


11. The film’s attitude toward what Life magazine referred to as “the mystery of transference” deserves more comment than I can give it here. The film establishes a link between transference, counter-transference, and erotic love and suggests what later Hitchcock films make explicit—that such a transferential love is accompanied by strong impulses toward erotic domination and even violence. But it is crucial here that the analyst be female and the analysand male; violence and the will to dominate can be neutralized, read as signs of a negative transference only—as when Ingrid Bergman tells Gregory Peck, after he expresses irritation at her probings of his unconscious mind, “Darling, you’ll be angrier at me yet.”

12. I am arguing somewhat against the grain here, since Hitchcock himself is on record as seeing the psychoanalytic elements of the film as its least successful dimension—as not even a successful “MacGuffin.” To a certain extent, one cannot argue with him, or with critics like Thomas Hyde, who argues that the “psychoanalytic practice [in the film] is a vehicle for making an artistic statement; it is both MacGuffin and metaphor” (“The Moral Universe of Hitchcock’s Spellbound,” in A Hitchcock Reader, ed. Marshall Deutelbaum and Leland Poague [Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1966], 154). But what I find most compelling about the film is not so much the success or failure of the film’s use of psychoanalysis but the consequences of that adaptation within both the Hollywood cinema and American culture.

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**Hitchcock’s Washington Spectatorship, Ideology, and the “Homosexual Menace” in Strangers on a Train**

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A curious freemasonry exists among underground workers and sympathizers [of the Communist party]. They can identify each other (and be identified by their enemies) on casual meeting by the use of certain phrases, the names of certain friends, by certain enthusiasms and certain silences. It is reminiscent of nothing so much as the famous scene in Proust where the Baron de Charlus and the tailor Jupien suddenly recognize their common corruption.

—Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Vital Center* (1949)

Set in Washington, D.C., Alfred Hitchcock’s *Strangers on a Train* (1951) abounds with images of the federal government. In shot after shot, the dome of the Capitol building appears in the background brilliantly lit up, and the Jefferson Memorial provides the setting for a suspenseful encounter between the all-American hero, Guy Haines (Farley Granger), and the murderous villain, Bruno Anthony (Robert Walker). The function of these monumental backdrops is not readily apparent. Although national monuments often figure prominently in Hitchcock’s films, they usually have an obvious connection to the plot. In the climactic scene of *North by Northwest* (1959), for example, the American agent Eve Kandall (Eva Marie Saint) dangles perilously from Mount Rushmore. Her suspen-
sion from the monument translates into visual terms the cold-war conflict at the heart of the film: Mount Rushmore stands for the democratic principles at stake in the recovery of the microfilm stolen by the Communist spies. But the images of the federal government in Strangers on a Train bear no obvious relation to the plot. There are no Communist spies conspiring to overthrow the American government, only a psychopathic killer who tries to blackmail a champion tennis player into committing murder. Why, then, does the film abound with images that constantly remind the spectator that the film is set in the nation's capital?

In a cursory but suggestive reading of Strangers on a Train, Alain Marty provides a possible explanation for the film's constant reminders of its own setting. Although Marty does not specifically discuss the film's recurrent use of national monuments or the significance of its setting in the nation's capital, he links the film to the anti-Communist hysteria unleashed by the McCarthy hearings. He suggests that the film registers "the more or less unconscious preoccupations of public opinion in the 1950s." Stressing the subject's often unconscious engagement with the discursive practices that structure its relation to the world, he argues persuasively that the film encodes Hitchcock's own paranoia about Communist infiltration of the American government. But despite Marty's attempt tohistoricize the film by locating it in the cold-war politics of the 1950s, he never specifically engages the film's topographical referent, its setting. The film emerges from his reading as a kind of mythical allegory. He argues that the film tries to show that "American society must be purged from top (Bruno) to bottom (Miran) whatever the social cost" (124). Even the all-American Guy Haines must prove himself before he can assume his rightful place in the ruling class, for he undergoes a series of trials, "like a medieval knight" (121). Marty's reading, in other words, inadvertently reproduces the reductive categories of cold-war political discourse. It represents the cold war as a struggle between good and evil, heroes and villains.

Despite its hasty retreat to political allegory, however, Marty's Althusserian reading of Strangers on a Train represents a welcome departure from the rigid psychoanalytic approach to classical Hollywood cinema that has dominated Hitchcock criticism. This approach tends to ignore the historical specificity of male subjectivity, its construction in relation to historically specific institutions, discourses, and practices. Raymond Bellour, for example, in a series of textual analyses deeply indebted to Lacanian theories of the cinematic apparatus, has argued somewhat abstractly that Hitchcock's Oedipalized narratives constantly restage the subject's entry into the Symbolic order. He claims that because Hitchcock's films are constructed along an Oedipal trajectory, they insert the male spectator into a fixed, stable subject position. The hero's sadistic pleasure in the woman's fragmented body supposedly guarantees the coherence and totality of his own, thereby allowing him to return her look without fear of castration. Bellour also argues that these films restage the mirror phase as defined by Lacanian psychoanalytic theory as fluid and unstable. Moreover, their application of psychoanalysis to Hitchcock's films narrativize the female as well as the male Oedipal trajectory, thereby allowing for the limited expression of a specifically female desire.

Feminist film critics, then, have not so much rejected the model of filmic pleasure proposed by Lacanian theories of the cinematic apparatus as they have expanded it to include the production of an active and desiring female subject. For although they conceive of the process of identification as a sexually differentiated one, they follow Bellour's example in proposing a monolithic view of male subjectivity. They assume that the male spectator is not only heterosexual but unequivocally so, and they limit the possibility of occupying multiple identificatory positions to the female spectator. Consequently, they tend to see the male spectator's insertion into a fixed, stable heterosexual subject position as inevitable. But in stressing the fixity of the male spectator's identification with the hero, they overlook the polymorphous sexualities circulating through the filmic text. As I will show, an alternative reading of psychoanalytic theory suggests that we should regard the male spectator's identification with the hero of the classical text as fluid and unstable. Moreover, their application of psychoanalysis to Hitchcock's Oedipalized narratives seems circular. For Hitchcock's films have an ideological investment in ratifying a psychoanalytic understanding of male subjectivity. One of the ways in which Hitchcock's films try to contain the play of sexualities circulating through the cinematic apparatus is by narrativizing the male Oedipal trajectory. In identifying with the hero, the male spectator becomes complicit with the production of his own Oedipalized subjectivity. Obviously, Hitchcock's films must engage the male spectator libidinally if they are to ensure his submission to their discursive structure. The male spectator must first desire his own Oedipalization before he will consent to it. Yet by relying on the process of identification as their primary mode of address, Hitchcock's films threaten to disrupt their own ideological project.
Imported from psychoanalytic discourse, the concept of identification has remained largely unexamined in Lacanian film theory. Although psychoanalytically oriented film theorists emphasize the importance of identification in the construction of the male heterosexual subject, they ignore the concrete historical forces that condition it, and they oversimplify the role Freud assigned to it in the male Oedipal trajectory. Freud conceived of identification as a defense against the boy's homosexual object cathexis with the father. In The Ego and the Id, he defined identification as a melancholic structure that compensates the boy for his loss of the father as an object choice. Freud argues that the boy frequently adopts a 'feminine attitude' toward the father during the pre-Oedipal phase and fantasizes about taking the place of the mother. But in order for him to resolve the Oedipus complex, he must renounce these fantasies. Unless he represses his attachment to the father and fixes his affections on the mother, he will retain the polymorphous sexuality of the pre-Oedipal phase. He reconciles himself to this loss by incorporating the father into his ego, which reinforces his primary identification with the father. Freud explains that in assuming the features of the lost object, the ego 'is forcing itself, so to speak, upon the id as a love-object and is trying to make good the id's loss by saying: 'Look, you can love me too I am so like the object.'"

Insofar as this psychoanalytic model of identification clarifies the primary mode of address of classical Hollywood cinema and its codes, it suggests that rather than inserting the male spectator into a fixed, stable heterosexual subject position, Hitchcock's films return him to the polymorphous sexuality of the pre-Oedipal phase. For according to Freudian theory, the male spectator's identification with the hero of the classical text involves the repression of a potentially destabilizing homosexual object cathexis. He unconsciously desires the hero of the classical text, or else he would not identify with him. Identification acts as a defense against a homosexual object cathexis. The culturally sanctioned prohibition of homosexuality requires the male spectator to abandon his object relation to the hero. To compensate for this loss, he incorporates the hero into his ego. He does not desire the hero; he is the hero. But this does not mean that he wholly renounces his homosexual object choice. Rather, it continues to exist in his unconscious, where it becomes a potential obstacle to the formation of a fixed heterosexual identity. The melancholic structure of identification guarantees the preservation of the object relation to the hero in the unconscious. Thus, in addressing the male spectator as a subject, cinematic discourse establishes a homosexual object relation between him and the hero that it must then repress. As the primary mode of address of classical Hollywood cinema, identification restructures the male spectator's feminine attitude toward the father in the pre-Oedipal phase, thereby encouraging the formation of a polymorphous, rather than a fixed, heterosexual identity. Obviously, Hitchcock's films must limit the effects of this aspect of identification if they are to insert the male spectator into an Oedipalized subject position.

To show how Hitchcock's films contain the potentially disruptive effects of their own mode of address, I will follow Alain Marty's lead and situate Strangers on a Train in relation to cold-war politics. But whereas Marty links Strangers on a Train to the anti-Communist crusade, I will focus on the cold-war construction of the homosexual as a national-security risk. This shift in focus has several advantages. First, it furthers recent attempts to historicize the spectatorial subject. I will show that the spectator's subjective engagement with Hitchcock's film was determined by a multiplicity of discursive practices, political as well as medical, that defined homosexuality as pathological. Second, emphasizing the homophobic politics of the postwar period will clarify the paranoia about male heterosexuality encoded in the film. At the same time that it tries to insert the male spectator into an Oedipalized subject position, Strangers on a Train represents the achievement of a fixed heterosexual identity as virtually impossible. I will argue that this paranoia is directly related to cold-war fears that homosexuals were indistinguishable from heterosexuals and had infiltrated all levels of American society. Finally, locating the film in its cold-war context will shed more light on the heterosexual panic of the period. In particular, it will clarify the significance of the juridical construction of the homosexual as a security risk. Because this construction involved the appropriation of a medical model of same-sex eroticism, it resulted in a virtually unprecedented alliance between juridical and medical discourses. To counteract the pioneering attempts of gay men and women to define themselves as an oppressed minority with their own history and culture, the government appealed to medical evidence supposedly demonstrating that homosexuals and lesbians had no outward characteristics or physical traits that distinguished them from heterosexuals, but because this evidence acknowledged the resistance of sexuality to containment through representation, it called into question the fixity of male and female heterosexual identities. Thus, I will use Strangers on a Train to examine the relation between the politics of spectatorship and the crisis over national security. I want to show that in the cold-war era the construction of male and female subjectivity was conditioned by the identification of homosexuality and lesbianism as threats to the nation's security.

The Kinsey Reports and the Homosexualization of the American Male

On February 28, 1950, John Peurifoy, a State Department official, made a revelation that would not only intensify allegations that the employment practices of the Truman administration recklessly endangered national security but also precipitate a juridical crisis that threatened to undermine the government's power to regulate same-sex practices. Under sharp questioning by the Senate Appropriations Committee, Peurifoy disclosed that the State Department had re-
recently dismissed several employees on charges of homosexuality. Republican leaders, already engaged in a campaign to discredit the Truman administration over its national security policies, seized the opportunity to embarrass the president further. Exploiting Peurifoy's disclosure, they accused the president of tolerating homosexual employees in the federal government. Senator Joseph McCarthy charged that the State Department had reinstated a known homosexual despite the growing crisis over national security. Suddenly, homosexuals were said to pose as great a threat to the government as members of the Communist Party. When the chief officer of the District of Columbia vice squad testified before a Senate committee that thousands of "sexual deviates" were employed by the federal government and had been arrested for cruising in the city's parks, Senator Kenneth Wherry, the Republican floor leader, demanded a full-scale Senate investigation. How could thousands of "sexual deviates" with police records be employed by the government without the government knowing it?

It would be difficult to exaggerate the significance of the ensuing investigation undertaken by the Senate Appropriations Committee into same-sex behavior. To begin with, the discovery that there were "deviates" who could "pass" as heterosexuals, thereby escaping detection, led to a redefinition of homosexual and lesbian identities. The report issued by the Senate Appropriations Committee disputed the popular stereotypes of the effeminate homosexual and the masculine lesbian. Many of the legal and medical "experts" who testified before the committee claimed that there were "no outward characteristics or physical traits" that positively identified gay men and women. Thus, effeminate men or masculine women were not necessarily homosexual or lesbian. "The fact is that many male homosexuals are very masculine in their physical appearance and general demeanor, and many female homosexuals have every appearance of femininity in their outward behavior" (2-3). This testimony encouraged the medicalization of the juridical discourse on sex. For if the government could not identify homosexual and lesbian employees, how could it regulate their behavior? Moreover, even if it could identify them, how could it legally expel them when, except for their sexual orientation, they appeared "normal"? To support its claims that lesbians and gay men did indeed constitute a security risk, the committee appealed to a medical model of same-sex eroticism. It tried to show that homosexuals and lesbians were by definition emotionally unstable and should therefore "be considered as proper cases for medical and psychiatric treatment" (3). This meant that even those gay men and women who seemed "normal" should be expelled from the government. They were as emotionally unstable as more stereotypical homosexuals and lesbians and were therefore just as vulnerable to the "blandishments of the foreign espionage agent" (3). If the government could not expel "passing" lesbians and gay men on the basis of their behavior, it could do so on the basis of their psychological profile. Indeed, their very "normalcy" was a sign that they were disturbed.

How do we account for the emergence of gays and lesbians as security risks? Historians of American sexuality generally agree that Alfred Kinsey's reports on male and female sexuality, published in 1948 and 1953, respectively, forced Americans to reexamine the established norms of male and female sexual behavior.12 Widely discussed in the news media, Kinsey's reports contained startling findings that seemed to confirm psychoanalytic theories that stressed the instability of sexual identities. The incidence of same-sex behavior among the men and women interviewed for the reports was unexpectedly high. Among the men, for example, 50 percent admitted to being aroused by members of their own sex, 37 percent reported having had at least one postadolescent homosexual experience leading to orgasm, and 4 percent claimed to be exclusively homosexual. Perhaps the most startling of Kinsey's findings was that "persons with homosexual histories are to be found in every age group, in every social level, in every conceivable occupation, in cities and on farms, and in the most remote areas of the country," a finding that added new meaning to the patriotic phrase "from sea to shining sea."13 The high incidence of homosexuality led Kinsey to conclude that homosexual behavior was an "inherent physiological capacity" (659-60) that could not be suppressed and should therefore be tolerated.

Historians of American sexuality may be right in claiming that the Kinsey reports eventually undermined the restrictive norms of male and female behavior in postwar America, thereby making possible the sexual liberation movements of the 1960s, but their most immediate impact was to exacerbate the emergent heterosexual panic. Kinsey's findings that the sexual identities of most Americans varied during their lifetimes only reinforced fears that homosexuals and lesbians had infiltrated the government and threatened to subvert it from within. For if Kinsey was correct, if homosexuality and lesbianism did indeed constitute an "inherent physiological capacity" that could not be contained, then gay men and women would have little difficulty converting straight employees to their "perverted" practices. The knowledge that many "normal" men and women had once been so converted, even if they were not now engaging in same-sex practices, made this vulnerability to sexual conversion seem even more acute. The report of the Senate Appropriations Committee claimed that "one homosexual can pollute a Government office" (20). The continued employment of lesbians and gay men, in other words, threatened to result in a homosexualization of American society. The report cited legal and medical evidence supposedly showing that homosexuals and lesbians "will frequently attempt to entice normal individuals to engage in perverted practices. This is particularly true in the case of young and impressionable people who might come under the influence of a pervert" (4).

Kinsey's reports, then, inadvertently contributed to the growing juridical crisis over the politics of sexual practice. Confronted by the evidence of widespread homosexual and lesbian activity among "average" American men and women, the
government appealed to the psychiatric discourse on same-sex eroticism, lest Kinsey's findings encourage greater tolerance of homosexuals and lesbians. The Senate Appropriations Committee was especially determined to counteract the evidence suggesting that there was little to distinguish gay men and women from straights except for their sexual orientation. It accepted the finding that homosexuals could be masculine, but it continued to treat homosexuality as a form of gender inversion. The masculine homosexual emerged as particularly threatening. Dividing the male homosexual population according to the binaries that governed the production of gender, it claimed that the active gay man "exhibits no traces of femininity in his speech and or mannerisms which would disclose his homosexuality. This active type is almost exclusively attracted to the passive type of homosexual or to young men or boys who are not necessarily homosexual but who are effeminate in general appearance or behavior" (3). Thus, the committee continued to rely on homophobic stereotypes to categorize homosexual behavior. The effeminate gay man, whose behavior corresponded to those stereotypes, was supposedly more "normal" than the masculine gay man. The masculine gay man, on the other hand, could avoid detection. Because he was active rather than passive, his masculinity conflicted with his sexual orientation. In this way, the committee tried indirectly to recuperate Kinsey's findings for the continued medicalization of same-sex eroticism. It positioned lesbians and gay men who did not correspond to the stereotypes as even more threatening than those who did.

This is not to suggest that Kinsey's findings were solely responsible for the postwar crisis over the government employment of an indeterminate group of gay men and women who could pass. The emergence of politicized gay and lesbian communities in large urban areas also contributed to the construction of "the homosexual" and "the lesbian" as security risks. For it was in the postwar period that middle-class gay and lesbian professionals in cities such as Los Angeles and New York first began to define themselves as members of an oppressed minority. Rejecting the medicalization of same-sex behavior, these gay and lesbian professionals pioneered a minoritarian, or subcultural, model of same-sex eroticism. For them, gay men and women were not "sick" but different. They had a history and a culture that extended beyond the bars and bathhouses that had traditionally provided urban gay men and women with a sense of collective identity. This history and culture encompassed all aspects of their lives, including their careers. The pseudonymous Donald Webster Corey, for example, in The Homosexual in America (1951), argued that homosexuals and lesbians shared more than a common sexual identity. They were members of an oppressed minority whose rights had been systematically violated by the American government: "Our minority status is similar, in a variety of respects, to that of national, religious and other ethnic groups; in the denial of civil liberties; in the legal, extra-legal and quasi-legal discrimination; in the assignment of an inferior social position; in the exclusion from the mainstream of life and culture."14

The Mattachine Society, the first homosexual and lesbian rights group founded in the postwar period, similarly emphasized the common history of oppression uniting gay men and women. As former members of the Communist Party, the founders of the society—Henry Hay, Bob Hull, and Chuck Rowland—were committed to theorizing homosexual and lesbian oppression from a Marxist perspective. They felt that gay men and women who passed as middle-class heterosexual professionals were victims of false consciousness and did not realize that they were oppressed, despite their wealth and privilege. When the society began to recruit members in 1950, it established consciousness-raising groups that encouraged the participants to see themselves as members of an oppressed minority regardless of their status as professionals. Not surprisingly, Hay, Hull, and Rowland encountered significant opposition to their essentialist claims about distinct lesbian and gay identities. Even those members who were sympathetic to their claims hesitated to embrace their position. They worried that the attempt to define a distinct gay and lesbian culture would only isolate them further from mainstream American life. But the majority of newly recruited members simply rejected the idea that they were fundamentally different from heterosexuals. Although they agreed that they had certain interests in common with other homosexuals and lesbians, they insisted that the only thing that distinguished them from heterosexual professionals was their sexual orientation. After a protracted struggle with Hay, Hull, and Rowland, these members assumed leadership of the society and stated categorically that "the sex variant is no different from anyone else except in the object of his [sic] sexual expression."15

Historians of the homophile movement usually explain this struggle over how to define lesbianism and homosexuality within the Mattachine Society in terms of a "retreat to respectability." For these historians, the members of the Mattachine Society who rejected the founders' minoritarian claims wanted to be accepted into, rather than excluded from, mainstream American society, thus, they were unwilling to challenge existing social structures. Yet this explanation oversimplifies the resistance encountered by the founders. For the divisions within the society suggest that lesbian and gay professionals occupied a multiplicity of competing subject positions. The lawyers, doctors, and other professionals recruited by Hay, Hull, and Rowland resisted the argument that they were essentially different from heterosexuals with similar backgrounds because that argument failed to describe their own lived experience. Unless their behavior corresponded to the stereotype of the "fairy" or the "dyke," they could pass in straight America. Consequently, they did not experience the disjunction between their personal and professional lives as a contradiction. Thus, to claim that the rejection of a minoritarian model of same-sex eroticism in the 1950s constituted a form of false consciousness and/or denial is to minimize the extent to which the relation between gay men and women and their sexuality was overdetermined. The members who eventually gained control of the Mattachine Society had no interest in
radically challenging existing social structures, because those structures allowed them to practice their sexuality without seriously endangering their professional status.

The emergence of a minoritarian model of same-sex eroticism also left its mark on the report of the Senate Appropriations Committee. By invoking psychiatric categories, the committee tried to indirectly contain the attempts of middle-class gay men and women to define themselves as members of an oppressed minority. It insisted that homosexuality and lesbianism constituted aberrant psychological conditions. Because they suffered from an arrested sexual development, homosexuals and lesbians could supposedly be cured of their "perverted" practices. Citing medical evidence, the committee claimed that homosexuals and lesbians could be cured "if they [had] a genuine desire to be cured" (3). The committee defined gay men and women, in other words, as "sick" or recalcitrant heterosexuals who refused to grow up. Such a definition indirectly countered the argument that lesbians and gay men were systematically oppressed by society. If lesbians and gay men felt alienated from mainstream America, that was because they were maladjusted; their problems were personal rather than political and were best remedied in a doctor's office. Thus, the homophile movement's minoritarian claims emerged as another indication of just how "abnormal" gays and lesbians were. The medical model defined homosexuality and lesbianism as developmental disorders rather than as categories of identity similar to other categories of identity such as race, gender, and nationality.

In the postwar period, then, homosexuality and lesbianism became sites of extended ideological struggle among competing political interests. On the one hand, juridical discourse appropriated the medical model of same-sex eroticism to justify the government expulsion of lesbians and gay men; on the other hand, middle-class lesbians and gay men began to contest the pathologizing of same-sex practices and to define themselves as an oppressed minority. The problem with the first of these constructions was that it appropriated rather than disputed Kinsey's findings. To justify its claims that even gay men and women who appeared "normal" constituted a security risk, it invoked medical findings that all human sexuality is fluid and polymorphous. For this reason, it left heterosexuals in a vulnerable and embattled position. In assuming that many heterosexuals might succumb to the "blushings" of gay men and women, it encouraged heterosexual panic. The problem with the second of these constructions was that it assumed that it had a potential constituency in all lesbians and gay men. It failed to consider the overdetermination of gay and lesbian identities and simply took for granted that there was an automatic connection between an individual's sexuality and her/his politics. Many of the members recruited by the Mattachine Society proved just as susceptible to anti-Communist propaganda as more mainstream Americans and had no desire to theorize their own oppression from a Marxist perspective that seemed at odds with the nation's security interests. Rather than making a connection between the anti-Communism and homophobia sweeping the nation, these members threw their support behind the government's campaign to rid American society of Communist influence. They proposed requiring loyalty oaths and establishing a committee to investigate members suspected of Communist sympathies. These members saw themselves primarily as vulnerable middle-class professionals whose entitlement was threatened by the growing influence of the Communist Party. Their identities as members of an oppressed minority were secondary to their identities as patriotic Americans.

A question remains, however: Why would the government appeal to scientific findings that encouraged heterosexual panic? What did it gain by acknowledging the resistance of sexuality to containment through representation? The codification of lesbian and gay identities according to a medical model of same-sex eroticism might, after all, have reassured heterosexuals of the fundamental differences between them and passing lesbians and gay men. Such a model conceived of all gay men and women as sick, whether they appeared "normal" or not. But the government invoked scientific findings that posited the instability of all sexual identities, gay or straight. It wanted to justify the expulsion of gays and lesbians by claiming that they might pervert straight employees if they remained in the government. Thus, at the same time that the government claimed that gays and lesbians were fundamentally different from heterosexuals, it also argued that heterosexuals were vulnerable to sexual conversion. Yet it was precisely for this reason that the alliance between medical and juridical discourses provided a particularly effective mechanism of social control. For it allowed the government to do more than regulate the behavior of an indeterminate group of gays and lesbians. Historians generally agree that the postwar years were a period of almost unprecedented social and sexual upheaval. Returning soldiers often had difficulty readjusting to civilian life, and many women resented the pressure to return to the domestic sphere. Moreover, many homosexuals and lesbians came out for the first time during the war and, upon returning home, settled in urban centers where they participated in the gay and lesbian subcultures. The construction of gays and lesbians as security risks helped to contain these dramatic shifts in attitudes and behaviors. It not only politicized the sexual practices of an indeterminate group of gay men and women by linking them to the crisis over national security but also coerced heterosexuals into policing their own behavior. Suddenly, there was a connection between an individual's politics and her/his sexual identity. Membership in the Communist Party and other left-wing political organizations indicated that the individual was not only unpatriotic but potentially perverted as well. Thus, if an individual's sexual orientation could no longer be determined by her/his lack of conformity to the norms of male and female behavior, it could be by her/his politics.
Hitchcock and the Heterosexualization of Spectatorship

Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* participated in these attempts to contain the political and sexual upheavals of the postwar period through the deployment of homophobia. Based loosely on a Patricia Highsmith novel of the same name, it identified individual conformity to the political and sexual norms sanctioned by the national security state as an act of supreme patriotism. In Highsmith's blatantly homophobic novel, a fledgling architect, Guy Haines, befriends Charles Bruno, a spoiled mama's boy from Long Island, on a train while traveling from New York to Texas. Over drinks in the dining car, Guy tells Bruno that he is returning home to Texas to divorce his wife, Miriam, who is pregnant with another man's baby. When he expresses his fear that Miriam might refuse to grant him a divorce, thereby jeopardizing his first architectural commission, Bruno proposes exchanging murders. Bruno will murder Miriam, if Guy will murder Bruno's father. Throughout the scenes on the train, Guy becomes increasingly uncomfortable with Bruno's flirtatious behavior. When Bruno suggests that they spend a couple of days together in Santa Fe, Guy snaps: "Pick up somebody else." It is not until Bruno makes his murderous proposal, however, that Guy becomes truly alarmed by his familiarity. When he leaves Bruno's compartment, he regrets that he has left behind his volume of Plato. Highsmith's not-so-subtle clue that Guy is latently homosexual: "He didn't like the idea of its spending the night in Bruno's room, or of Bruno's touching it and opening it" (32). Guy rejects Bruno's proposal unequivocally, but Bruno ignores his protestations and kills Miriam when he discovers that she has indeed refused to give Guy a divorce. He then blackmails Guy into killing his father by threatening to implicate him in Miriam's murder.

Although Hitchcock's film retains the basic outline of Highsmith's novel, it makes several important changes. Rather than a fledgling architect, its Guy Haines is a champion tennis player who intends to enter politics after his final match at Forest Hills. His girlfriend, Ann (Ruth Roman), is not a wealthy socialite but the daughter of a powerful senator, and he resists Bruno's attempts to blackmail him into carrying out his part of their "bargain." But the film's most significant change is in translating the action from New York and Connecticut to Washington, D.C. The film's setting in the nation's capital casts the homosexual subplot in a wholly new light. The encounter between the strangers on the train has a political resonance lacking in the novel, for it narrativizes the "homosexual menace" as defined by contemporary juridical discourse. To begin with, it translates into visual terms the juridical crisis precipitated by the discovery that gays and lesbians could look and behave like heterosexuals. Hitchcock's Guy Haines certainly does not look homosexual. In his dark wool tweeds and V-neck sweater, he appears too clean-cut and all-American to threaten national security. Yet it is he who initiates the meeting with Bruno. He accidentally kicks Bruno while crossing his legs. Moreover, Hitchcock's scenarization of the encounter on the train immediately iden-
functions as a signifier of the instability of Guy's sexual identity. Originally a token of Ann's love for him, it now becomes a token of his love for Bruno. In the context of the encounter on the train, the A on the lighter is ambiguous. It stands not only for Ann but also for Bruno (whose last name in the film is Anthony). Thus the markings can be interpreted to mean that Guy would consider Miriam's murder a token of Bruno's love for him ("Anthony to Guy"). Miriam's death, after all, would enable Guy to marry Ann and achieve his political ambitions. This is certainly how Bruno interprets the markings on the lighter. After Guy leaves his compartment, Bruno examines the lighter before pocketing it and says, "Crisscross." Bruno's comment could of course merely refer to the crossed tennis rackets engraved on the lighter, but "crisscross" is also the term he uses to describe the exchange of murders. Bruno, then, has some justification for believing that Guy has agreed to the terms of his proposal. Yet Guy leaves the lighter in Bruno's compartment not so much to indicate his consent to the exchange of the murders as to redefine their relationship. As I have already suggested, the A is ambiguous. It stands for Ann as well as for Bruno, which makes it possible to interpret the markings on the lighter in a different way. Guy would accept Miriam's murder as a token of Bruno's love for him because it would normativize their relationship by triangulating it through Ann.31 By eliminating the obstacles to Guy and Ann's marriage, Bruno would in a sense be giving Ann to Guy ("A to G") as well as making her into a guy. Reduced to an object of exchange between the two men, Ann would become a substitute for Bruno. Guy uses the lighter, in other words, to redefine the terms of the exchange. He and Bruno will exchange Ann rather than the murders.

In this respect, the film goes even further than the national security state in attempting to police male same-sex behavior. The Senate Appropriations Committee distinguished sharply between "latent" and "overt" homosexuals. It limited its investigation to overt homosexuals, or homosexuals who openly engaged in same-sex practices, and ignored those who "knowingly or unknowingly have tendencies or inclinations toward homosexuality and other types of sex perversion, but who, by the exercise of self-restraint or for other reasons, do not indulge in overt acts of perversion" (2). It refused, in other words, to pathologize traditionally accepted forms of male homoeroticism such as those in which two men mediated their desire for each other through the exchange of a woman. By contrast, Hitchcock's film insists that homosexuality is homosexuality, whether it involves the exchange of a woman or not. Guy remains outside the law, despite his attempts to normativize his relationship with Bruno. In shot after shot, Guy's actions mimic Bruno's, thereby reducing him to Bruno's double. The crosscuts that link the two men in the film repeat formally the crisscross that links them in the plot. A shot of Bruno looking at his watch crosscuts to one of Guy looking at his. In the scene in which Bruno informs Guy that he has strangled Miriam, the composition of the shots visually expresses Guy's complicity with the murder. The camera shows...
him and Bruno standing next to each other behind the bars of a wrought-iron gate that casts its shadows across their bodies. Close-ups of his face as he listens in horror to Bruno’s description of Miriam’s death alternate with close-ups of Bruno talking excitedly. The shot/reverse shot structure of this sequence makes Guy and Bruno seem virtually interchangeable: Guy too belongs behind bars. Guy’s doubling of Bruno culminates in the scenes of Guy’s final tennis match at Forest Hills. Shots of Bruno frantically searching for Guy’s lighter, which he has accidentally dropped down a sewer, are crosscut with shots of Guy desperately trying to beat his opponent. In these scenes, Guy seems to have become Bruno. He is active rather than passive. His determination to win the match surprises the tennis announcer: Guy usually plays with a “watch-and-wait” strategy, but his desire to win has made him uncharacteristically “grim and determined.”

In representing Guy as Bruno’s double, Hitchcock encourages the spectator to interpret his behavior psychoanalytically. Guy’s doubling of Bruno recalls the mirror stage as defined by Lacanian psychoanalysis. According to Lacan, during the mirror stage, the subject exchanges a fragmented bodily image for a coherent, unified one when it recognizes its own image in a mirror or in another body (usually the mother’s). This exteriorization of the subject, its projection outward, enables the subject to conceive of the body as finite rather than as continuous with the mother, thereby establishing a boundary between inside and outside. The subject becomes an object that can be incorporated and mimicked. Thus, Guy’s doubling of Bruno is one of the preconditions of his entry into the Symbolic order. In mimicking Bruno’s actions, Guy achieves a unified and coherent identity. Guy must first project himself outward before he can master his transgressive desires. Recognizing himself in Bruno enables Guy to displace those desires onto him. He does not desire Miriam’s death—Bruno does, he does not desire Bruno—Bruno desires him. Moreover, Guy’s mimicking of Bruno shows that he has relinquished the polymorphous sexuality of the pre-Oedipal phase. Guy’s doubling of Bruno conforms to the Freudian model of identification described above. It indicates that he no longer desires Bruno but identifies with him. The culturally sanctioned prohibition of homosexuality forces Guy to renounce Bruno as an object choice, and he compensates for his loss by incorporating Bruno into his ego. He no longer adopts a “feminine attitude” toward Bruno but is determined to beat his opponent in the tennis match so that he can prevent Bruno from planting the lighter at the scene of the murder.

The film, then, follows the example of contemporary juridical discourse in privileging a psychoanalytic understanding of male subjectivity. It tries to show that in order for the male subject to achieve a fixed heterosexual identity, he must successfully negotiate the Oedipus complex. For if Guy must pass through the mirror stage before he can enter the Symbolic order, so too must he elide the threat of castration signified by Miriam and her transgressive sexuality. Mary Ann Doane has shown that glasses worn by women in classical Hollywood film indicate an active looking “or even simply the fact of seeing as opposed to being seen.” Doane stresses the epistemological rather than the sexual implications of such looking, but her analysis still seems applicable to Miriam, whose glasses signify plenitude rather than lack. Miriam represents the sexually “deviant” woman demonized by cold-war political discourse because she refuses to restrict her sexuality to the privatized space of the nuclear family. The subject of her own desire, she circulates freely among men. She returns the male gaze rather than submitting to it passively and refuses to function as an object of Guy’s desire and his alone. The scenes in which Bruno follows her at the amusement park are constructed in such a way as to excuse her murder. Because they are shot almost wholly from Bruno’s point of view, the spectator identifies with Bruno, who seems both attracted to and repelled by her. Although she has come to the park with two other men, she seems to want Bruno to pick her up. She constantly looks to see if he is still following her. When she buys an ice cream cone, she turns toward him and licks it suggestively, staring straight into the camera. In other words, she is “asking for it.” Because her sexuality is castrating, she deserves to die. We are meant to accept her death as a precondition for Guy’s entry into full masculinity as signified in the Symbolic order. Significantly, when Bruno tells Guy that he
strangled Miriam, he gives his glasses to him as though they are a kind of trophy or prize; in so doing, he returns her look to him. Her cracked glasses are the mark of her castration and thus guarantee Guy's totality and coherence. He can now return her look without fear of castration.

This does not mean that Guy achieves a fixed, stable heterosexual identity. In narrativizing the postwar crisis over the politics of sexual practice, Hitchcock follows the example of contemporary juridical discourse by representing all sexuality as polymorphous. Despite Guy's determination to prevent Bruno from planting the incriminating lighter at the murder scene, he continues to adopt a "feminine attitude" toward him. He never makes a choice between Ann or Bruno; rather, the choice is made for him. He continues to mimic Bruno even in the final shots. He pursues Bruno through the amusement park just as Bruno once pursued Miriam. Bruno also seems to control the action in these shots. He nearly overwhelms Guy during their struggle on the merry-go-round, and Guy retrieves the lighter only when the merry-go-round crushes Bruno to death. Thus, Bruno's death functions as a kind of deus-ex-machina conclusion to Guy's Oedipal journey. Bruno is a powerful figure who constantly threatens to seize control of the narrative. He is more charismatic than the all-American Guy, and his potentially destabilizing presence can be contained only by his violent expulsion from the government. Rather than Guy resolving his Oedipus complex, it is resolved for him. This becomes apparent in the final shot, where we see Guy and Ann sitting on a train. Guy's Oedipal journey seems to have come to an end, for he appears to have entered the Symbolic order. Ann is sitting in the place where Bruno sat when he proposed exchanging murders with Guy, and thus she seems to have replaced him as an object of Guy's desire. Yet when a priest leans over to ask Guy if he is Guy Haines the champion tennis player, Guy, about to reply yes, has second thoughts and quickly changes places. In concluding the film in this way, Hitchcock stresses the tenuousness of Guy's Oedipal resolution. Although Guy's Oedipal journey seems to have come to an end, he remains susceptible to, if not tormented by, the "homosexual menace." He cannot trust even a representative of the very institution that sanctions monogamous heterosexuality.

In this way, the film ratifies the report issued by the Senate Appropriations Committee. It shows that heterosexuals are indeed susceptible to sexual conversion. But whereas the report argued that the expulsion of lesbians and gay men from the government would counteract the "homosexual menace," the film questions whether the threatened homosexualization of American society can be prevented. Guy's relationship with Bruno is normativized only when Bruno is crushed to death by the merry-go-round. The crisis over the government employment of gays and lesbians appears to justify extreme measures. Miriam's murder and Bruno's death are both necessary to prevent Guy's homosexualization. In what is perhaps the film's most famous shot, we see Miriam's murder reflected in her own glasses, which have fallen to the ground. Here the camera reappropriates Miriam's look. The act of seeing belongs to the camera, not to her. As a woman she is meant to be seen rather than to see. But with this shot the film also implicates itself in the production of a female subject who is desired rather than desiring. In reappropriating Miriam's look, the film endorses her castration (and by implication the castration of all women who dare to resist confinement to the domestic sphere). As I have already noted, the film seems to suggest that the stability of American society depends on the female subject's restricting her sexuality to the privatized space of the nuclear family. The desiring female subject signifies plenitude rather than lack, thereby threatening the male subject with castration. She refuses to function as an accessory to his Oedipal trajectory. In other words, Hitchcock attributes the homosexual menace not so much to the gay men and women who avoided detection as to those heterosexual women who positioned themselves as subjects of desire. Miriam's unwillingness to occupy a passive position in relation to desire forces Guy to consent to Bruno's murderous proposal. Guy's inability to contain Miriam's desire within the domestic sphere signifies his castration. Thus, if the female subject persists in occupying an active position in relation to desire, she must be forcibly subjected to the binary logic of male heterosexual desire.

That the film does indeed attribute the crisis over national security to those heterosexual women who resisted returning to the domestic sphere is nowhere more apparent than in its representation of Ann's sister, Barbara (Patricia Hitchcock). Barbara bears a close physical resemblance to Miriam, which Bruno notices when he first meets her at one of Guy's tennis matches. Barbara's glasses remind him of Miriam, and he is momentarily transported to the murder scene. The camera cuts from a shot of Bruno looking at Barbara to a shot of her returning his gaze. A shot of the lighter then appears, superimposed over Barbara's image. But Barbara's resemblance to Miriam is more than physical, for, like Miriam, she positions herself as a desiring subject. Although she is not even remotely promiscuous, she occupies an active position in relation to desire, constantly flirting with the detective assigned to shadow Guy. Thus, she threatens to end up like Miriam (a woman she describes as a "tramp," implying that she deserved to die) and must be forcibly subjected to the binary structure of postwar gender relations. The similarities between her and Miriam become obvious even to her in the scene in which Bruno nearly strangles Mrs. Cunningham to death at Senator Morton's party. When Bruno realizes that Barbara is watching him, he becomes delirious and begins to strangle Mrs. Cunningham in earnest. Barbara's presence reminds him of the murder, and he imagines that he is strangling Miriam. Barbara feels as though Bruno were strangling her and becomes terrified. When Ann asks her what happened, she stammers, "His hands were on her neck, but he was strangling me. ... Ann, he was strangling me!" Thus, Barbara interprets Bruno's nearly fatal stran-
Ill Robert J. Corber

mosexual object cathexis between spectator and hero. The male spectator must
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rupt the discursive structure of classical Hollywood cinema. As we saw above, the
why would the film distrust the logic of its own specular regime? Apparently, the
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the spectator not realize that s/he is meant to see her/himself reflected in the
system of representation. The film must call attention to its own operations, lest
spectator) becomes visible. In this respect, the shot acknowledges the film's come
pleasures of the cinematic apparatus to the male heterosexual spectator. Now I
would like to argue that this moment of self-reflexivity calls attention to the
operations whereby the film tries to insert the spectator into a fixed, stable subject
position. The spectator does not see Miriam's murder directly. Her glasses act as
mirror in which her castration (and, by extension, the castration of the female
spectator) becomes visible. In this respect, the shot acknowledges the film's compi-
lity with the specular logic of the mirror stage as defined by Lacanian psycho-
analysts. The film structures the spectator's gaze according to a specific mode of
appréhension. In subjecting the spectator to this mode of apprehension, it restages
her/his entry into the Symbolic order. It provides the spectator with the categories
of seeing through which s/he becomes visible not only to her/himself but to other
spectators as well. In this way, the film ensures that the spectator will be satisfied
that s/he has been adequately reflected on the screen. The spectator's engagement
with the film virtually guarantees the production of Oedipalized male and female
subjects less vulnerable to the "homosexual menace." Because of the film's narra-
tization of the crisis over national security, the spectator submits to the specular
logic of its mode of address and recognizes her/himself reflected on the screen.
Like the characters with whom s/he identifies, the spectator is susceptible to the
homosexual menace and therefore willingly acquires her/his hetero-
sexualization, which becomes the ultimate patriarchic act.

But this moment of self-reflexivity also indicates a crisis in the film's own
system of representation. The film must call attention to its own operations, lest
the spectator not realize that s/he is meant to see her/himself reflected in the
characters on the screen. Moreover, the film must supplement its own operations
by invoking other discursive practices. To guarantee the spectator's hetero-
sexualization, it enlists the homophobic categories of cold-war political discourse. But
why would the film distrust the logic of its own specular regime? Apparently, the
proliferation of competing constructions of same-sex eroticism threatened to dis-
rupt the discursive structure of classical Hollywood cinema. As we saw above, the
process of identification involves the repression of a potentially destabilizing
homosexual object cathexis between spectator and hero. The male spectator must
first desire the hero before he can identify with him. The widespread paranoia
about male heterosexual identities in cold-war America rendered this aspect of
identification extremely problematic. By encouraging the male spectator to iden-
tify with the hero, the film threatened to reinforce his sexual instability.26 At-
ttempts to redefine gay men and women as members of an oppressed minority
only added to this crisis in cinematic representation. Constructed across a mul-
tiplicity of competing discourses, the spectator might reject the subject position
made available to her/him by the film. Thus, by invoking the juridical construction
of "the homosexual," the film tried to contain the spectator's political and sexual
indeterminacy. It appropriated the nationalistic discourses that constructed the
cold-war subject in order to promote the spectator's heterosexualization. Even gay
men and women committed to delegitimating the medicalization of same-sex erot-
icism had difficulty resisting appeals to their patriotism.

Notes
3. For feminist critiques of Bellour, see Jacqueline Rose, 'Paranoia and the Film Sys-
tem,' in Feminism and Film Theory, ed. Constance Penley (New York: Routledge, 1988), 57-
68, and Susan Lurie, "The Construction of the Castrated Woman in Psychoanalysis and
Difference,' in Penley, Feminism and Film Theory, 159-88.
4. Mary Ann Doane, The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 16. See also Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative
Cinema," in Penley, Feminism and Film Theory, 57-68, and her "Afterthoughts on Visual
Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by Dull in the Sun" in ibid., 69-79.
5. Teresa de Lauretis, Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana
University Press, 1984), 103-57.
7. There are some exceptions. For theories of male spectatorship that stress male
masochism, see D. N. Rodowick, The Difficulty of Difference, "Wild Angle 3 (1982): 4-
(1985): 185-203. See also Gaylyn Studlar, In the Realm of Pleasure (Urbana: University of
Illinois Press, 1988), and Kaja Silverman, "Masochism and Male Subjectivity," Camera Ob-
scura 17 (1988): 31-66. For a forceful feminist critique of these theories, see Modleski, The
Women Who Knew Too Much, 9-13. The problem with these theories, including Modleski's
critique of them, is that they restrict the male spectator's bisexuality to his masochistic
attachment to the mother during the pre-Oedipal phase, and they ignore his pre-Oedipal
attachment to the father, with its fantasies of replacing the mother. As a result, they repress the homoerotics of spectatorial pleasure. As I will show, an alternative reading of psychoanalytic theory suggests that the male spectator's identification with the hero involves the repression of a homosexual object cathexis that recalls his pre-Oedipal attachment to the father.

8. Insofar as the filmic text engages the male spectator libidinally, it can be said to function as a machinery for ideological investment that makes the spectator's insertion into the sex-gender system not only desirable but pleasurable. For a discussion of this aspect of textual practice in general, see Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 17–102. For a discussion of it as it relates specifically to classical Hollywood cinema, see Kaja Silverman, Male Subjectivity at the Margins (New York: Routledge, 1992), 52–121.


12. See D'Emilio and Freedman, Intimate Matters, 275–300.


14. Quoted in D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities, 33.

15. Quoted in ibid., 81.


21. Insofar as Bruno's relationship with his mother constitutes a form of "momism," Hitchcock's film indicates another possible dimension to the representations of momism in cold-war movies discussed by Michael Rogin in Ronald Reagan, The Movie. And Other Episodes of Political Demonology (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 236–71. The demonization of the mother in cold-war movies may also encode anxieties over the homosexual menace.


24. When I presented an earlier version of this chapter at Dartmouth College, a member of the audience informed me that the term "merry-go-round" was used in the 1950s to refer to the gay male subculture. If this is so, then the merry-go-round in the final scene provides another indication that Bruno is meant to represent the homosexual of postwar juridical discourse.

25. In this respect, Bruno is merely one of a long line of psychopathic gay men and women who die violently in Hollywood films. For a "necrology" of gay and lesbian characters who meet violent deaths in Hollywood films, see Russo, The Celluloid Closet, 347–49. Russo compares the psychopathic gay and lesbian killers who populated postwar Hollywood films to the stereotypical black characters played by Butterfly McQueen, Hattie McDaniel, and Stepin Fetchit in the 1930s and 1940s. But clearly more is involved here than the perpetuation of homophobic stereotypes. Films such as Strangers on a Train in which the gay or lesbian killer is more charismatic than the heroes and heroines are perhaps best understood as heterosexual paranoid fantasies about the instability of the sex-gender system.

26. Contributing to this potentially destabilizing aspect of identification was the disparity between Robert Walker's and Farley Granger's screen images. Granger was perhaps best known for his role in an earlier Hitchcock production, Rope (1948), in which he played David Kentley, Shaw Brandson's homosexual lover, and it seems likely that contemporary spectators would have seen a parallel between his role as Kentley and his role as Gay. Moreover, he seemed passive and ineffectual compared to the more charismatic Walker, whose performance won praise from critics. Hitchcock was apparently concerned about this. In his interview with François Truffaut, he commented: "I must say that I...wasn't too pleased with Farley Granger; he's a good actor, but I would have liked to see William Holden in the part because he's stronger. In this kind of story the stronger the hero, the more effective the situation" (François Truffaut, Hitchcock: The Definitive Study of Alfred Hitchcock by François Truffaut, rev. ed. [New York: Simon, 1983], 199).