Abstract
Cultural producers, including screenwriters and film directors, create fictional and imagined spaces as the locations – and sometimes subjects – of the stories they tell. Through the depiction of characters interacting with fictional spaces, storytellers illuminate the significance of spatial relationships in the real world. An examination of spaces in fictional narratives can therefore reveal a great deal about the spaces we inhabit in our everyday lives. One storyteller who has frequently used both natural and man-made spatial environments as catalysts for drama is the “Master of Suspense” himself, film director Alfred Hitchcock. By taking a close look at two Hitchcock films in which the built environment is especially significant, this article demonstrates the importance of architectural, geographic, and social spaces in the context of Hitchcock’s work. In particular, I consider the ways that these films draw on both physical and symbolic boundaries as a way of generating tension and enhancing suspense. The setting of *Rear Window* (1954) is inseparable from the film’s commentary on the physical and social divisions between public and private, while the setting of *Psycho* (1960) emphasizes and materializes the issues of duality that are central to the film. I argue that Hitchcock’s use of space – both the design of the sets and the way that he stages action within them – plays a crucial role in the development of suspense within both films. By drawing on societal anxieties about the tenuous nature of cultural boundaries and the dangers of crossing such boundaries, Hitchcock offers material expressions of existing fears in order to enhance the suspense within his narratives.

Introduction
The opening sequence of Alfred Hitchcock’s 1954 film *Rear Window* begins with a static shot of a large window divided into three panes, each of which is covered by a lowered bamboo shade. As the film’s opening credits roll over top of this image, the three shades are slowly raised one at a time from left to right, revealing the apartment courtyard that lies beyond the window. At the conclusion of the credits, the camera pushes forward to the edge of the window sill, effectively turning what had been a background (the courtyard) into the primary subject of the shot. This is followed by a series of shots, some of them pans and others static, which survey the space of the courtyard and emphasize particular details within it, including the various apartments whose rear windows overlook the courtyard and some of the people who inhabit the space. While these opening images may initially seem like filler material for a credit sequence or a simple establishment of the location that will provide a backdrop for the film, they actually introduce spatial arrangements and relationships that are crucial to the development of the narrative.

Not all films provide such a detailed survey of their settings, but the relationship between cinema and space is always significant, and is, in fact, quite complex. Within the realm of cinema, space can refer to the arrangement of people, objects, and other images within the frame of a given shot or sequence. This is visual space that is created collaboratively by a film’s director, cinematographer, and production designer, and interpreted by film scholars as the mise-en-scène. But scholars from a variety of fields, including art, architecture, and geography, in addition to film and media studies, have demonstrated that the relationship between cinema and space has many more dimensions worth exploring. For example, many have examined the relationships between fictional, on-screen spaces and their real world off-screen counterparts in an attempt to better understand how each one reflects and influences the other (see, for example, collections edited by Stuart Aitken and Leo Zonn; Tim Cresswell and Deborah Dixon; and
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Martin Lefebvre). Pamela Wojcik, Merrill Schleier, and Steve Macek have all argued that the cinematic use of particular urban spaces and buildings (like apartments, housing projects, and skyscrapers) can reproduce and/or challenge dominant values and ideologies. Moving away from the two-dimensional narrative spaces projected on the screen to the three-dimensional spaces that house those screens, Giuliana Bruno has argued for an exploration of the role that viewing environments, like movie theaters, have on viewers’ interactions with the films they see (42-53). These examples are only a small sample of the growing interdisciplinary body of work that explores cinema and space, but they suggest the range of questions being asked about this intersection of concepts.

While scholars and critics generally analyze the complexities of cinematic space after a film is completed and available to audiences, filmmakers must engage with and work through spatial issues throughout the creative process of producing a film. One filmmaker who has frequently demonstrated a clear understanding of the significance of on-screen space and its ability to serve as a catalyst for drama is the “Master of Suspense” himself, Alfred Hitchcock. By taking a close look at two Hitchcock films in which the built environment is especially significant, this article demonstrates the importance of architectural, geographic, and social spaces in the context of Hitchcock’s work. In particular, I consider the ways that these films draw on both physical and symbolic boundaries as a way of generating tension and enhancing suspense. The setting of the aforementioned Rear Window is inseparable from the film’s commentary on the physical and social divisions between public and private. In Psycho (1960), the setting emphasizes and materializes the issues of duality that are central to the film. I argue that Hitchcock’s use of space – both the design of the sets and the way that he stages action within them – plays a crucial role in the development of suspense within both films. By drawing on societal anxieties about the tenuous nature of cultural boundaries and the dangers of crossing such boundaries, Hitchcock offers material expressions of existing fears in order to enhance the suspense within his narratives.

Suspense, Surprise, Curiosity, and Anxiety

The concept of suspense is central to the majority of Hitchcock’s films, and it should be distinguished from two other narrative structures: surprise and curiosity. Hitchcock himself has famously differentiated between suspense and surprise, noting that “you have suspense when you let the audience play God” (“Let ‘Em Play God” 113). He suggests that if the audience is aware of important details that characters are not aware of, they will become more involved in the story, “because they know what fate is facing the poor actors” (“Let ‘Em Play God” 113). Surprise, according to Hitchcock, occurs when an event is completely unexpected and catches the audience off guard. These are both distinguishable from curiosity structures, which Deborah Knight and George McKnight describe as “backward-looking, since what motivates plot action is the discovery of something that has already taken place” (107). Mysteries and whodunits, which hide important information from characters and the audience, fit this structure. Some texts, including Rear Window and Psycho draw on elements of all three structures, and the different structures often help to reinforce one another.

The precise elements that create suspense are not always clear-cut. While Hitchcock has argued that “In the usual form of suspense it is indispensable that the public be made perfectly aware of all of the facts involved,” (quoted in Truffaut 72) others have clarified this by pointing out one element that remains unknown to the audience – the outcome. Knight and McKnight, for example, argue that, “Suspense relies upon the audience’s strong sense of uncertainty about how events will play out” (108). Others have suggested that suspense is built upon the audience actively engaging with a story by establishing their own expectations or trying to anticipate outcomes based on the information provided in the narrative (see Tan and Diteweg 149; Wulf 1).

Uncertainty, anticipation, and expectation can be intensified by drawing them out. Tan and Diteweg note that suspense is often, therefore, equated with delaying narrative closure for a story or a particular scene (150). As I discuss below, in both Psycho and Rear Window, Hitchcock often relies on spatial arrangements to achieve this delay, thus intensifying the suspense. Another way that Hitchcock enhances suspense is by connecting his stories to anxieties that already exist in the audience. Hitchcock once said, “I really feel that suspense has to do largely with the audience’s own desires or wishes” (“Lecture at
Columbia University” 272), suggesting that what the audience brings with them to a film is potentially as important as what the filmmaker provides. Following Christopher Morris’ suggestion that one might substitute “anxiety” for “desires or wishes” in the above passage (40), I would argue that when a particular story or sequence resonates with pre-existing anxieties in the audience, the level of discomfort and unease increases, amplifying the effect of the suspense generated within the story/sequence itself. In both Rear Window and Psycho, Hitchcock sets his stories in spaces that reflect and/or generate feelings of anxiety, thus establishing a foundation of unease upon which he builds narrative structures of curiosity, surprise, and suspense.

**Setting the Scene**

Rear Window tells the story of L.B. Jefferies, aka Jeff (Jimmy Stewart), a professional photographer confined to a wheelchair while recovering from a broken leg. During his recovery he spends much of his time gazing out the rear window of his apartment, watching the goings on of those who live near him. When he begins to suspect that one of his neighbors, Mr. Thorwald (Raymond Burr) has murdered his wife, he enlists the help of his girlfriend Lisa (Grace Kelly) and his nurse Stella (Thelma Ritter) in an attempt to get to the bottom of things. Probably the most famous of Hitchcock’s single-set films, Rear Window takes place entirely in a group of apartments all overlooking a shared courtyard. The camera is almost always positioned in the apartment of the film’s hero, Jeff, which offers a view into many of the apartments around the courtyard. The fact that the entire film is limited to a single complex set makes that set particularly important within the context of the film. It is a driving force in the development of the story, allowing the narrative to unfold the way it does, while reflecting and visualizing some of the themes of the film.

In Psycho, a young woman named Marion (Janet Leigh) is frustrated by the direction of her life and, when her boss asks her to take $40,000 to the bank for deposit, she sees an opportunity to turn her life around. She packs a bag and heads out of town, taking the money with her as she goes to be with her boyfriend, Sam (John Gavin). Tired from a long drive and caught in a rain storm, she pulls into the Bates Motel to spend the night. After she is murdered in the shower by the motel manager, Norman (Anthony Perkins), Sam and Marion’s sister Lila (Vera Miles) search for clues, eventually confronting Norman and discovering the truth. While the famous shower scene may stand out as the most shocking and memorable moment in the film, there is another element that has taken on iconic status: Norman Bates’ home and its companion, the Bates Motel, which continue to be popular attractions on the tour of Universal Studios. The extended life that these structures have had outside the film is partially a reflection of the important role that they play within the film. Perched on a hilltop, the Bates home overlooks the Bates Motel, which sits next to the road at the base of the hill. The ominous looking home rises up vertically above its surroundings, while the plain looking motel stretches out horizontally, as if reaching out to travelers on the road. Together these buildings make up the primary setting for the second two-thirds of the film, and are the location of the film’s most important narrative developments.

The significance of these two sets goes beyond their narrative prominence and creative design. Both sets draw on social anxieties that were particularly prominent in America during the era of the films’ releases, helping to establish a sense of discomfort and unease in preparation for the suspense narratives about to unfold. Rear Window was released in 1954, while Psycho premiered in 1960. During this time, the country was dealing with the impact of the post-World War II suburban boom. The exodus of large numbers of families to the outskirts of cities, aided by increased auto-mobility and the ever-expanding highway system, helped contribute to a general movement away from traditional urban centers, creating a tension between these two types of spaces.

In his analysis of urban modernity and film noir, Edward Dimendberg builds on ideas from Henri Lefebvre and Frank Lloyd Wright to discuss the differences between centripetal and centrifugal spaces, which Dimendberg describes as “tendencies toward concentration and dispersal,” respectively (18). According to Dimendberg, both of these tendencies were accompanied by particular anxieties in mid-20th century America. “Anxieties provoked by centrifugal space hinge upon temporality and the uncertainty produced by a spatial environment increasingly devoid of landmarks and centers and often likely to seem
permanently in motion” (172). Marion’s journey away from Phoenix to the Bates Motel via a barren ribbon of highway seems to place her in centrifugal space, and invites the accompanying anxieties described by Dimendberg. In stark contrast to these anxieties are the fears associated with centripetal space. Dimendberg describes them as “the agoraphobic sensation of being overwhelmed by space, fears of constriction, or the fear of losing one’s way in the metropolis…” (172). While the isolated highway and forgotten motel of *Psycho* may represent centrifugal space, the tightly packed buildings of *Rear Window*’s Greenwich Village fall into the category of centripetal space.

Increasing the tension even more is the fact that the films’ environments reflect many of the characteristics that Michel Foucault attributes to heterotopias. Discussing examples such as hospitals, cemeteries, churches, and brothels, Foucault suggests that heterotopias are out-of-the-ordinary spaces that allow us to better understand our society as a whole. He says that in these spaces, “all the real arrangements…that can be found within society are at one and the same time represented, challenged and overturned…” (“Other Spaces” 12). Heterotopias are “in rapport in some way with [other spaces], and yet contradict them” (“Other Spaces” 11). As with any other roadside accommodation, the Bates Motel brings together people from different locations and walks of life – people who would not share space in ordinary circumstances – and places them under a single roof for the night. Apartments are normally seen as private, domestic spaces, and thus excluded from Foucault’s definition; the space of *Rear Window*, however, is shared and linked by the courtyard. The private apartments become semi-public, and together they create a unified space that is a conglomeration of very different individual homes. Viewed as a single space, the courtyard and apartments of *Rear Window* take on heterotopic characteristics.

The heterotopic nature of these spaces supports the development of suspense in the films because of the tension that is built into them. Their blend of the familiar and the unfamiliar makes them spaces that characters and viewers find simultaneously recognizable and foreign. Foucault argues that “Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that isolates them and makes them penetrable at one and the same time” (“Other Spaces” 16). The closed isolation creates a sense of claustrophobia while the penetrable openness creates a sense of vulnerability. Heterotopias also tend to blur the boundaries and categories of society. Foucault says that heterotopias are “disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that” (*Order* xviii). Things are brought together in unusual ways, forcing us to question the naturalness of their habitual separation (for example, the co-mingling of the living and the dead in a cemetery). The tension associated with heterotopic spaces lays the foundation for the suspenseful stories that will develop within these spaces.

**Boundaries, Physical and Symbolic**

Hitchcock builds on the tensions inherent to the settings of *Rear Window* and *Psycho* by exploring the physical and symbolic boundaries that exist within those spaces, ratcheting the tension up another notch. Boundaries are important to many people on many scales within our culture. Physical and visible boundaries are key to the work of those who design and build houses, plan cities, and draw maps, among others. But as many scholars have pointed out, boundaries are not always or merely physical. Deborah Pellow, for example, stresses that even in the absence of physical markers, “boundaries at the conceptual level – attitudes, beliefs, symbols” can play an important role in establishing relationships between individuals and helping us make sense of the world (3). Social boundaries help establish categories by which people come to know their own identities and those of others. These socially constructed categories help people adapt to the ambiguities of the world around them and respond to new situations, making such boundaries and categories a necessary part of modern society (Cloke and Johnston 1-2; Perin 4).

Although the establishment of social boundaries may provide us with a superficial sense of comfort by giving apparent order to an otherwise chaotic world, Foucault argues that this sense of order is potentially misleading. In *The Order of Things* he describes order as “that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language” (xx). In other words, order and the boundaries that seem to create it are social constructions, which means that they are far less stable than they appear. They can often be crossed or shifted with relative ease, and as cultural anthropologists and
other scholars have pointed out, the crossing of boundaries is regularly a source of anxiety. For instance, Mary Douglas notes that people or things that unacceptably cross cultural boundaries are viewed as socially polluting, and cultural mores act to “punish a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined or joining of that which should be separate” (136). The state of liminality, of being in transition from one side of a boundary to another, is also seen as dangerous. Victor Turner notes that “from the …viewpoint of those concerned with the maintenance of ‘structure,’ all sustained manifestations of [liminality] must appear as dangerous and anarchical, and have to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions” (109). Because liminality challenges the existence of discrete categories, it is unsettling for those who want to preserve such distinctions.

Contemporary society is regulated by boundaries of all kinds, and when those boundaries are crossed, people become uncomfortable. Their sense of the world is disturbed if things do not remain where they are supposed to be within socially accepted guidelines. Hitchcock draws on society’s existing anxieties about boundaries, their permeability and instability. In 
\textit{Rear Window} \text{ and } \textit{Psycho} he presents physical spaces that give material presence to some of the social and cultural boundaries existing within our culture. By deliberately blurring and crossing these boundaries, Hitchcock puts these anxieties to work in the service of his films.

\textbf{Public and Private Space in \textit{Rear Window}}

\textit{Rear Window} is set within a city that exemplifies Dimendberg’s notion of centripetal space – New York City. A model of the modern metropolis, New York demonstrates the “tendency toward concentration” (Dimendberg 18) through its history of drawing individuals and businesses from around the country and around the world, turning it into a population center and hub of business, art, and culture. As Dimendberg suggests, centripetal spaces such as New York bring with them anxieties about being overwhelmed by the city, lost in the shuffle of humanity, and alienated from society despite being surrounded by people. The open courtyard behind Jeff’s Greenwich Village apartment can be viewed as a microcosm of the city, and Jeff finds himself surrounded by people that he knows only by sight, but not through conversation or personal interaction. This tension between physical proximity and social distance sets an uneasy tone from the beginning of the narrative, and draws attention to what will become a central concern of the film – the distinction between public and private.

Although each individual apartment in the film is established as a private space, the apartments all share the semi-public courtyard situated between them. This courtyard space is semi-public rather than fully public because it is surrounded on all four sides by apartment buildings, thus keeping it out of the view of passersby. There is an alley situated between two of the buildings, and looking through this alley from Jeff’s apartment, one can see a street busy with cars, pedestrians, and commercial establishments. This is clearly marked as a public street and helps to establish the courtyard as something in between the two extremes, a liminal – and, thus, as Victor Turner argues, dangerous – space sharing characteristics of both public and private. It is also heterotopic in nature, given that it brings together social categories and concepts that are usual kept separate. In addition to joining the broad categories of public and private, the courtyard displays different architectural styles from various periods, and the people visible from Jeff’s window (other tenants, delivery people, passing strangers) demonstrate the mix of temporary and permanent inhabitants who make the space primarily domestic, but occasionally commercial (Wojcik 51). While the space is mostly closed off, it does open out to the street in one corner, and the apartments open out into the courtyard by way of windows, doors, balconies, and fire escapes, creating the heterotopic “system of opening and closing” (Foucault, “Other Spaces,” 16), further eroding the apparent distinction between public and private.

As a general rule, privacy is highly valued in contemporary society. Private space is seen by many as a retreat from the world and a place where they can let down their guard and be themselves. As Hannah Arendt notes, “the four walls of one’s private property offer the only reliable hiding place from the common public world, not only from everything that goes on in it but also from its very publicity, from being seen and being heard” (71). Because of the value people place on privacy, they like to imagine a
clear distinction between that which is public and that which is private, and people tend to fear the invasion of their privacy.

*Rear Window* asks the audience to identify with the perpetrator of privacy invasion, which is initially an uncomfortable stance. At the time of the film’s release, fears of privacy invasion were heightened because of the Cold War. Concerned citizens were encouraged by the government to report any signs of ‘un-American activity,’ which led to anxieties about constant surveillance, as one never knew who might be watching or listening. As the film progresses and the audience learns that the protagonist’s invasion of someone else’s privacy may help catch a criminal and solve a crime, the surveillance is made to seem justifiable. But this does not negate the anxieties about privacy and surveillance that are mobilized by the design of the set. These anxieties create an underlying tension that runs throughout the film, verbalized by Stella when she asks Jeff, “What are you gonna do if one of them catches you?” The built space that allows Jeff to watch his neighbors also makes him visually vulnerable to the gazes of others, reminding the audience of the implications of privacy invasion.

The confusion over the public/private divide in *Rear Window* is created in part by the fact that it is the backs of the apartment buildings that face each other and share the courtyard. As Craig Whitaker points out, most architectural structures are designed with a distinct front and back. The front is the side meant to face the world. It is often the site of the most elaborate architectural decoration and acts as the building’s public face. The back of the building usually overlooks a parking lot, driveway, alley, or back yard. The back sides of buildings are often where trash is collected, deliveries are made, and vehicles are parked. In domestic spaces, salesmen and mail carriers come to the front door, while close friends and relatives tend to use the back door. Extending beyond the building, the front yard is the place of lemonade stands and block parties. The back yard, on the other hand, is the location of intimate family cookouts and secluded tree houses. On the whole, particularly in domestic spaces, the back door/back yard is the private counterpart of the more public front door/front yard. People tend to be more protective of their back yards, and in turn feel uneasy about invading someone else’s back yard. According to Whitaker, “Because one’s own back yard is private, scrutinizing the neighbors too closely in their back yard is regarded as an invasion of privacy” (49). The very set-up of *Rear Window* plays on a discomfort with this invasion, as it essentially forces the viewer to invade the privacy of Jeff’s neighbors.

Again, the arrangement of buildings in *Rear Window* brings together the back yards, doors, windows, and balconies of the residents in the surrounding apartments, creating a sort of back door neighborhood. Constance Perin points out that neighbors occupy a liminal space between public and private, existing outside each other’s private homes, but sharing property lines, hedges, or in this case, a courtyard (26). Private spaces are forced into close proximity with one another, making it difficult for individuals to avoid catching glimpses of their neighbors’ private affairs. It is this arrangement that allows Jeff (and the audience) to witness all the events that eventually become the primary and secondary plots of the film, from the murder of Mrs. Thorwald to the sad situation of Miss Lonelyhearts to the physical displays of Miss Torso. The private spaces of Jeff’s neighbors are essentially made public by his (and the audience’s) voyeurism.

For many scholars, privacy is largely a question of visibility. That which is out in the open and thus visible to a range of people is considered public, while behaviors kept hidden from view are considered private. (See, for example, Arendt 50 and 72; Brain 242). As *Rear Window* demonstrates, the boundary between public and private is often breached visually. Jeff initially becomes suspicious of Thorwald because he sees clues and activities that Thorwald clearly felt were private and hidden, since they took place in his own home. But if Jeff could see such activities simply by looking out his window, were they really private? In this case, the fact that the boundary between public and private can be broken simply by looking demonstrates just how tenuous that boundary is.

As the preceding discussion demonstrates, the public/private boundary and the anxieties associated with the breach of that boundary are not incidental to *Rear Window*, but rather constitute a central theme within the film. In addition to mobilizing social anxieties, the physical spaces that mark public/private boundaries also serve a narrative function, as Hitchcock uses them to regulate the flow of information within the diegesis. *Rear Window* is unique in its treatment of the visual demarcations of public and
private. Most films regularly invade the privacy of characters by following them into their homes, their bedrooms, even the bathroom. A moment or space that may be private for a character within the diegesis is still on display for the camera and therefore the audience. In other words, rarely do on-screen characters have complete privacy. *Rear Window,* however, keeps the boundaries of visual privacy intact. By telling the story almost exclusively from Jeff’s visual perspective, and by confining Jeff to “the immediate visual and aural space around him” (Belton 1128), Hitchcock allows the audience to see only those moments that can also be seen by the protagonist within the film.

Because of his fixed position and the sight lines created by that position, Jeff can only see certain parts of his neighbors’ apartments. Other parts are blocked by permanent walls or temporarily drawn blinds. As Steven Jacobs notes, Hitchcock in this case “introduces, on screen, an off-screen space,” which helps to rouse curiosity and build suspense (292). This is established early on when Jeff’s erotic gaze is partially blocked by the wall of Miss Torso’s apartment (as she gets ready in the morning), and the drawn blind of the newlyweds (as they kiss passionately). The situation turns suspenseful after Jeff suspects Thorwald of killing his wife. During the time that Jeff is spying on him, Thorwald occasionally chooses to pull his blinds, preventing Jeff from knowing the full story of what’s going on inside Thorwald’s apartment. By revealing just enough information to make Jeff suspicious, and then concealing the information that would answer his questions, the environment in which Jeff exists increases his anxiety and suspicion. Hitchcock never allows the camera to invade anyone’s privacy any more than the onscreen characters are able to. Even when it seems like Jeff is invading his neighbors’ privacy, he is really doing nothing more than looking through the windows that they left open. It is only when neighbors allow themselves to be visible (even if they think they are not being watched), and thus somewhat public, that Jeff, Lisa, Stella, and the audience can watch them. In this way, Hitchcock manipulates the visual boundary between public and private to regulate the amount of information revealed to the audience.

This suppression of information might seem to contradict Hitchcock’s own definition of suspense, which he says involves the audience knowing more than the characters, but I would argue that this is not the case. While it is true that the narrative withholds some details, the audience does, in fact, have greater knowledge than anyone on screen. The average viewer will bring both intertextual and extratextual knowledge to the film – something that the characters cannot do. An understanding of generic patterns and/or Hitchcock’s other films, combined with the limited evidence offered within the narrative, are enough to make the audience suspect - or even know - that Thorwald has, in fact, done something terrible. The suspense of the story results from the audience’s uncertainty, anticipation, and expectations about how Thorwald’s true activities will be revealed (Knight and McKnight 108; Wulff 1; Tan and Diteweg 149). The walls of privacy built into the set interrupt and delay the revelation of information, thus prolonging and enhancing the suspense.

The use of space to conceal and reveal information is highlighted in the scene where Jeff writes Thorwald a note that Lisa then delivers. When Lisa is standing in the hallway outside Thorwald’s apartment, both she and Thorwald are visible (through separate windows) to Jeff, Stella, and the audience. Lisa and Thorwald, however, cannot see each other, as the door to Thorwald’s apartment separates them. Lisa knows that Thorwald is inside, because she just saw him from Jeff’s apartment, but she does not know exactly where, and Thorwald is unaware that Lisa is outside. When she slides the note under his door, it catches his attention, and he moves to the door to investigate. Lisa hurries down the hall and manages to slip out of sight just before Thorwald opens the door to look out. As he searches for her in the hallway, on the fire escape, and in the courtyard, she manages to stay just out of his line of sight by maneuvering around the spaces of his building. Throughout the sequence, the design of the space, coupled with the angle from which it is shot, conceals vital information (each other’s location) from the main characters while revealing that same information to the audience. The sequence is shot in such a way that the characters are frequently very close together within the space of the frame, even if they are separated by walls or doors, and this proximity (which the audience recognizes but the characters do not) increases the sense of danger.

Suspense is further developed by the spatial relationship between Jeff’s apartment and Thorwald’s apartment. The apartments are close enough to see from one to the other and close enough to hear
someone shouting from one to the other, but still far enough apart that conversations of normal volume in one apartment cannot be heard in the other. Jeff partially overcomes this distance to interact with Thorwald more intimately when he calls him on the telephone. The phone call allows Jeff to maintain a safe distance from Thorwald even as he speaks with him as though they were in the same room. Because Jeff knows the location of the person with whom he is speaking, he (as well as the audience) can connect sound with image to create a more complete knowledge of the situation. Thorwald, however, is at a disadvantage. When he answers the phone, he has no way of knowing the location of the disembodied voice at the other end of the line, and thus has no visual information to attach to the sound he hears. Jeff uses this to his advantage when he tricks Thorwald into believing that he is calling from a bar around the corner and convinces Thorwald to go there for a meeting.

Despite the relatively short distance between apartments, and the ability to overcome that distance instantaneously with a phone call, the particular arrangement of the apartments makes an actual journey from one to the other much longer than the straight-line distance between them. As demonstrated by Lisa and Stella, who travel from Jeff’s to Thorwald’s while Jeff watches, the journey requires someone to go out of one apartment, down a set of stairs, across the courtyard (which itself involves a couple of smaller walls) or around the building, and then back up the stairs or fire escape on the other side. This arrangement becomes particularly significant during the film’s climactic sequences. After Jeff has tricked Thorwald into leaving his apartment, and Stella and Lisa fail to find clues in the courtyard flower garden, Lisa decides to venture into Thorwald’s apartment by way of the fire escape and an open window to look for evidence. While Jeff and Stella watch from a distance, Lisa searches inside Thorwald’s apartment. In a reversal of the scene where Lisa delivers the note from Jeff, this scene features Lisa inside the apartment unaware that Thorwald is approaching the front door, while the audience is fully aware of the relative locations of both characters. The framing again highlights their proximity to one another, and thus, the danger that Lisa faces. Although Jeff also sees what is going on, he is far enough away that he is unable to assist her, so he (along with the audience) watches helplessly as Lisa first hides from Thorwald and then fends him off when he discovers and attacks her.

Throughout most of Lisa’s investigation, Jeff maintains the distance and invisibility of a detached voyeur who watches the scene unfold without actually taking part in it. But this changes when Thorwald notices Lisa signaling to Jeff, and then looks across the courtyard to discover Jeff watching him (Palmer 7, Stam and Pearson 206). After Lisa is taken away by the police and Stella goes to bail her out, Jeff is left alone and vulnerable, and it is not long before Thorwald disappears from his apartment. Jeff correctly deduces that Thorwald is coming after him, but his injury leaves him unable to escape.

As Thorwald approaches, Hitchcock again manipulates the space, strategically concealing and revealing details to help build suspense. Trapped in his apartment, Jeff is unable to see the killer climbing the stairs. Because the camera remains situated with Jeff, the audience is also unable to see Thorwald’s approach. Jeff’s inability to maneuver through space restricts his access to visual information – which had previously been the primary basis for all of his amateur sleuthing. In this sequence, Hitchcock reveals crucial information aurally, using sound effects to help define the off screen space of the stairwell and to convey the killer’s slow approach one loud footstep at a time. The sequence culminates with Thorwald entering Jeff’s apartment and attacking him. The police arrive at Thorwald’s apartment just as this is happening, and Jeff shouts to them for help. But as previous scenes have already established, the journey from one apartment to the other takes time. As Thorwald wrestles with Jeff and tries to throw him out the window and into the courtyard, the police attempt to traverse the stairs, patios, walls, and ladders necessary to stop Thorwald and rescue Jeff. The suspense of this climactic scene, therefore, once again depends on spatial maneuvering and the question of who will negotiate the space quickly and successfully.

*Rear Window* offers a long slow build in narrative tension, originating in anxiety but developing into suspense and terror. The design of the courtyard creates a space where the bounds of privacy are very weak. Both Jeff and the audience initially cross these boundaries only visually, creating a sense of unease about the social violation involved. The visual invasion becomes physical and suspenseful when Lisa enters Thorwald’s apartment, and the invasion is eventually reciprocated when Thorwald attacks Jeff in
his apartment. All of these developments play on the social norms associated with the boundaries of privacy, warning of the dangers associated with such breaches.

**Exploring Duality in Psycho**

Similar to *Rear Window*, the opening of *Psycho* initially places the film within centripetal space. From the opening aerial shot of the Phoenix skyline, to the high rise hotel where Marion meets Sam, to the busy streets that Marion encounters in the vicinity of her office, the spaces in the early scenes of the film suggest urban concentration and population density. But after Marion decides to steal the money her boss asked her to deposit in the bank, she packs a suitcase, hops in her car, and flees Phoenix to be with Sam. Her flight from the city (which echoes the era’s continued population migration from cities to suburbs) moves her into the realm of centrifugal space. Dimendberg argues that in the shift from centripetal to centrifugal space, “Separation replaces concentration, distance supplants proximity, and the highway and the automobile supersede the street and the pedestrian” (177-178). As Marion moves through this new space, attempting to put distance between herself and her crime, she experiences a series of tense situations, including a run-in with a highway patrol officer and a frantic attempt to exchange her car at a roadside used car lot. Alone and disoriented in the darkness of a late night rain shower, she decides to stop at the Bates Motel, which was itself isolated when someone decided to “move the highway.” Although Marion’s flight from Phoenix was meant to allow her to safely escape her crime, her journey from centripetal to centrifugal space has introduced additional sources of tension and left her vulnerable, alone, and largely cut off from the rest of the world, setting the stage upon which the rest of the narrative unfolds.

In addition to stimulating the discomfort associated with the shift from centripetal to centrifugal space, the Bates Motel and the house on the hill reflect and emphasize the ideas of duality that pervade the story, showing how boundaries that seemingly separate two entities may not be as clear cut as they appear. At the center of *Psycho’s* narrative, and essential to the film’s surprise ending, is the coexistence of two seemingly distinct characters in the same body. The audience discovers in the film’s climactic sequence that Norman’s mother is actually deceased, and only survives inside Norman’s head. The house and the motel simultaneously foreshadow and obscure this split in Norman’s personality, as each building is associated with one of the two halves. The motel is primarily Norman’s space. He takes care of the rooms, greets guests and visitors, and is essentially in charge of the space. He brings dinner down from the house to share with Marion after she arrives at the motel, and it is in the motel office that he converses with Sam, Lila, and Detective Arbogast (Martin Balsam). The house, on the other hand, is Mother’s domain. When Norman is seen inside the house, he generally appears as Mother, except in scenes where he appears *with* Mother – or at least with her corpse. It is Mother that Marion, Arbogast, and Sam see standing at the window. She is the one who murders Arbogast when he intrudes upon the house. And in the film’s climax, just as Lila discovers the corpse of the real Mrs. Bates, it is Norman-as-Mother who rushes down the stairs to attack Lila. By associating each half of Norman’s identity with a separate physical space, Hitchcock maintains the illusion that they are, in fact, two distinct people.

A second split that is reflected by the house and motel is the distinction between interior and exterior. While usually applied to buildings, the concept of interior and exterior relates to humans as well. On the outside, in his physical manifestation, Norman is Norman even when he tries to alter this identity by donning a wig and a dress. His mind, however, is another story. Though the struggle for control over Norman’s mind seems to shift back and forth throughout the film, the female voice over the image of Norman in the final scene indicates that Mother has won out in the end, gaining complete control over Norman’s mind/interior. In his discussion of gender and the built environment, Aaron Betsky says “Interiors are what we are, and we still associate them with femininity, while exteriors – appearances, buildings – are what we aspire to, and that is still a masculine order” (174). The appearance that Norman tries to present to the world – his exterior – is manifested in the motel. This is the face he puts on for visitors, and allows the outside world to see. The feminine interior is represented by the house and all of the secrets contained within its walls. In contrast to the motel, most of the house is kept hidden from the outside world, just as Mother is kept hidden by Norman.
Closely tied to the exterior/interior divide is the split between public and private, which is also clearly represented by the motel and the house. Each individual room of the motel may provide privacy, but the building as a whole acts more like a public space, an extension of the road, welcoming different travelers each night with its glowing neon sign. Norman actively makes the motel public, by offering it up as a place for guests to stay and specifically by inviting Arbogast, Sam, and Lila to have a look around. The house, on the other hand, is a distinctly private space. It is the location of Norman/Mother’s hidden activities, shut off from the rest of the world. Norman is very protective of this space, refusing to allow Arbogast, Sam, or Lila to go inside, as he knows that it will lead to the discovery of his private secrets.

The public/private distinction between the two buildings is further maintained by the way the film regulates the audience’s access to them. Just as Norman tries to keep Marion, Arbogast, Sam, and Lila away from the house, Hitchcock keeps the audience at a distance. In the early portions of the film, the audience sees far more of the motel than the house, as the camera follows Marion and Norman through the office and the parlor, into Marion’s cabin and even into the bathroom. The house, on the other hand, remains largely off limits. It is generally shot from a distance and from the outside. When the camera follows Norman inside the house, only the entry hallway is visible. The same is true when Arbogast enters the home, and when Norman carries Mother out of her room and down to the cellar. The camera remains in the hallway (which includes the main staircase) for these scenes, revealing very few details about the private secrets contained within the rooms of the house. In fact, the little information that these scenes do reveal turns out to be misleading, as the careful shot design helps to conceal the fact that the female figure at the window and the female voice inside the house are at various times either Norman or his mother’s corpse, but never a living, breathing Mrs. Bates. The secrets within the home are protected by the privacy that it is granted, and it is not until the film’s climax (discussed below) that the privacy is fully breached, and the secrets revealed.

Another division is highlighted by the architectural styles of the two buildings, which situate them in separate historical moments. The Victorian Gothic house represents an old-fashioned style, evoking the days when life centered on the home. The more contemporary motel, with its stripped down, largely functional style and neon sign inviting travelers to stop, represents a newly mobile society. The roadside motel was brought into being by the modern development of the highway system and automotive travel. The historical periods represented by the two buildings seem to reflect the two generations of which Norman and Mother are a part, again highlighting the split between them.

All of these dualities – Norman/Mother, exterior/interior, public/private, and modern/old-fashioned – are very important to the development of the film’s narrative and the themes that the story presents. In addition, the film also deals with the apparent distinctions between masculine and feminine, professional and domestic, sane and insane, living and dead. In all cases, these splits are made visible and material through the built environment of the film. The house and the motel stand as two distinct spaces, defined by their appearance, their function, and their inhabitants. For those who find comfort in clearly drawn boundaries, the two buildings may initially seem to reinforce the rigidity of the various binaries that they represent. But these binaries can only be maintained if the two structures are kept separate. Viewing the entire Bates property (including the motel and the house) as one continuous space collapses distinctions and brings together the seemingly opposed concepts described above. Public and private, professional and domestic, modern and old-fashioned all mingle to create a heterotopic space that challenges any notion of clear and precise categories or definitions.

The house and the motel may be distinguished by recognizable boundaries, but the boundaries are tenuous at best. These are lines that can be, and in fact are, crossed without much difficulty. This tenuous relationship is physically demonstrated by the long stairway that runs between the house and the motel. While the stairway acts as a visual marker of the division between the two spaces, it also connects the spaces, showing just how fine the line between them (and all that they represent) really is. As Dennis Zirnite notes, “From ‘mother’s’ bedroom to the motel office, the declivity of stairs is virtually continuous – a structural linkage that underscores the essential psychic linkage: the moral cohesion of “mother”... and Norman” (17). Beyond the cohesion of the two characters, the stairs enable the cohesion of the entire space, suggesting that the house and motel are two parts of the same whole.
Connected to both structures but a part of neither, the stairs running from the motel to the house occupy a liminal space in between the two buildings and represent the boundaries that are crossed throughout the film. In some cases, the crossing of boundaries is rather insignificant, as when Norman traverses the stairs to travel from home to work. In other cases, the stairs represent a more serious transgression. They mark the line that must be crossed in order to unlock the dark secrets hidden inside the house on the hill. Crossing this line is not without its dangers, however, as evidenced by the fate that awaits Arbogast. Soon after he travels up the stairs to the house (and then up a second set of stairs inside the house) he is brutally murdered. Although Lila is not murdered, thanks to Sam’s intervention, her trip up the hill and then down the cellar stairs results in a terrifying shock, as she discovers the corpse of Mrs. Bates only moments before being attacked by a knife-wielding Norman.

The ease with which these boundaries can be broken is powerfully demonstrated by the shower murder sequence. The lines between Norman and Mother (and thus masculine and feminine) are blurred as Norman puts on the wig and dress in order to “become” Mother. This also blurs the exterior/interior line, as the part of his personality that usually remains inside (Mother) comes out to take over the outside. This is also the only time in the film that Mother ever leaves the old-fashioned, domestic, private space of the home to move into the modern, professional, public space of the motel. The public/private line is doubly crossed as Marion’s privacy in the shower is destroyed by the intrusion of Norman/Mother. In a scene that lasts only a few moments, all of these lines are crossed, and the path of the film is changed dramatically. By establishing seemingly clear boundaries and then breaking those boundaries, Hitchcock creates discomfort through the “joining of that which should be separate” (Douglas 136). The anxieties associated with such boundary crossing become embedded in the spaces of the film, thereby enhancing the suspense generated by the actions of characters within the narrative.

In addition to establishing an underlying sense of tension, the built environment of Psycho contributes to the suspense of specific scenes, as Hitchcock maneuvers characters through the built spaces of the set. For instance, in addition to their symbolic power, the stairs help build suspense by slowing the pace of certain sequences. In any narrative, suspense can be heightened by delaying the resolution of a particular scene. This can be accomplished in a number of ways, and is often achieved through editing. For example, in his discussion of the melodramas of D.W. Griffith, Tom Gunning notes that the director often “creates suspense through parallel editing, using the pattern to create an agonizing delay” (197). By repeatedly interrupting the action of one scene to cut to another scene, Griffith delays resolution and increases suspense. In Psycho, resolution is delayed by the time required for actors to negotiate portions of the set. Famed set designer Cedric Gibbons once warned of the problems associated with using long stairways in movie sets.

The designer, for instance, may conceive of a grand staircase down which the star makes her entrance. The head of the stairway is seventy feet from the point she must reach to meet the characters assembled at the foot. But unless there is a valid dramatic reason for giving a lot of footage to her entrance, it takes too long to walk seventy feet. (Quoted in Eustis 794)

In Psycho there is, in fact, a “valid dramatic reason” for showing someone’s journey up or down the steps. While this kind of shot may slow down the action in certain films, in this film it heightens the tension and suspense. The first shot of someone coming down the stairs is when Marion first arrives at the Bates Motel. When she finds no one in the office, she climbs back into her car and honks her horn. As Norman makes his way down the hill, a cutaway to Marion’s frustrated expression shows her impatience over the length of time that he is taking to get to her, increasing the moment’s dramatic tension, and foreshadowing later scenes in which trips up or down the stairs lead to far more dramatic results.

Probably the most suspenseful trip up the stairs (and the one with the most shocking payoff) is when Arbogast decides to go up to the house to talk to Mrs. Bates. The sequence features a wide shot of the house and the stairs as Arbogast climbs slowly from the motel to the house. A single shot of him climbing the steps lasts nearly twenty seconds before cutting to him at the porch of the house. The suspense started by this long shot continues as Arbogast enters the house and climbs the interior stairs, where he meets his
bloody demise. This is an example of a scene that combines the narrative structures of suspense and surprise, both building on feelings of anxiety. By climbing the stairs and entering the house, Arbogast is crossing physical, social, and symbolic boundaries to invade the privacy of the Bates home, thus mobilizing audience anxieties connected to such breaches. The audience knows that there is a killer on the loose, and that Arbogast is therefore in danger, but they don’t know where the killer is or what will happen to Arbogast. This knowledge mixed with uncertainty creates suspense, which is increased by the length of time required for Arbogast to climb the steps. The suspense of the scene is resolved by a moment of shock and surprise as Arbogast is stabbed to death.

Negotiation of spaces other than the stairs also leads to suspense, particularly in the sequence that makes up the climax of the film, which is built around intricate spatial maneuvering. Tension and suspense are created almost entirely based on movement in and around the spaces of the Bates home and motel. The segment begins with Sam and Lila going to the motel, determined to find out what happened to Marion. When they decide that someone needs to go up to the house to speak with Mrs. Bates, Sam agrees to find Norman and keep him distracted while Lila investigates the house. As Sam exits the room, he is startled by Norman, who suddenly appears from around a corner. As Norman tries to exit the office, Sam stands in the doorway, knowing that the only way to prevent Norman from seeing Lila outside the motel is to keep him occupied inside the office. As Lila makes her way to the house, she is exposed and in plain view, and much of the suspense rides on the question of whether or not she will get to the shelter of the house without Norman seeing her.

Even after Lila is in the house, there is the lingering question of how long Sam will be able to keep Norman in the office, which makes Lila’s search for answers that much more urgent. Each time Lila climbs a set of stairs, opens a door, or enters a room, she discovers something new. Neither Lila nor the audience knows what she will find, and so each step in the house is filled with suspense. And while she finds numerous rooms and objects, she finds very few answers. Her search, therefore, does more to build suspense than provide any resolution (Christopher Morris 221). As the answers continue to elude her (and the audience), the suspense continues to build, because the audience knows that it is only a matter of time before Norman finds Lila in the house. When Norman figures out what is going on and gets away from Sam, Lila is forced to hide underneath the main staircase in the house. When she does this, she sees another door, and is clearly drawn to investigate. It is here, in the deepest, most interior and private part of the house that she finally finds the shocking answer to her questions. All of the suspense and drama of the last segment depends on Lila’s ability to negotiate physical spaces and uncover the secrets contained within them.

By going up to the house, Lila has crossed an important symbolic boundary and ends up in a place where she shouldn’t be. As a result, she is in danger, and neither she nor the audience knows what is about to happen to her. It is in many ways her transgression of boundaries that causes suspense in this sequence. Up until this point, the audience has been kept guessing because the boundaries have remained generally intact, and viewers have seen only that which Norman has willingly let outsiders within the film see. When the lines drawn by Norman to separate his two worlds are broken by outsiders, both the characters within the film and the audience watching the film discover the shocking and terrifying truths hidden within the Bates home. Much like the shower scene, the suspense of the film’s climax is closely tied to the crossing of both physical and symbolic boundaries.

Conclusion – Spatialized Anxieties

In *Rear Window* and *Psycho* Hitchcock uses centripetal and centrifugal spaces with heterotopic characteristics as his primary settings. *Rear Window* emphasizes centripetal space, as the noise, activity, and close quarters of the metropolis almost seem to close in on Jeff as he sits trapped in his apartment. The setting of *Psycho* draws on anxieties connected with centrifugal space, as the characters’ move away from the city and into an environment that is “devoid of landmarks and centers,” creating a sense of isolation and disconnection from society (Dimendberg 172). Both exhibit heterotopic tendencies, and as such undermine the usual separation of public and private, interior and exterior, modern and old-fashioned.
Hitchcock builds on the tensions inherent to these spaces by exploring the physical, social, and symbolic boundaries that exist within them, showing how easily such boundaries can be crossed, blurred, and re-drawn. He blends deliberate spatial arrangements with precise spatial maneuvering to visualize and materialize abstract anxieties about the lines people draw in their lives. While most people may wish to organize their world into neat, orderly categories surrounded by clear boundaries, Hitchcock’s spatial dramas demonstrate the impossibility of such well-defined separation. By foregrounding liminality and permeability, both films force viewers to confront the messiness of life and to question the nature of the categories and boundaries people try so hard to establish and maintain. The suspense is largely a product of fears about the inability to control the boundaries that define society. These films suggest that all boundaries will eventually blur, and thus those fears are here to stay.

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