomenology engaged with the Teniers picture is not the only example we can use to re-evaluate internalism and externalism. There are other models that extend and deepen these perceptions. I believe that Sartre’s description of a man looking through a keyhole does just that, and provides ways to think about our connectedness with the world of images.

**Sartre’s Keyhole**

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre conjures up a mental image of a man who looks through a keyhole (Sartre 1956, 261-2). He is a taken up by a scene on the other side of the door and immersed in it at the expense of all else. His consciousness is ‘through there’ in the world, his self-awareness a background hum, as is ours in the mental envisioning of this act, reading Sartre’s text, a ‘keyhole’ onto the philosopher’s mental imagery. The viewer looking through the keyhole exists not as a duality, a self who perceives a
spectacle, but as losing himself in the world. Yet this involvement is interrupted when the peeping Tom suddenly hears footsteps, causing his attention to shift away from the scene in the keyhole towards the unknown figure behind him. The self is split between what the peeping Tom sees with his eyes and the mental image of the other person approaching. For a moment, he imagines himself seen from behind as a voyeur and he becomes aware of himself as an object of the Other’s gaze, whom he presumes to be looking over his shoulder (as the reader is doing, in a sense). He is conscious of himself through the consciousness of the Other, looking at himself through the Other’s eyes, feeling shame, but nevertheless remaining to look through the keyhole. While his sight is directed through the keyhole, he is formulating a mental image of himself looking, as seen through the eyes of the person looking at him.

The peeping Tom feels as if the Other is in his head (another framing device) or that he is in the head of the Other looking at himself (another play on interpenetration). The peeping Tom is now painfully aware of his looking, possibly even the shape of the keyhole which until recently was invisible to him in his prereflexive state. As the peeping Tom is split off from the scene of his desire, he is also split off from himself while looking at himself (being conscious of himself). He is both subject and object, which reside in him in a double sense, whether he pays attention to the scene ahead of him (visually) or to what the Other is seeing behind him (a mental projection). As with Husserl’s Dresden Gallery, this seeing through keyholes while having mental images of oneself doing the same demonstrates a cooperation of processes of consciousness, straightforward and reflectively. It is through the keyhole of the Other’s consciousness that the peeping Tom is conscious of his own consciousness. The gaze, imagined or real, of the Other distances the peeping Tom from himself and this is another way of saying that the gaze distances consciousness from conscious mental states in order that they come into view, and so that Sartre can write about them.

Sartre’s thoughts about the transpositions of consciousness are organised by a series of frames-in-frames. The keyhole scene is a system of
frames: the eye of the Other, the peeping Tom’s eye, the keyhole, the scene through the door. Each frame is linked to the other spatially in terms of embedding; the peeping Tom internalises what is externally behind him (a mental image of the Other’s eye) to ‘look’ at (become conscious of) himself looking at (being conscious of) what he sees with his eyes through the keyhole:

1. Consciousness is to eye, as eye is to keyhole. A conscious mental state becomes a framing device from the vantage point of another conscious mental state.
2. The Other’s eye is to peeping Tom, as peeping Tom is to keyhole scene.
3. The Other’s gaze is to peeping Tom, as peeping Tom’s gaze is to himself
4. The peeping Tom is a keyhole for the Other to look through, which also references the reader of Sartre’s text.
5. The peeping Tom looks through the Other’s gaze, as a keyhole through which he can see himself caught in the act.
6. Consciousness of his facticity as voyeur is the constriction of freedom caused by the Other’s gaze; the constriction of the gaze is like the constriction of the keyhole.
7. The scene through the keyhole is both external in the world and ‘inside’ the keyhole, but the scene ‘out there’ is merged in experience with what is going on ‘in here’ (implying, also, the reader).

It is as if consciousness travels, sheathed in several gazes, and these gazes are embedded one in the other: the gaze of the Other is carried inside the gaze of the peeping Tom gazing at himself, gazing at the scene. Another way of expressing this is to imagine a series of arrows shot in the same trajectory at intervals, the arrow behind pierces the one ahead of it, turning it into a receptacle, a threshold or a frame through which it passes but the trajectory is ultimately circular and reflexive. The eye of the Other, the eye of the peeping Tom, the eye of the keyhole, the eyes of people on the other side of the door are signals that mark the direction of consciousness. Each gaze, each
framing device of the keyhole/iris/edge, marks a distinction between mental states, but it is possible to look through all these frames at once and at oneself. The implicit sexual nature of Sartre’s construct functions as a key which opens the door of the text. The gaze goes through the keyhole and cooperates with the phallus. The keyhole is an outward visible expression of the peeping Tom’s anticipation of coitus through the keyhole. Kneeling down before the keyhole to launch the gaze is a form of outward ritual which instantiates desire. The gaze through the keyhole mimics penetrative sex (which is what Sartre’s fascination, and feelings of jealousy and shame imply may be happening on the other side of the door). The footsteps allude to rhythms approaching climax, yet also to the beating of the heart, the passing of time, the element of things in flux. The footsteps are not only the approach of the unknown lodged in the consciousness of the moment, the approach of consciousness of the series of conscious mental states that Sartre begins to describe, but they also take him away from his keyhole scene. The footsteps mark the distance of alienation, they take him away from his engagement while he is being approached by them, as he withdraws from the keyhole. But there is also the fear of a series of penetrations from behind. At the base of this is the logic of the frame-in-the-frame, the logic of the interpenetration of the levels of consciousness of conscious states. In Sartre’s mental imagery and structural logic emerges a consciousness that penetrates and is penetrated, views and is viewed, their overlapping creating intensities of various kinds.
Hitchcock

In *Psycho* (1960), Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) looks through a hole in the wall, watching his guest (Janet Leigh) undress. While looking at the character, seen here in the dark, we are watching him watch his guest and we become aware of our own watching through his. The scene appears as a visualisation of Sartre’s keyhole description, but we are split between being the Other gazing at the target and the target receiving the gaze. The glazed frames of pictures displaying birds on the back wall of the guest’s room into which he peers, are on the periphery of our vision (and his) and they are a reminder that the peeping Tom, Norman Bates, is associated with a hunter, a bird of prey, for we have already seen his room replete with stuffed birds which signify trophies as well as corpses. The gaze is thus Eros and Thanatos. The bird’s eye view is re-presented to us as the hole in the wall through which the gaze is launched; as in the case of Sartre’s keyhole, this doubles as an aperture for both the eye and coitus. This is made more complex when we realise (on a second viewing of the film) that Norman Bates has a split-personality disorder and that his ‘mother’ may be a co-watcher during this peeping Tom sequence, looking over his shoulder, as we do. The viewing audience is implicated in the act of voyeurism as well, not just by looking but also in thinking. We are thinking about what the characters may be thinking, stepping back into what we consider to be our own thought—although, of course, it is all our own thought—strangely visualised for us by the director’s use of props and editing.

The sequence not only references the nature of film production - eye, through camera aperture, through to picture and subject (the Husserlian stages of Bildding, Bildobjekt and sujet shown in Figure 1) - but also stages the nature of our enactive vision: we are both viewer and viewer-of-our-own-viewing and this should tell us about our own ability to shift our consciousness from one vantage point to another, as does Sartre’s keyhole imagery. As in Husserl’s Teniers picture that captures something of the space...
it occupies, we seem to share the intimacy of the darkness ensconcing Norman Bates, which is somehow contiguous with the dim ambience of the cinema hall in which we are present. He is an image of me watching the film: do I have a mental image of myself watching? As in a mirror reflection where we are both viewer and viewed, we are in the same position as one who looks at his or her own body. The sequence thus cooperates with important mechanisms of reflexive consciousness of the body as a viewing subject and as viewed object. This chiasmus is extended by the montage of the voyeur’s gaze and its object, the guest’s body. Viewing the scene of the woman undressing, we feel as if we are looking through his eyes, yet we subsist as a solitary consciousness inside his gaze that seems to surround us while we look, his consciousness looks over our shoulders while we view her body; we are viewing while being viewed. We are looking through the eyes of the voyeur at ourselves (entirely consistent with Sartre’s perceptions). This is, of course, not a simple optical experience of looking with the eyes. We are aware of our embodied experience; we can have a mental image of ourselves as a vantage point from which the gaze is launched and as a target for that gaze, and it just so happens that this mental image is found in the world and in the film.

Hitchcock seems to get inside our head, to turn the camera on our own looking, thereby framing our gaze, but we also take up the director’s gaze and see through it, as in Sartre’s keyhole example. The camera aperture through which the director ‘sees’, which is the edge of the cinema screen, can also be ‘tried on’ for size by any viewer. The framing devices in the film—peephole, window, picture frame—play with the viewer’s consciousness of viewing. All this may sound ponderous but the visual process is, in fact, subtle and immediate, rapidly effected by a series of saccades back and forth, saccades which are sent into further stimulation by the quick editing of the film, adding further levels of curiosity and concern. The series of unresolved conflicts between capture and flight, self-awareness, awareness of being in someone else’s gaze (Hitchcock, Norman Bates), the actor’s gaze at her own body, and our ability to step back and escape are used by the director to
create a claustrophobic viewing experience, not of film *per se* but of the anatomy of consciousness as a visual experience. The film sequence is a diagram of conscious processes and their relations, but one which is being drawn by those very processes.

In Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954), the audience looks ‘through’ a character’s eyes into a window which is also a cinema screen. The frame functions psychologically in many ways. It puts us in the position of being a voyeur and seeing through the eyes of a voyeur. Yet we are also external to this viewing: there is a switchback effect here of distance and involvement, of continually stepping back from watching people and watching through their eyes, feeling what they are feeling, but being aware also of a skilfully constructed fiction. In the same way, the frame of the screen is complemented by the frame of the rear window, but the frame of the cinema screen is also the frame of the lens, our eyes (the extent of our peripheral vision), the character’s eyes and Hitchcock’s eyes. These are all stages of the frame, their plurality alluded to in the image itself, in the plurality of its frames.

We apprehend a person watching or a person watching another person watching, and this suggests being conscious of another’s mental state, which may be about yet another person’s mental state as deduced from the visual evidence. Such a chain of relations is visually represented in both film and art as a framed picture representing a mental state in which there is another picture, depicting another mental state, *et cetera*. We go through a series of spaces which represent changes in the vantage points of consciousness. The compulsion and release inherent in film find their vehicle in scopophilia, which both compels and releases the appearance and disappearance of frames. James Stewart’s character in *Rear Window*, a photographer immobilised by a broken foot and through whose eyes we are supposed to see through the telescopic lens and window frames, is of course an allusion to film, its freedoms and compulsions, its constrictions of the gaze upon the fetish. The photographer’s subtly signalled obsession with the visual in cooperation with his immobility mirrors the audience’s, and so, again, the
mise-en-scène is similar to Husserl’s Dresden Gallery image because it is an inner reflection of the world which surrounds and contains it.7 The mise-en-scène ‘is about’ the audience’s viewing or, more correctly, what it means to be an audience who has consented to have its freedom, its ability to intervene, curtailed and its consciousness directed to look straightforward and reflexively. The consciousness attendant upon this double sense is brought into sharp focus when, through the telephoto camera (the film-aperture/eye and keyhole8), the photographer sees the murderer look back at him from the window across the courtyard. Raymond Burr, the actor who plays the murderer, eyes crisply demarcated with round spectacles, is looking directly at Hitchcock’s camera, a gaze which magically reverses the photographer’s gaze and, by proxy, our own. This rare cinematically powerful confrontation shrinks distances, reverses gazes, and brings what previously seemed to be discrete and mobile moments of consciousness into a compellingly frank and inescapable chill. The seriality of seeing-in is reversed, collapsed, pierced by the shared gaze. If one were to isolate the still, we would have a picture of a man looking at us from the pictorial space, but that gaze is pregnant with many other gazes in the context of the film. The actor, Raymond Burr, is looking into the camera aperture, which is being looked through by Hitchcock or the cameraman, but he is represented as looking at the peeping Tom photographer (James Stewart) through whose camera I, the cinemagoer, peer. Hitchcock must have had a mental image of the audience; he launches his intentional thought through the imagery of the gaze of his actor looking straight at the camera. Never let it be said that Hitchcock took the gaze lightly. Indeed, through it and through its representations in the eyes of his actors, his power over the stream of

7 There is a very similar mise-en-scène in Vertigo (Hitchcock 1958) where Madeleine (Kim Novak) is shown sitting in a gallery in front of a picture of Carlotta (her ‘previous life’). She looks forward and reflexively, while the private detective (Jimmy Stewart) is shown watching her from what he believes is a concealed position. The scene duplicates the film viewer’s looking forward and reflexively. For further discussion on framing device in Vertigo and elsewhere, see Minissale (2009).

8 As if to underline the logic that links Sartre’s keyhole with the camera aperture, in Rear Window one of the characters tells Jeff the photographer that his telephoto camera, which he uses to study the lives of others, is ‘a portable keyhole’.

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consciousness seems total. A momentary escape from this grip is offered by critical engagement, when the viewer becomes conscious of the devices and techniques used by the director to achieve his ends and begins to enjoy their deployment as part of the experience of the film.

Buñuel

Husserlian and Sartrean principles of consciousness help us to unpack other iconic images in the history of cinema. Vermeer’s *The Lacemaker* (1669-70), as seen below, is framed by the margin of a book inside a frame from Buñuel’s film *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), and further framed by a browser frame. We are readers (of the book) as well as viewers of the film, the printed picture and the digital image. We are looking through the reader/viewer/filmmaker’s eyes. The film still is a visual display of a structure of consciousness, not a frozen structure but one which changes with an ever-increasing seriality of frames and transpositions.

![Digital image from Un Chien Andalou (1929) in browser window](image)

The image from *Un Chien Andalou* exemplifies the paradox central to cinematic consciousness: the camera shot appears to zoom in on a still object, to fix on one image, but the film frame, the frame of the book and the painting’s frame allow for the idea of movement, the gaze into the space or withdrawal from it. Meanwhile, the book and its turning pages form a
horizontal movement which cooperates with the frames-in-frames of the film reel and the frames-in-frames of the image. This is an intersection of horizontal and penetrative projections through frames. But this multiple motion also causes us to look straightforward and reflexively. As with Husserl’s Dresden Gallery image and my extension of it in Figure 1, what is signalled here is a seriality of appearances: multiple visualisations of the object-image compacted into one image, which shows us something of our own ways of seeing. It reflects back to us our ability to have a series of mental images of the object. Not only do we see the image from *Un Chien Andalou* as singular but we also see it through the lens of various mental images, from ‘original’ work of art to photograph of painting, film of book, and web browser. A series of mental states is produced, through which the idea of the original identity is veiled and continually translated. The series of frames-in-frames is structurally analogous with Husserl’s Dresden Gallery device and Sartre’s keyhole example, which also trigger a series of adjustments of focus in cooperation with various mental images. Not only is the image transparently serial, structured by various apertures, frames, windows or edges through which we can continually re-enact ‘seeing-in’, but so are the conscious mental states which track these distinct demarcations of the visual field; consciousness ‘sees through’ its own seriality of mental states.

*The Lacemaker* has been given several different guises. We seem to inhabit a new conscious state every time we see through one of these guises, and we are also able to conceptualise them together as a series. Every time we consciously consider the frame, we at once become aware of another level of representation. This awareness is a new conscious moment, where one frame is left behind for a new, ‘penetrated’ space and a new consciousness of the next or last level of representation. Cooperating with the frames-in-frames are re-presentations of the surface. The surface of the printed image in

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9 Similarly, Barthes’ analysis of Eisenstein’s film stills, as opposed to the motion of film sequences, focuses on a vertical or paradigmatic reading of correspondences superimposed upon a horizontal or syntagmatic chain of events (Barthes 1977, 54-57).

10 Similarly art (or film): ‘gives us not merely an object but a perception of that object; a world and a way of seeing that world at once’ (Danto 1989, 231).
the book appears to dissolve into the surface of celluloid (a moving surface), which transmutes into the surface of the image on the computer screen, the browser window. This dissolving and merging movement is also a cooperation between mental and physical vision, for when I identify the image as a film still but also keep in mind that it is a painting or a book, this ‘keeping in mind’ is a mental image which I sustain while looking at the image as a film still which cooperates with my mental envisioning. One can be conscious of seeing through all of these surfaces as different transformations of materiality, where I see the image not as an image but as a principle of seriality which I can keep in my mind as a mental image while I optically inspect the film still. I have an image of consciousness that ‘transverberates’ the series of appearances and views.

Consciousness of extrication from framing and embodiment is also possible. The mental image here is of a consciousness which withdraws, with each backward step, from the frame covering over the image with a new surface: painting, photograph, celluloid, browser, computer monitor, digitised image. This may restore the initial conscious mental state of beholding the image, before the processing of frames-in-frames occurs, but this revisited conscious state is enriched with knowledge of the possible series of thoughts accompanying each appearance. With this film image we see the picture’s material substratum (Bildding) and the picture object (Bildobjekt) in order to regard the picture subject (sujet) but this tripartite division is repeated each time we take as our intention the painting, photograph, film still or digital image. The virtue of having a series of frames and surfaces presented in this way is that it suggests both the motion of a stream (going through the frames) and static moments, iterations, ruptures and particulars of time and materials that are experienced while passing beyond them. Consciousness constructs the mental image of a series of frames-in-frames folding in or unfolding out of space, or changing over time, engaging with the (in real life) flat image of the still from Un Chien Andalou. When one

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11 Husserl writes, ‘the glance penetrates through the noemata of the series of levels, reaching the object of the last level, and there holding it steady, whilst no longer penetrating through and beyond it’ (Husserl 1982, 271).
becomes conscious of this mental construct of the principle of seriality occupying space, flatness returns. Yet one cannot shake off the notion of being able to see one through the other, aware of both a plurality of distinctions and the single image.

The image from *Un Chien Andalou* incorporates two sets of values: an ontology of states of an ‘original’ image, which in some sense lies ‘underneath’ its iterations; and a phenomenology of conscious states that, like the image itself, is both one and many, representing one moment in which many other previous moments subsist. The visual and the mental co-emerge in the experience of film. The film still suggests various principles of seriality not only as an extendable and dynamic unfolding of frames in time and space, but also as a folding back in the reverse direction. Yet there is also possible a radical folding/unfolding of seriality which never moves or diverges from the point of its initiation. The image in the actual running film, *Un Chien Andalou*, looks still (it looks like a film still and a still photograph/painting) and appears to freeze time but is actually a series of frames rapidly passing before the eye. In the next few frames in *Un Chien Andalou*, the pages of the book are turned to reveal other pages, and this conjures up the mental image of a running film and the passing of time. The scene encourages us to become aware of the paradox of a still image produced by the dynamic seriality of film frames. This paradox has its counterpart in our mental envisioning. We can have a mental image of *The Lacemaker* which we maintain in our minds (the still image) while envisaging its transformations into photograph, film still and digital image. I can visualise the varieties of *Bildding* (the sheen of oil on canvas, the matt surface of a printed illustration in a book, the pixels of a digitised image) but I can also create mental images of the *Bildobjekt* and *sujet*. Our mental image of *The Lacemaker* may appear to be still in the sense that we maintain it as a reference point, an identity through transformations and changes, but in fact it is continually refreshed by other mental images which wash over it to change its identity from painting to photograph to digital image, and yet it shines through these changes. There is a stillness within dynamism and
identity through difference—a convergence of opposites that William James characterised as pails of water standing in the stream of consciousness. The mechanics of film and mental processes seem to index each other: while the film still appears fixed and our consciousness appears fixed upon it, both are non-inertial processes that reference each other. This is not surprising given that film sequences are the products of conscious processes that we re-enact while watching them.

Conclusion
The frame-in-the-frame enjoins us to engage straightforward and reflexively at the same time when we look through a series of transpositions with the lightning reactions of our visual thinking. But when we explain this spontaneous process of visual knowledge with words, they seem to separate out the two terms ‘straightforward’ and ‘reflexively’ with a series of steps between them, the kind the man looking through the keyhole hears when approached from behind in Sartre’s example. As soon as we become conscious of our immersion, we seem to step outside of it. But this immersion can be recaptured. In Hitchcock’s films, our immersion is reflected back to make us conscious of it and this further increases our involvement. Our connectedness does not hinge solely on emotional appeal but on how Hitchcock skilfully lays the trap and the audacity of his address. This is not critical distance but critical involvement as a kind of immersion in the director’s precise intricacy. Hitchcock often structured his films with a series of frames-in-frames which both take us forward and make us aware of going forward. They ensnare us but we go in eyes wide open, willingly, partly because of our desire for emotional reward and partly because they anticipate and engage our mental envisioning.

12 Warhol’s Empire frames the monumental stillness of the Empire State Building without changing the shot for hours. While our bodies are immobile and our eyes fixed on this still image, there is a kind of symmetry. Yet the film’s invisible, dynamic substructure of rapidly passing frames seems to mirror the dynamism of our conscious thoughts attending the film. In such a way, the film allows us to envision the flow of our consciousness.
I have tried to translate into words my own experience of viewing film as somehow ‘in here’ in my world yet ‘out there’ happening in the world for me to see. It seems important to give some account of this feeling of profound and meaningful continuity that bridges these worlds and harmonises the polarised views of externalism and internalism. During film experience, ‘my world’ is an adjunct of the world around me. There is something of me in it and something of it in me, and there are all sorts of causal paradoxes about what this means and who I am. Film reflects part of myself back to me while I am investing it with part of me, both emotionally and with my mental envisioning. This is also due to the reciprocal nature of film, which encourages intersubjective processes of empathy and mental image sharing between individuals. Another way to see film questioning the externalism/internalism divide is to see it as an extension of our consciousness. Recent work on cognitive extension argues against the view that the activity of thinking is something that happens solely in our heads. Cognition extends beyond the body to the tools, symbols, notebooks or other artefacts like film, for example, which depict character’s lives and emotions as well as our own. These objects are, in a sense, extensions of our mind:

[T]he actual local operations that realise certain forms of human cognising include inextricable tangles of feedback, feed-forward, and feed-around loops: loops that promiscuously criss-cross the boundaries of brain, body, and world. The local mechanisms of mind, if this is correct, are not all in the head. Cognition leaks out into body and world. (Clark 2008, xxviii, my italics).

I would like to add that the mental imagery I have focused on in this essay also ‘leaks out into body and world’ and is stored and reflected back to us by film. The boundaries mentioned above are a series of frames through which cognitive continuities flow. I have used the cognitive markers of the edge of the eye, the camera aperture, the frame of the cinema screen, the depiction of the keyhole, the page margin to extend this series. As we have seen in the still from *Un Chien Andalou*, these sequences can be shown as monadic, as a series of frames in linear or horizontal extension, as a multiplicity of views in one scene, or as appearances which seem to self-generate out of each other,
moving nowhere. This kind of seriality can be experienced in an ecstatic instant with both mental imagery and visual inspection, or it can be unpacked and extended in time using words. Although consciousness is not itself a seriality, we can and often do experience self-consciousness as various mental images of seriality and most often in cooperation with our physical sight involved in finding serialities in the world, of which film is a rapid and compacted experience. A film’s seriality of images appears to interlock with the seriality of our mental images, sometimes confirming, sometimes enriching the latter, and this is what allows us immediately to feel at one with what we are watching.
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