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Stephanie Hunt Hegstad
Oberlin College

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"As If I Could Do Anything Except
Just Sit and Stare"

A Gaze of a Viewer/Reader in *Psycho* and *To The
Lighthouse*

Stephanie Hunt Hegstad
English Department Honors Program
Oberlin College
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I would like to thank everyone who watched Psycho or part of Psycho with me--especially Susan for her inspirational quotes and fine seeing eye, Evan for the fifty thesis topics he composed for me whenever I was stuck, Bill for the kind of movie viewer he is, and David for asking so many questions...my thanks also to everyone in the English honors program--particularly Urmila, who humored my tumbling down the hallway...and to friends near and far who have taught me how to see... And of course I give my most enthusiastic thank you to Pat Day: a good teacher you have been. Thank you for everything!

An Extra Pane of Glass

I've spent the past two summers living and working at a backcountry mountain chalet that sits just a couple hundred feet from the Continental Divide. The nearest telephone was 16 miles on foot round-trip, and mail arrived on a pack train of mules arriving once a week. Letters were the looked-forward-to luxury of the nine women--including myself--who worked there. One mail day, some pictures I had sent out to be developed were returned to me. Now, since I am not a photographer, I have always been unhappy with my snapshots of landscapes--sunrise, mountain, flowers at dusk; always, there's something missing from the image. The view itself is altered by chemicals on paper, but even beyond that: something is missing. But I have drawers filled with pictures of flat landscapes, and still I continue to load my film into my camera, always hoping for a perfect shot--hoping, maybe, that practice will turn me into an accomplished photographer, that somehow I will capture the essence of the sunset.

Hiking one afternoon to a saddle of a ridge overlooking Glacier National Park's now-biggest glacier, trying to change the course of my thought from the ice and rock to thesis ideas (this never was entirely successful since the rock and ice had a distinct advantage over the invisible and far-away concept of an honors thesis), I realized what was nagging me about this just-returned packet of photographs. While sorting through them, I experienced an unexpected pleasure at looking at one picture of a not-so-spectacular view that I had shot only because the diorite sill that runs throughout the park was especially well-exposed on the mountain side. It was, on the whole, an unfamiliar view to me, taken from behind a car

window on a short trip we made before hiking up the mountain and beginning work. Nevertheless, this photograph satisfied me because I could locate in it my own position behind the camera--my own purpose for taking the picture as well as the time and place it was taken. And I can realize these things because I am essentially visible within the framed image itself; the sunlight passing through the plexiglass of the window caused a reflection of me and my camera onto that extra pane of glass (the window) standing between the inside of the car and the photographed landscape without. The reflection caused only a slight aberration in the print--just enough for a disturbance and play of color and texture on its glossy surface, but still--there I am: a viewing presence existing within the view itself.

Sitting on a rock on the Continental Divide, looking down on Grinnell Glacier to the east and Lake MacDonald valley to the west, I realized that I cannot separate myself from my surroundings, and the dissatisfaction I feel with my landscape photography comes primarily from my absence within the frame of the picture. Where am I? Focused edge and deep color mean little to me without a perspective from which to view them. While sitting on a rock and seeing the glaciers and mountains, I cannot separate myself from my surroundings because I am located within those surroundings; when looking at the two-dimensional photograph, when I am no longer located within the area encompassed by the rectangled space, I am distracted from the landscape by the people and places surrounding me now, and the pleasure of looking at the view may be lost because of distance gained-- unless I can find some reflection within the framed picture to remind me of my viewing presence, to place me back into the space of the landscape.

Most of my photographs portray an empty landscape--empty, that is, of the human gaze. But the thing pictured at the moment of the camera-action is not empty at all: my gaze fills the view, and that's what I take a picture of--what I see, what I see . But how can we photograph a gaze, a thing in the invisible space between active verb and physical noun? Maybe my dissatisfaction comes from looking at a landscape that appears emptied of human viewing but that I know is not.

There's a stimulus in the realization of the action of my own eyes, a moment when seeing becomes not the ordinary occurrence of everyday, everysecond life, but an active, for-the-moment motion. I believe that reflections in an extra pane of glass can remind us of this action of ours, can allow us to see something a little more clearly even while disrupting the clean color and edge of the image within the frame.

Every evening after dinner, we made it a ritual to watch the sun set into the mountains of the west (behind Longknife--the one that looks like Kennedy's profile--then behind Vulture as the summer turned to fall). Sunsets weren't unidirectional out there; to the south and east the colors were reflected in an alpen glow of pink and orange mountains and clouds. So while we'd watch an event that happened in the west, we were also caught in the midst of a much larger spectacle. In the experience of actively watching a sunset, I know that I found a medium to express the great contradiction I felt living on the Continental Divide: I can describe my place there only as at once part of the great view and at once so small and separate from it.

...as if I could do anything except just sit and stare--like one of his stuffed birds.

--Mother/Norman, *Psycho*

At the end of Alfred Hitchcock's film *Psycho*, the figure of Norman Bates (or maybe the figure of his mother--at this point, the distinction is fogged) hugs a blanket around him as he sits in his prison cell, staring, perfectly still except for the movements of his eyes, the expressions on his face, the slight movement of his head. He stares directly at the camera, the audience, while the phantom voice of Mother explains her trouble with her son ("he was always--bad"). The camera does not shift angles during this scene to relieve us of this penetrating gaze, but this also means that our viewer's gaze continues to focus on Norman; like Mother/Norman, we "sit and stare"; the cinematic screen acts as a window through which we see a reflection of our own viewing action.

As readers and viewers, our image remains absent from the novel we read or the film we watch, because the plane of the paper or the screen acts as a divider between the realm of the text and the realm of the reader. We can never see the camera that does the shooting, since it belongs neither to the scene of the film frame nor to the outside world of the viewer; instead, it has an invisible presence upon which nothing and everything rests; it is an unseen necessity, without which the image cannot be projected or transformed to film. But the filming of a view that appears free of the apparatus of the camera and the viewer can be accomplished only through

the technical achievement of the apparatus itself.¹ In taking a photograph, for example, I am always present as the person behind the camera, behind that already extra pane of glass, even if my camera and I do not throw a reflection or shadow on the text of the photograph. However, when watching *Psycho*, I am highly aware of my own viewing presence. I am interested in exploring how this awareness comes about--how do texts cause a reflection of me as viewer?

Along with *Psycho*, I want to examine Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*. I realize that this is rather an odd mix of genre and cultural class, but both works prompt in me a window-like reflection of my own role as reader and viewer because of self references to seeing through what I will call an extra pane of glass, but that can take the form of a painting or a peephole, a mirror or an alien voice. Both texts share the characteristic of displaying multiple viewpoints within their narrative structures; *To the Lighthouse* relies almost exclusively on the points of view established in the thoughts of several different characters. *Psycho* allows us to see both through the eyes of Marion and through the eyes of Norman--a dramatic contrast of subject and object of the gaze, of victim and murderer.

A shot/reverse shot sequence often works in theory to establish point of view in cinema. If a shot shows a view (the camera must not revolve more than 180° in order for this to work), the next shot reverses that view by 180° to show a figure looking. This inscribes that the view we are shown in the first shot belongs to the viewer pictured in its reverse shot. This denies the presence of the camera and of the audience because we can

¹Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, 3rd ed. (New York, Oxford University Press, 1985) 688.

never be imaged in that second shot.² Both *Psycho* and *To The Lighthouse* incorporate elements of this technique into the creation of multiple points of view, but I believe that there are moments in both works that defy suture by leaving the second shot open, by showing a view without a viewpoint from which to anchor it. In the final scenes of *Psycho*, for example, when the camera focuses on Norman--who stares back out of it and at whom we stare, the camera does not show the reverse shot of him--it does not show either a guard watching him or the blank wall of his cell. What this does, I think, is create the possibility for the incomplete shot/reverse shot sequence to reflect my own point of view.

²Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1983) 201-202.

Psycho: "She's always in her bra!"

They're probably watching me. Well, let them. Let them see what kind of a person I am....I hope they are watching. They'll see. They'll see and they'll know and they'll say: why she wouldn't even harm a fly.

--Norman/Mother,

Psycho

In an interview with François Truffaut, Alfred Hitchcock tells him: "Psycho has a very interesting construction and that game with the audience was fascinating. I was directing the viewers. You might say I was playing them, like an organ."³ The game Hitchcock refers to is that of leading audience members to expect something to happen only to surprise them in the end with unexpected twists. But I would like to suggest an idea supplementary to that of directing audience expectation: replete with references to seeing, the film creates a space where our viewing becomes a near-visible presence--so that we play an active part in the construction of the film and are directed like the actors on the screen; Hitchcock directs not only our expectations but our viewing bodies as well. At the very end of the film, when Mother/Norman looks directly at the camera and accuses a "they" of watching her/him, we can fill this referred-to role of "they" because we have been cued to do so.

When I watched *Psycho* in Oberlin for the first time, a friend who was watching it with me became impatient as Norman looked through a

³François Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984) 269.

peephole at an undressing Marion: "She's always in her bra!"---meaning that we as audience members have seen Marion in a state of undress twice before this peephole scene: once at the very opening of the film, when Marion is lying in bed with her lover, Sam Loomis, and again when Marion is in her own bedroom, preparing to leave Phoenix with the stolen \$40,000. What Norman sees through the concealed peephole is what we have been viewing in the open cinema.

Because we hold essentially the same view as Norman in this scene, we can identify with his action of looking through the peephole: we see Norman looking; then we, too, look through the peephole at the undressing woman Norman sees; then again the camera shifts to give us a view of Norman spying through the peephole. The shot in which we look through the peephole is masked so as to give the illusion of the rounded contours of the hole in the wall--this enhances the effect of seeing just what Norman sees--seeing through his eyes.

But this is something we have done before--looked into the private room of a half-dressed Marion--so the identification with Norman remains incomplete; his action of looking is our own action of viewing. Recognition of this action--"She's always in her bra!"--keeps us from fully identifying with Norman's view because ours comes first; our own viewing holds precedence over Norman's. In fact, however, when the camera once more shifts to let us view Norman looking through the peephole, he gets to see something withheld from us: the completely undressed Marion; when we again look through the peephole, she is already tying on her bathrobe.⁴ While we identify with Norman's action at

⁴Keith Cohen, "*Psycho* : The Suppression of Female Desire (and Its Return)," *Reading Narrative: Form, Ethics, Ideology*, ed. James Phelan (Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1989) 153.

this point, we still remain considerably distant from him because of what we have seen previous to this incident and because of what he sees that we do not. Nevertheless, our actions parallel each other: both of us share the action of looking--something we have been doing all along as movie viewers, but articulated in the masking of the peephole. This articulation brings us into interaction with the film narrative: we can no longer sit back in our seats and absorb what we have been shown: like Norman, we are peepers into the private rooms of this film: we have slipped under the window cracks, created our own peepholes in visible and invisible walls.

The peephole serves as a reflection or marker of our own viewing presence; Norman's actions mirror our own, and the masking of the frame so as to create the illusion of the peephole becomes a visual representation of a seeing apparatus--the medium through which we see: a hole in the wall, the camera lens, our own eye. Because the medium of sight is exposed, our voyeurism becomes an action imaged within the frame of the film screen. We cannot maintain a distance from the action of the film because that action is partly our own action; but we can also resist absorption by the film because reference to our own viewing presence denies total identification with Norman or Marion or Arbogast or Lila or Sam; our presence is at once necessary within the film frame and completely separate from it; rather than being absorbed by it or distanced from it, we interact with the film narrative.

The peephole reflects the instance of our seeing, but I would like to propose that it is just the first scene in a larger sequence that continues our interaction with the film. It first acts retrospectively: "She's always in her bra"--leading us back to the opening of the film where Marion is spending her lunch hour in bed with Sam, then to the scene of Marion's packing

before she leaves Phoenix. If we are not aware of our peeping presence prior to its visualization in the peephole scene--if we manage to view the first scenes of the movie from the distant darkness of the movie theater and to avoid confronting our own moral responsibility as viewers, voyeurs, witnesses, the scene of Norman's peeping catches us off guard. We cannot condemn his action without condemning our own; our judgement of Norman mixes with our judgement of ourselves. While we can locate the instant of Norman's peeping, the remembrance of the two other times we have looked at Marion-in-bra brings about the realization that we constantly peep: voyeurism is the action of the audience.

The scene of the peephole also acts upon events that follow it. After Marion's murder, we watch Norman clean Cabin One in order to cover up what his mother has done. As he closes the window and walks to the door, we follow his movements, the film frame foregrounded by the night table on which the money rests. The camera continues to shift its position as Norman nears the door so as to follow him while still keeping the money in view. In order to do this, it reveals something that is impossible for us to see if we are to believe in the composition of the room as earlier revealed in a differently angled shot and if we are to maintain faith in the solidity of walls: we see the back of the night table that should be pushed up against the wall. We have rendered invisible what Norman punctures with a peephole.

The camera positions itself (and therefore our gaze) at the point of Norman's peephole, but gives us a larger space to play with. We no longer have the contours of the peephole to remind us of our peeping, but because the earlier scene creates the visual presence of our gaze in the instant of Norman's peeping and also through retrospective parallels to other

instances of our seeing without the visual aid of masked contours, this second half of the peephole sequence images a gaze that comes from no point visible on the screen. Instead of viewing the scene from Norman's perspective--as might be expected, since he claims the only living gaze in the room, we view through an invisible presence located within the impossible space of a solid wall. Hitchcock supplies us with no reverse shot to reinforce the fiction of the solidity of the wall, to deny the presence of the camera or of the audience. Instead, this second half of the peephole sequence further breaks down the fictions established in the film prior to this point: that the world of the film is whole and solid, that there is no crossing in the levels of production, the film produced, and the levels of consumption. Our presence is invisible, but it is there. In answering the question: who sees the back of the night table, I can say only that I see the back of the night table.

When Marion Crane is murdered, we lose the viewpoint we have stood behind for most of the first half of the movie. The infamous shower scene abounds with images referring to seeing; the toilet, the shower head, the drain all position themselves within the film frame so as to form parts of the human eye. The drain finally dissolves into the picture of Marion's lifeless eye that no longer sees. After this close-up of the lost view, the camera tracks into the bedroom, focuses momentarily on the money lying on the night table, then moves again to the open window, through which Norman's voice is heard, confronting his mother and suspecting the horror of what she has done.

The tracking of the camera seems to be leading our view somewhere, searching for something to latch onto (we cannot stare too long at the dead, and the death of that view perhaps reflects the possibility of the loss of our

own view), so the loss of Marion's view does not leave us without a viewpoint from which to see: we always have our own. Cabin One is devoid of human life; it is in essence empty but for one thing: the gaze of the camera that allows our own gaze to penetrate the lifeless space.

Hitchcock--or the camera or the narrative--needs our gaze at this point. It is necessary for us to play a part that cannot be filled by any character on-screen at this point (there is no character on-screen at this point); we are the audience for Norman's confrontation with murdering "mother." Ironically, we must take up the position by the window that Marion holds only a few scenes before. Then, too, we are an audience for a confrontation between Norman and his mother, but the first time we do so under the auspices of Marion's listening--much as we take the position of the peephole for the first time by placing ourselves in Norman's position. Hitchcock needs us to be the listeners at this point because he needs an audience to witness Norman's horror at what his "mother" has done; we are the innocents (or not quite so innocents) to be tricked into pitying poor Norman Bates with a raving lunatic for a mother. Immediately after the murder, we cannot cut to a scene within the house, we cannot see that actual confrontation without razing the fictions that maintain the film's suspense; the meeting of Norman and Mother must be acknowledged only through an open window and distance that disguises what we see. Therefore, our view fills the emptiness of the cabin--just as the shower-eye continues to fill the bathroom with water.

When we view Marion through Norman's peephole, the sequence of shots follows a point of view pattern that would lead us to identify with Norman: we see Norman, we see what Norman sees, we see Norman. I have already mentioned the possibility of non-identification with him

because the peephole frames our own action as well as his--because part of his view is withheld from us, and also because the concealed peephole revealed calls into question the morality of our surreptitious gaze. Here, we view Norman through his own device, further establishing our separate existences, our differences: Norman is now on the other side of the wall, a figure to be looked at. Unlike Norman, we can see through walls without the help of a peephole. It serves to remind us of the circumstance of our viewing, but our viewing is a constant force despite the lack of peepholes. Now that Norman has penetrated the interior of the room and has become the object of our gaze and active subject within the film screen, we are still left looking at him from behind the wall, and I ask the question: when will we penetrate the interior and become subjects visible on the film screen (everyone else is doing it): when will we confront not only the visual representation of our gaze but the visual representation of ourselves?

The closest I find myself coming to that visual confrontation with my own image is when Lila searches the Bates house for Norman's mother. She enters Mrs. Bates' bedroom. Our gaze follows her, sweeps the room, notes its emptiness, its lack of human life, finally focuses on a jewelry box decorated by a pair of crossed bronze hands. Suddenly, we are startled by a movement in the room that seems to stand outside of Lila: her image has been doubled in the dressing table mirror and again doubled in a free standing mirror facing the dresser. We see three Lilas: Lila looking at the jewelry box, Lila's reflection in the dressing table mirror, and within this last image, the reflection of Lila's reflection in the free standing mirror. This last reflection doubles Lila herself, produces not just her mirror-image, but a double of her as we see her on screen--back to audience,

bending over the dresser.⁵ When Lila begins to stand up, the movement of this imaged figure appearing entirely independent of herself startles her. When we whirl around with her to see what it is, we do in fact encounter another figure--but this is only the image that is doubling Lila earlier--so that Lila actually faces herself--not just a reflection. This doubling of images has occurred throughout the film, but only here is the image actually confronted. Is the image Lila confronts not only an image of herself, but also a reflection of the audience and our viewing presence within the narrative of the film?

Psycho allows us to exist in another body, to claim a screen surrogate. The view denied us in Marion's and Arbogast's murder is the clear sight of mother's face, the sight granted only in the moment before death. When we are finally granted this view through Lila, we confront not the unknown visage but Norman Bates, whose figure we have already become familiar with--both as object and subject of our point of view. At the end of the film, however, the psychiatrist tells us that what we have seen is not Norman Bates, is not even his mother, but is some imbalanced synthesis of the two: what we see is the "mother half of Norman."⁶This uncertainty of what we see along with the doubling of images--we see two Normans reflected in mirror and window, two Marions, two Arbogasts, even two Sams--makes it possible for us to see ourselves disguised as Lila's reflection. After seeing the double images of the other characters--the triple image of Lila, as well as the sudden instant when she swings around, creating the dizzying effect of Lilas everywhere, I believe for a moment

⁵William Rothman, *Hitchcock--the Murderous Gaze* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982) 246-341.

⁶*Psycho*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Paramount, 1960.

that another presence enters the room--or rather that another presence is discovered within the room. After all, why should Lila have two reflections when everybody else has only one mirror image?

But if Lila acts as our surrogate in her investigation of the Bates' house, our gaze also penetrates the narrative without the help of a surrogate--in Cabin One after Marion's murder, in the prison cell with Norman/Mother, where no reverse shot anchors the view to any one pair of eyes. The confrontation with our viewing eye comes about through the combination of these situations: our view is first uncovered when we look through the peephole with Norman; we then take an active part as solitary witnesses to the events following Marion's murder; with Lila acting as our screen surrogate, we confront our reflection face to face; finally, our gaze outlasts that of our surrogate, and we become "subjects of speech" as well as "spoken subjects"⁷ because of our seeing--the "they" who watch Norman/mother at the end of the film.

Mother/Norman suspects that someone watches her--the someone she refers to as "they," and of course she is right, because we watch her from our seats in front of the screen--we watch her as if through one-way glass, except that it gets vaguely uncomfortable because she suspects that we watch her. In the context of him/her (a being of ambiguous gender at the moment) suspecting and hoping that we watch her, Mother/Norman claims that: "They'll see and they'll know and they'll say: why, she wouldn't even harm a fly."⁸ Seeing inspires a chain of active events: first knowing, then speaking. We hold a privileged position here; being able to listen to

⁷Silverman 194-201. The subject of speech refers to the characters on the screen; the spoken subject is the viewer. These form a triad with the speaking subject, the camera.

⁸*Psycho*.

Norman/Mother's thoughts, we think that maybe we should not be fooled by the apparent calm, especially when fooled is what we have been throughout this film.

When I first saw *Psycho*, I was thrilled when Norman throws the newspaper with its hidden forty thousand dollars into the trunk of Marion's car and then sinks the car in the swamp. Later, watching the film with friends who had never seen it before, I could barely contain my excitement while I watched their expectations aroused by the camera's focus on the newspaper as Norman cleans Cabin One, and I finally blurted out before the car disappears completely into the murk: "I love that Norman doesn't find the money!" A fellow *Psycho*-viewer who had verbally anticipated every action was stopped in his commentary by this turn of events, later saying: "It's pretty cool that the money sinks with the car." I experience pleasure at this divergence from expectation, in playing this game of Alfred Hitchcock's. After the first surprise, I want to see how the game is played--how expectations are created and where and why the narrative departs from them. My particular glee at the loss of the money comes from the sudden negation of the power attributed to it by society. I am disappointed when the car and money re-emerge from the swamp⁹ in the film's last image because the money can then regain its potency. Actually, I missed this cue the first two times I saw the movie; it never occurred to me that the money could force its way back into the narrative, and I find the ending insidious because of this, creepy.

Frankly--I like to be fooled. However, part of the pleasure of being fooled comes from the realization of the trickery going on--even in hindsight--so that I gain increased control over my sight, even if that

⁹Cohen 160.

control emerges from heightened uncertainty. *Psycho* challenges the accuracy of my vision, and it does so partly by placing me in the position of a first-hand witness of a fictitious scene. It calls attention to my own viewing presence and directs my view within the frame of the film. But what I see--or what I think I see--is twisted just like my expectations of the \$40,000: Norman does not confront Mother existing in a body separate from him; an old woman does not rush from Marion's motel room after stabbing her in the shower. I must re-examine just what it is that I have seen within the course of the movie, calling into question my own seeing process, my own reliability as a witness.

I can watch *Psycho* many times even though the thrill of expectations thwarted can no longer be my own source of pleasure. Instead, I continue to watch the film to answer the question--what is it that I see? Because of the attention paid to my own viewpoint and role within the film as viewer; I question not only the movement of each character, the reflections and shadows they cast, but also my own role in the viewing of the film, my own gaze, my own character--questions difficult to pin down, ever-changing.

To The Lighthouse , From a Train Window

But the stillness and the brightness of the day were as strange as the chaos and tumult of night, with the trees standing there, and the flowers standing there, looking before them, looking up, yet beholding nothing, eyeless, and so terrible.

--To The Lighthouse,

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The title of Virginia Woolf's novel *To The Lighthouse* creates the idea of movement--someone or something going to the Lighthouse, but it can also refer to a point of view--to the Lighthouse, James was a mere speck on his mother's lap. The second paragraph of the novel begins: "To her son these words conveyed an extraordinary joy"(3), giving us insight into what James thinks and experiences. We could just as easily read: To The Lighthouse, these words conveyed the happy expectation of visitors--except that I have difficulty thinking that an inanimate object could command a point of view; a point of view connotes a human gaze, a human consciousness with which to see and compose. However, the personification of the Lighthouse as a "silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye, that opened suddenly, and softly in the evening" (186) makes the idea of the Lighthouse's point of view a little easier to accept. And after all--why shouldn't the Lighthouse hold its own point of view in this novel that relies on a multiplicity of viewpoints to configure its narrative?

That the Lighthouse can be seen as a blinking eye that sees sets up a reversal of view and counterview, providing a framework within which much of the narrative technique of the novel can operate. What first interested me about studying this novel along with a film is the creation of cinematic shot/reverse shot sequences within the text. Because there is no definite distinction between the thought voices of one character and another, some kind of marker is needed to identify who thinks and sees: the easiest way to do this is to show the character-viewer by parenthetical insertion: "(James thought)", or by a viewpoint followed or preceded by a movement of the character who commands the gaze. We need visual reminders of the person seeing--so that when we see "Lily thought" printed on the page, we visualize Lily Briscoe because L-i-l-y is her signifier.

The fragmented multiplicity of viewpoints in the novel lends an interesting twist to the shot/reverse shot sequence of view and viewer. I am most interested in the example of Mrs. Ramsay sitting in the window with James: several people look at her from outside on the lawn, including William Bankes, Mr. Ramsay, Lily Briscoe. But while Mrs. Ramsay acts as an object for Lily's painting, she also becomes controlling subject of her own view. As readers, we travel through the open window and see the view controlled by opposite perspectives: to Lily, the window frames Mrs. Ramsay; to Mrs. Ramsay, the window frames the figures on the lawn. The window plays the double of the lens through which we view the text, and its reflective properties reverse the shot in such a way that we see both segments of the point of view shot at once. View and viewer become relative terms, then: like the Lighthouse, "nothing [is] simply one thing" (186); subject becomes object, object becomes subject.

Subject and object are confused, interchangeable. When Lily asks Andrew what his father writes about, he tells her: "Subject and object and the nature of reality"--in other words, "think of a kitchen table then, when you're not there"(23). Andrew assigns Lily an impossible task: that of visualizing something while denying her own presence, experiencing something without coming into contact with it. I think of my own role as reader here, wondering how my engagement with the text brings me in or distances me from it: is reading like thinking of a kitchen table when I'm not there? When we pick up a book to read, do we reconcile ourselves to a distance that allows us to conjure up images that stand completely separate from us--since we cannot witness the events and characters, do we take the account we are given as truth? Can we find in this divination of truth the very essence of reality? (Do we find reality, in fact, in fiction?)

The impossible task stands as follows: picture a kitchen table when you're not there. Lily sees, whenever she thinks of Mr. Ramsay's work, "a scrubbed kitchen table...a phantom kitchen table, one of those scrubbed board tables, grained and knotted, whose virtue seems to have been laid bare by years of muscular integrity" (23). She sees the table--straight before her or lodged in a tree; either way, she sees the table; it exists not separate from her, in a space where she is not, but only in places where she is. She has endowed the table with physical qualities--the grainy and knotted wood; in order to think of the kitchen table, she first must see it--see it certainly as it is projected from her own mind, but see it all the same. Andrew asks her to think of a kitchen table when she is not there; instead she manages to see a kitchen table when it is not there. Her process of trying to fathom what the nature of reality might be opposes the idea of grasping Mr. Ramsay's work: in order to think of that kitchen table, she

must see it, and in order to see it, she must picture it before her--the table cannot be thought of when she is not there.

As a reader, then, the text exists as I see it. I can think of it because it falls within the range of my vision; I cannot place myself at too great a distance from it, because it then becomes unseeable, unreachable. Likewise, if I allow myself to become absorbed by the text, I may not be able to see it clearly because it is too close and becomes unfocused. Both extremes trick my ability to see. Somewhere between the point at which I distance the text from me to the degree of making it unfathomable and the point at which I become absorbed by the text, I think I can find a place where I can interact with the text, find a place in my reading where I resist absorption but cross boundaries of distance.

What seems to keep me at a point where I can comprehend is vision itself. In looking at the words on the page or the images formed from those words, I can remain outside of the text even as my gaze travels to its interior. The distance maintained between me and the object of my gaze depends on my awareness of my own action of seeing, of the presence of my own point of view. This awareness hinders complete absorption because I envision my viewpoint standing between me and the text.

Awareness of our own view comes maybe from awareness of other points of view. This is one reason why *To The Lighthouse* seems like a good study of the viewing presence of the reader: the characters display a multiplicity of point of view, and we can see how they interact with one another--this might in turn reflect how we interact with the text. For example, the Ramsay children dislike Charles Tansley's point of view--rather a strange thing to dislike about a person. But--

when they talked about something interesting, people, music, history, anything, even said it was a fine evening so why not sit out of doors, then what they complained of about Charles Tansley was that until he had turned the whole thing round and made it somehow reflect himself and disparage them--he was not satisfied. (8)

Charles Tansley wishes to insert the importance of his view: he wants what he does not have--the confidence of a point of view all his own. He follows Mr. Ramsay, follows Mrs. Ramsay: while on a walk with Charles Tansley, Mrs. Ramsay tells him of her grandmother's friends, artists, who mix their own colors very carefully--she tells him this fact as they pass a group of artists whose colors are washed out, all yellows and pinks and greens and grays in imitation of Mr. Paunceforte, who had visited the island three years earlier.

So Mr. Tansley supposed she meant him to see that that man's picture was skimpy, was that what one said? The colours weren't solid? Was that what one said? Under the influence of that extraordinary emotion which had been growing all the walk, had begun in the garden when he had wanted to take her bag, had increased in the town when he had wanted to tell her everything about himself, he was coming to see himself, and everything he had ever known gone crooked a little. It was awfully strange. (13)

Charles Tansley thinks: he "supposed she meant him to see," as if he can see something based on what another wants him to see. As readers, we are in the position of choosing to see what someone else is pointing out to us; our view emerges from the multiplicity of viewpoints offered by the characters, and these views come from the vision of a writer. But even if it is a question of whether Mrs. Ramsay means Mr. Tansley to see the colors as skimpy, even if she tries to impose her own viewpoint onto his, this does not mean that he will see the painting according to Mrs. Ramsay's view. He questions whether or not she means him to see something one way, but he does not necessarily give into that influence. His awareness of this influence upon him might even deter its impact: it neither absorbs him nor keeps him at too great a distance for him to see. He experiences its pull while realizing the experience of the pull.

However, in the realization of the influence of Mrs. Ramsay's point of view, Charles Tansley sees something else--the reconfiguration of himself, his ideas, his life; everything goes crooked--not so straight and certain as before. Mrs. Ramsay might not change the way Charles Tansley looks at a painting, but still he stops and questions what he knows, how he sees things. He turns Mrs. Ramsay's comment about the painters around in his mind so as to reflect something about himself; he transfers the focus

from Mrs. Ramsay's view to his own, but in doing so, he questions the nature of his view--where it comes from, what shape it takes, what effect it has on the people around him.

I have been using the word "view" as a short form of "viewpoint" or "point of view," but in *To The Lighthouse*, it also signifies the physical view, the landscape, the masses framed by the seeing eye. View implies the simultaneous existence of these two uses for the word: if referring to a landscape, it signifies the physical elements as they have been arranged by the eye of a viewer who commands a viewpoint. Andrew's explanation of Mr. Ramsay's work--the kitchen table when you're not there--attempts to separate the view and the viewer, to image one without the presence of the other. It seeks to create that view that seems "to outlast by a million years (Lily thought) the gazer and to be communing already with a sky which beholds an earth entirely at rest" (20), but it can do so only through the gaze that the view seeks to outlast: so, for example, "Lily thought." Even as Lily thinks that the view outlasts the gazer, the writing on the page is interrupted by the parenthetical direction: "(Lily thought)." Even the idea of the endurance of a view separate from the presence of a viewer cannot be expressed without Lily seeing and thinking it. The elements that make up a view might outlast the gazer, but the view itself exists only as it is being seen.

After the first part of the novel ("The Window"), where each angle of the view--of many views, if fact--has been seen and told by characters claiming viewpoints, we enter part two: "Time Passes." Here, the narrative shifts dramatically. Where once we needed "fifty pairs of eyes to see with" (198), we are left eyeless, without a character's thoughts through which to see. Like the silence immediately following Marion Crane's

murder in *Psycho* , we are for a moment left to watch time pass in the empty house, alone; we lose all eyes with which to view the saucepan and the thistle--except for our own.

We encounter this loss of viewpoint suddenly--in abrupt notices set apart from the ebbing and flowing prose--notices that tell us of the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay, Andrew, Prue. Like Marion Crane, Mrs. Ramsay serves as a major object and subject of our vision, and when we lose her, we lose both a view and a viewpoint, left by ourselves to whirl with the wind that sweeps through the empty house, unravels the shawl , opens windows, closes doors. But if no pair of fictionalized eyes acts as our seeing surrogate within the text, how do we see, how do we deal with these empty rooms where:

Loveliness reigned and stillness, and together made the shape of loveliness itself, a form from which life had parted; solitary like a pool at evening, far distant, seen from a train window, vanishing so quickly that the pool, pale in the evening, is scarcely robbed of its solitude, though once seen. Loveliness and stillness clasped hands in the bedroom, and among the shrouded jugs and sheeted chairs even the prying of the wind, and the soft nose of the clammy sea airs, rubbing, shuffling, iterating, and reiterating their question--"will you fade? Will you perish?"--scarcely disturbed the peace, the indifference, the air of pure integrity, as if the question they asked scarcely needed that they should answer: we remain.
(129)

I am once again struck by the impossibility of this empty space--like the impossibility of thinking of the kitchen table when I am not there. I cannot fathom its emptiness because I am always there; my view fills the space. The eyelessness of the space is terrible because it recalls an unfathomable nothingness, the impossibility of vision, without which we

cannot read, we cannot see. As reader, I continue to perform the act of seeing alone what in "The Window" was performed always in the company of another viewpoint. Always necessary outside of the text, our presence finds a place here within the text itself, and references, reflections of my seeing presence lead me to become aware of its existence within the section. Being left alone, I have a greater responsibility to see; I am the witness of the passage of time. The consequence is that these rooms are never entirely empty because my gaze always fills them; I envision that solitude, that stillness.

The "loveliness and stillness" passage makes concessions to the ever-present view of the reader: the pool is "scarcely robbed of its solitude" because time passes so quickly that we see it as if from a train window, our view frames each shot only for an instant, then we cut to another scene. All the same, our gaze admonishes the still and lovely pool of the completeness of solitude; the stillness cannot be maintained because our view continually penetrates its glassy surface, reflects the presence of our viewing eye.

While we botch any attempt at the creation of an objective surface, a view of the nature of reality, we also dispel the eyeless terror of the trees and flowers by providing the seeing presence. In the space where life has been lost, we remain, living witnesses to the passage of time, to the change or stasis of views. Devoid of the fictional human gaze of the characters but not that of the audience, even the "Time Passes" section cannot support Lily's claim that "distant views seem to outlast...the gazer by a million years." Instead, it becomes my place of active seeing, the place where I can join the wind and the sea and know: I remain. Maybe running against the unceremonious loss of Mrs. Ramsay, Andrew, Prue, leads me to fight for

my own life here: I will see, I will fill these rooms because I want to remain. Time passing threatens; in any one of those brackets I can encounter a casual notice of my own death. (This is maybe a little paranoid--more in the realm of *Psycho* than in the breaking of waves against the island shore, but the desire to see comes from somewhere, maybe from the same desire Charles Tansley has when he turns everything around to reflect himself and disparage others.) The assertion of our own view distances us from the text even while we interact with it: if we become absorbed, we may have to face our own death; does fear, then, drive us to search for reflections of ourselves, places in the text where our presence becomes one that fills an empty space? By seeing, we can continue to remain.

By seeing we also allow for the view to remain--the literal view, formed by the arrangement and framing of mass and space--since without the action of my seeing, the framing and arrangement and the thinking of the view cannot function. The final section of *To The Lighthouse* ("The Lighthouse") brings about a completion of vision: Mr. Ramsay, James, and Cam arrive at the Lighthouse (and finally the shot of the lighthouse is reversed: now we can see the island from the same distance, see it as the blinking eye of the Lighthouse sees it), Lily finishes her painting, Virginia Woolf completes her novel, we bring to a close the process of our reading.

Lily controls the last written viewpoint:

She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw if clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision. (208-209)

The completion of Lily's picture brings to a tentative conclusion her anxiety over whether or not her painting will endure. She originally proposes the idea that "nothing stays; all changes, but not words, not paint" (279). Her painting can outlast its painter; words and paint will not fade, will not perish; they will endure, achieve an immortality unavailable to the mortal artist, the mortal writer. "Yet it would be hung in attics, she thought: it would be rolled up and flung under a sofa"(179)--not seen, bringing us back to the question: can a view outlast the gazer by a million years when view implies both the space and mass of its composition and the eyes that frame it? Lily tentatively thinks that words and paint can remain even without the eye to frame them, but returns to this question later, returns to the thought that her painting "would be hung in attics...; it would be destroyed"(208). If the picture is to be hung in attics where it will not be seen, if it is to be rolled up and stuffed under a sofa, then this questions the endurance and value of her work because it is kept out of sight, no seeing presence can act as a medium for its existence in a visual world--a world made of views and words and paint.

In her second evaluation of her painting, Lily not only confronts the possibility of her work not enduring because it will not be seen, but also its complete destruction. "But what did that matter? she asked herself...I have had my vision" (208-209). Suddenly it becomes not a question of endurance over time, but of completeness for an instant, bringing things back into the realm of human experience.

But as readers and viewers we are somehow discarded. We are the eyes that look at Lily's painting, that keep it from being rolled under a sofa or hung in an attic; likewise, we are the readers who read Virginia Woolf's words, allowing the novel to endure. When Lily achieves her

vision and recognizes that nothing else matters, she casts aside her worries of whether or not her painting will be seen; the secondary seeing presence diminishes in its importance since the view no longer needs to endure. My role as medium for the survival of the text suddenly disappears, and as Lily achieves her vision, I first ask myself: how do I matter?

I said that the secondary seeing presence diminishes in importance. I refer here to the reader as the viewer of Lily's painting, her vision. Lily is the primary viewer since she achieves the vision, just as Virginia Woolf is the primary viewer in her vision of the novel. After the first disappointment of exclusion from taking an active role in either of these visions--the novel or the painting, I recover from this negation of my importance in the understanding that I can achieve my own vision through my reading process--that in reading, I have created a work that comes out of my own vision but that maybe is evoked by the vision of the writer and the characters.

Rather than identify with Lily, my reading of the text enables me to identify with her action, to complete the vision of my reading as she makes her last brush stroke upon the canvas. I am aware of my own action of seeing, of my own point of view framing the novel and everything it contains because of reflections of this action within the narrative--because of the Time Passes section, where my gaze no longer operates under the guise of a surrogate, because of the realization that my gaze does not matter so long as it exists only to sustain the vision of another. The novel asserts a distance from the reader at the end when Lily asks what does it matter? What does it matter if I'm read? My reading of the novel matters to nothing but my own vision; and in locating that vision, I can enjoy the

completion of it with Lily, Mr. Ramsay, Virginia Woolf. Through interaction with the text I encounter my own view.

So Much Depends...On Distance

So much depends then, thought Lily Briscoe, looking at the sea which had scarcely a stain on it, which was so soft that the sails and the clouds seemed set in its blue, so much depends, she thought, upon distance: whether people are near us or far from us; for her feeling for Mr. Ramsay changed as he sailed further and further across the bay. It seemed to be elongated, stretched out; he seemed to become more and more remote. He and his children seemed to be swallowed up in that blue, that distance; but here, on the lawn, close at hand, Mr. Carmichael suddenly grunted.

--To The Lighthouse , 191

Like the image of me and my camera reflected in a car window, the reflection of my viewing presence onto the movie screen or into the pages of the novel depends on my looking at things at just the right angle, at finding the distance between absorption and dissociation where I can realize the activity of my viewing. I think there is something within both the narratives of *To The Lighthouse* and *Psycho* that makes for the easy location of my place of interaction with the texts, but even here the responsibility of finding this is left to me, the reader--a responsibility I am willing to handle because it affects nothing but my own vision. What I search for is the vantage point from which I can see best. In each successive reading and viewing, I can question anew what my position is in relation to the work. A few days ago, when someone asked me what I was writing my thesis on, and I replied with the abridged version: "*Psycho* and *To The Lighthouse*," he said: "So--you must be really sick of those by now!" I was startled for some reason--startled that this had not occurred to me--even more startled that I found the idea of reading Virginia Woolf's novel again or watching *Psycho* for the fifth appealing.

I have been working with these works to examine how things are seen and what I see when reading or viewing them, and in doing so, I examine different ways in which I read. It is an ongoing process; maybe this is why the works have not become tiresome to me. Every experience is a different one: for example, the last time I saw *Psycho*, I could laugh at the melodramatic lovers' language between Marion and Sam or at the characters' unpolished attempts at deception, but still experience the horror of the last image of the film: a skull superimposed on Norman's face as we fade from the jail to the swamp.

The difference in genre and cultural class between *To The Lighthouse* and *Psycho* affects how they are read. Virginia Woolf's novel might be considered high art--certainly she does not write for a popular mass. She attains a vision in writing that stands separate from the reader--for a moment I even feel like my presence is discarded, disregarded. Reading is a challenge because to receive any pleasure from it at all, I need to construct my own vision alongside that of Lily Briscoe and Virginia Woolf. (I create my own pleasure.) Alfred Hitchcock's films are also very artful, but they are intended as crowd pleasers as well; he is an icon of popular culture, the master of suspense. Virginia Woolf's novels require a careful reading in order to evince reader response, but Hitchcock's films could be appreciated for the dramatic effects just as much as for the art that goes into them. Everyone I have talked to has at least heard of *Psycho*. If they have not seen the movie themselves, they have heard the music and know of the shower murder--the screech of the violins mirroring the slashing of the knife: there is even a reference to it in *Wayne's World*.

Psycho makes a good model for a methodology of reading because of its popular appeal and because of how it thwarts expectations with the illusion of deceptive views--if not with actual deception. In questioning what we see within the film, we can then question how we come to see what we see. The insertion of our viewpoint within the text places it under the same scrutiny with which we view all of the other images. And maybe this is what Charles Tansley experiences when, "under the influence of that extraordinary emotion which had been growing all the walk,... he [comes] to see himself, and everything he [has] ever known [go] crooked a little" (13).

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Reading List

Roland Barthes: *The Pleasure of the Text*
Alfred Hitchcock: *The Birds*
Virginia Woolf: *The Waves*
Wolfgang Iser: *The Implied Reader*
Laura Mulvey: "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"