INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS GIVEN, WHAT IS NOT GIVEN

In his masterful defense of poetry, Paul Goodman considers silence:

> There is a silence beyond speech, an accord closer than verbal communication and where the situation is unproblematic. In one of the scriptural lives of Buddha there is a remarkable sentence, at the conversion of Anathapindika: "The Lord consented by becoming silent." I take it that this means that the silence of the Lord creates accord, *is* accord; and from the human point of view, if the *Lord* consents, what further is to be said?

He writes out, too, this pithy thought: "Very close friends often do not speak, because they do not have to" (4). I might go further: the intensity and extent of the silence will indicate the closeness, although only to the silent ones. There are surely many kinds of silence, friendly and otherwise, many paths along which silence can step as, without sounding, it speaks.

We know how Alfred Hitchcock's cinematic mastery is often thought both lordly and Lordly, that he is a "supreme creative being standing over his work"; or that, analogous to the way the Divine Being is figured in Genesis as a creative artist ("He made . . . ; and He saw that it was good"), so Hitchcock behind, above, beyond, and underneath his films is a creative artist indisputable, too. Silently, in his work, he makes consent.

Still more important than the idea of elevating the Silent One, the artist, to the position of Lordly being, is the quality, meaning, and range of implication contained in the artistic silences: the silence itself, for Goodman a matter of astonishing importance and fascination to be only gestured to by

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way of the tale of Buddha. The silence of the compassionate, comprehending, concurring divinity, perhaps; or sanctified one; or seeker who would find the unexpressed charm. Or, again, that silence of close friends, which for each can be the same silence.

If any one silence can be the same as any other . . .

Let us work on the assumption, shared by many millions of people around the globe, I believe, that if friends do not need to speak it is because they can see, feel, and imagine the conditions in which they find themselves, or which they recall or hope for, and verbal articulation simply does not add anything meaningful to the moment. Indeed, it might obstruct. Not only that: potential speech is foreknown and fully accepted as an addition that would be of no value; hence no energy is expended engaging in it. Or perhaps more stunningly: things are happening far too fully and far too swiftly for words to find a way in bearing the necessary torch—as regards film and film watching, the insuperable ekphrastic problem of being given so much so rapidly that the language is overwhelmed.

Having spent considerable time watching, rewatching, and again rewatching his work, and examining much correspondence about its production, and speaking to people who worked with him, I believe I can know the Alfred Hitchcock behind the Hitchcock film as one with whom silence surpasses understanding. While the film is unfolding through my breathing, I am experiencing a chain of moments being shared with me by a friend, a friend to the viewer in general but—as I feel it (and I think I am not alone)—especially to me, a loyal viewer who sees always in memory. Even during the screening, every sight is a memory. Very often spoken sound is not required, the simplest reason being that both Hitchcock and his viewer know that everything of necessity is already on the screen. The look on a face. The movement of a hand. The signal gesture of character or camera. The color. The design. The decoration of the room. A little boy's open-necked white shirt, or puppy. The pins a woman puts in her hair. The depth of field. The architecture of the moment, among moments. Think of the very, very famous extreme long shot from a high position that initiates the cropduster sequence in *North by Northwest* (1959)[1] and now imagine that gazing at it we could be obliged to hear an off-camera voice, if gentle still ineradicable: "Here, all alone in a vast and empty countryside, Roger stands

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expectantly and isolated and open to the elements." What a ruination, what a destruction of the temple that—or any other monotone—would produce! Or think how, at that very, very famous concert scene at the Albert Hall in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), Ben (Jimmy Stewart) arrives to find Jo (Doris Day) in a climactic dialogue-free passage, a little mime, albeit a whole conversation was written for them to deliver but on the set, as they prepared to shoot, Hitchcock summarily decided no, the Arthur Benjamin music was enough.

The silence of knowing when enough is enough . . .

A particularly elegant silence—because most complex as the dramatic situation goes—lies between, under, or around uttered words, in short what an openly heard statement *does not say*, for one reason or another: timidity, shyness, modesty, tact, strategy, ineffable awe. In the galvanizing parlor chat scene of *Psycho* (1960), Norman Bates utters a great many profound and intriguing things, energizes and moves our speculation not only about him but about life—"A boy's best friend is his mother"—but as lovers of the film know (too) well, what this young man is saying in this scene is not all of what he is meaning. This gap between utterance and meaning is a root of poetry, of course, and Goodman discusses it. I say, but not what I mean; this *not* because I wish to be cagey or cute but because *that which I mean* is not expressible in the language as we have it. T. S. Eliot had this idea when he used Dante in "The Waste Land": *Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*. (Then he hid himself in the fire which purifies.)

In *The Trouble with Harry* (1955, discussed in this book) a hyperopic medical practitioner holding a (presumably attention-grabbing) book very close to his eyes stumbles across a corpse while taking a walk in the woods. It's a sweet little moment for comedy, and never fails to provoke a laugh. But something true and provocative is not being said, in order to adduce which, if adducing is valuable at all—and exactly because onscreen there is a silence about this matter—I must now spell it out: here we have a doctor so absorbed in matters of "theory" (fiction is also theory) he cannot see what's real. And this could raise for any or all of us the question: Does anyone escape the confines of some theory to have a direct relation with the reality around? Or: in *The Lady Vanishes* (1938, discussed here, too) a nun sitting in a private train compartment next to a bandaged patient laid out on the seats

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maintains strict silence when spoken to by some travelers. Is she a person who does not speak or comprehend English? Is she a person who had reasons for *not revealing* that she does in fact speak and comprehend English—that she is, in fact, English herself? Is the silence malevolent or benevolent, and can it morph as the film winds on from one state to another? In this latter case, the suspension of our knowledge about the character depends securely on her remaining speechless when we might hope for speech.

It would be straightforward enough, and perhaps interesting—yet it is not interesting to me here—to go through Hitchcock's oeuvre and tease out telling moments of silence like the two I have just mentioned. It need hardly be said (!) that they are all over the place, these hushes, from the cryptic failure of utterance in the protagonist of *The Lodger* (1927) onward. Silence here, silence there, silence, silence everywhere. But narrative silence is not exactly the "thing" I hope to point to in framing this book around the idea of a silence from Hitchcock. There is a greater, far more troubling and ultimately far more uplifting silence in his films, particularly, perhaps, in the six films to be found here. This is a silence involving a certain compact of belief and corresponding engagement, that the filmmaker and his eager viewer share; an experience; a breath.

A compact between the filmmaker and the viewer? The Italian producer Goffredo Lombardo (1920–2006) gave an interview to discuss the making of Luchino Visconti's *Il Gattopardo* (1963). The cast and crew, he said, and the audience, firmly believed in the conditions of the story—that is to say, they shared a belief about what was to be realized, and what was realized, on the screen. It is this kind of utterly silent conviction that not only attracts the viewer toward a Hitchcock film but binds her frame of attention and the passion of her interest as the film progresses. When one speaks of Hitchcock knowing his audience, one refers to his knowing his own belief, which they share. One is not only standing outside to witness a situation in which dramatic activity unfolds; one is embedded within the situation, one is *there.* And because one is there, one is among friends—the filmmaking team, also there—friends with whom a great deal need not be said. No matter how much is said, then, a great deal remains unsaid. Far more than restrictions in dialogue, this creative silence bears upon the filmmaker's ability to show a fictional world infinitely more detailed, more

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complex, and more moving than can be referenced—that actually is referenced—in language. What Hitchcockian characters say is only part of a grander construction, just in the way that the story contained in the film, the "plot," is only part of the grander construction that is the film. Do not, with Hitchcock, fall into the trap of focusing on, worrying about, querying, or trying to unravel the plot. Look at the film. The film, not as a package securing the plot for shipping but an aesthetic entity with a coherence, a touch, and a pulse.

In *Notorious* (1946), on the many occasions when Devlin (Cary Grant) holds his tongue in conversation with Alicia (Ingrid Bergman), holds his tongue because the present moment is too ambiguous for words, note how we can virtually hear the tongue being held; that Grant manages to give off two signals at once, first that this is a moment not to answer a question—part of the unfolding plot; and second that he does not know this better than we do. We are in on the scene; the devious complexity into which Alicia tumbles, and which will almost destroy her, is one we have watched in construction, watched put in place. When Devlin begins to worry about her, seriously to worry, we already know why he should do, and have been wondering what on earth took him so long . . . and that is another thing he keeps mum about.

The silence of the audience's agreeable companionship with Hitchcock is our willingness to go along and make the best of even the sloppiest situations. Our tendency to wish, and to hope that he will sense our wishing and gratify it, a tendency of which he is aware and which he can jiggle. The silence of language that cannot fully speak its conditions, or that can only circumlocute, or that answers questions with words that are themselves also questions.

Hitchcock very often fashions a space in which objects and object relations "speak" not by sounding but by their own particular presence. Many routes: through the design of a locale—a room, a corridor, a building, a street—its general shape, its relation to the magnitude and extent of the movement and behavior to occur in it, its historical period, its completeness or incompleteness; or the way specialized objects sit or move within a space to give it both character and moment—a painting on a wall, a cushion, a coffee cup; or the way the camera shows the area it gazes at, with multiple

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planes of focus or only a few or only one, and away from or close to the grounding, and stretching or elongating space; and with the color films—Hitchcock was a supreme colorist—not only the way color is used to accent and balance the frame but the way different colors work with or against one another while something done by an actor's body is seen at the same time. Music cues can certainly fill behind these kinds of silence, but need not necessarily do so: Manny Balestrero (Henry Fonda) trapped overnight in his jail cell in *The Wrong Man* (1956).

If places speak in Hitchcock's films so do bodies, although, to be sure, the fashion has spread for talking about characters in Hitchcock films as though by and large they do not have bodies, only narratological or celebrity fame. When one casts for a film one must collaborate with the cinematographer to some degree beforehand or afterward, but in any case the framing and the lens in play will work according to the size and shape of the body being filmed. Michael Redgrave is rather tall, May Whitty is rather short. Cary Grant is somewhat tall, Claude Rains is considerably not so. Jerry Mathers is tiny compared with all the other characters around him in *Harry.* A body can have more than height. It can have girth, it can have a certain palpable tenderness or toughness. It has shape, color, presence; and it carries clothing in one way or another. This last is one of the reasons why the actor in a film is wearing clothing designed for the job, not just lifted off the rack according to personal taste. What, we can ask, does a character speak about him- or herself by dressing one way or another, or by dressing (or failing to dress) for a circumstance? The secret "speech" of social class is everywhere evident in Hitchcock to those who know its "tongue."

But in Hitchcock's films there are also what might be called Great Questions, the objects after which questing philosophers seek, very much notwithstanding the storylines that so many watchers take as The Treasure. There are no available answers to great questions, and yet great questions perturb and annoy and motivate and inspire us. The problem of death, for one: what it is in human relations and what it is in nature and whether these two are one. The problem of loyalty: what is the proper focus of faith, the nation-state, the political structure, or the human soul? How is it that we can be certain? Can we trust our perceptions, and can we trust our ideas, and in the end, what is it, if anything at all, that *can be* trusted? Or the

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problem of systems: that the social aggregation of the many requires some address far out of proportion with the individual, so that, in one interesting case, the system of order and justice can exist quite outside human experience, outside innocence, outside even witness testimony. This means no less than a questioning of the very perceptual act viewers commit in watching a film, since if perceptual lapses and flaws are possible, if one can swear to having seen something (even swear on a bible) and be wrong, how fraught, indeed, is the experience of seeing and digesting a film? And the issue of power: that machine power and social power can be related but are not the same, that the power of a machine will be opened by, yet limited to, its design, but the power of high-placed individuals can be executed through secrecy or public diplomacy, two very different possibilities, and power can play equally well in false dramatization or in life-and-death reality. Hitchcock uses his story material to work through issues of this kind. How did Harry die, where is Miss Froy, will Alicia succumb, will Manny go to prison, why is Richard Blaney so lost in London, who is "Topaz" really?

A comment about writing in general, about writing on Hitchcock, and about this writing. A dear friend of mine was told by the master, "Film is all music." I have been inspired by Hitchcock's études to write études of my own, perhaps vaguely in the manner of Claude Debussy or in the manner of Frédéric Chopin, both of whose strict grammar matches Hitchcock's accurately, or riffingly as in Bill Evans. Musical études are shorter than most filmic ones, surely shorter than the explorations in this book and shorter than the Hitchcock film, which is structurally symphonic. Always preparation for the statement, always careful treatment of the cadence. I have found that the more one watches Hitchcock's films, losing one's sense of everyday rationality or at least putting it aside, finally "drowning our book" of quotidian rational considerations, the more evident it becomes that, as he was far from conventional in setting his works on the screen one must be far from conventional in finding words to address them. For the Hitchcockian scene, nothing but a poetic approach will do finally, because there is so very much to apprehend, to feel, to wonder about, and to try to say, *all at once.* As a trifling exercise, I thought of a sentence describing Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint's characters in the dining car of *North by Northwest*—not an inappropriate focus, perhaps, because this Quartet

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began with that film. But having written it, I began to play with *other* ways of wording that one sentence, and then other sentences that would do the job differently but just as well, each of them framing the reader's attention on a different aspect of the scene while opening the gates for a discussion of all of it. Easily more than three dozen possibilities emerged, almost on the instant, so that in suffering through the challenge of writing about the scene it became mandatory to imagine how all the sentences could be articulated simultaneously. An impossibility, of course, but the challenge begins to get at the complexity of what's onscreen with Hitchcock and the poverty of plain language to even half-fully come to terms with it. "A man meets a woman in the dining car of a train." "In the dining car of a train a man meets a woman who, unknown to him, has been waiting for his arrival" . . .

This book, which attempts to offer the reader opportunities for "hearing" the speech of dramatized silences in Hitchcock, for assessing different kinds of silence and different kinds of speech, does not propose itself as an exhaustive study, either of the problems it nods to or of Hitchcock's work. Many other authors have written brilliantly of this filmmaker, and the reader who finds interest here will be happy to explore them; and is surely encouraged to explore the films. From Richard Allen to Charles Barr to Lesley Brill to Tom Cohen to Bill Krohn to James Naremore to William Rothman to Slavoj Žižek and many, many more, the probes go on. But the chapters here would claim to be idiosyncratic in one special way: that they seek beneath the obvious surface of the films—that much canonized surface—for the truly profound. In Hitchcock, the latent becomes manifest.

Watch the six films discussed in these pages, if you will, one by one before reading the appropriate chapter; or else afterward at leisure; but watch in relaxation from the dictate to follow along, and in surrender to the image. A case in point. In *Rear Window,* a film more or less universally addressed as posing for its central protagonist a number of "miniature" films in the windows of the various apartments over which he watches, it is true that we find a debilitated soul seeking a "story," call it coherence, in his world. But what is far less often talked about is another issue, similarly blaringly present yet somehow out of view, and that is the fact that in every apartment Jeff looks at he sees action without a beginning and without an end, as it were only the middle of a scene or a story. And, too, that every

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time he picks one window to look at he must perforce not see what is apparent somewhere else. Hitchcock gives the audience a very direct hint of this with the Miss Lonelyhearts episode, yet it applies across the board. To see what is before one in *Rear Window,* then, one must try to grasp what is not given to be seen.

A Silence from Hitchcock is the fourth, and culminating, volume in a series, the Hitchcock Quartet. *An Eye for Hitchcock* (2004) discussed *North by Northwest, Spellbound* (1945), *Torn Curtain* (1966), *Marnie* (1964), *I Confess* (1953), and *Vertigo* (1958). *A Dream of Hitchcock* (2019) included *Strangers on a Train* (1951), *Rear Window* (1954), *Saboteur* (1942), *Rebecca* (1940), *To Catch a Thief* (1955), and *Family Plot* (1976). In *A Voyage with Hitchcock* (2021) one could find *Psycho* (1960), *The 39 Steps* (1935), *The Birds* (1963), *Dial M for Murder* (1954), *Rich and Strange* (1932), and *Suspicion* (1941). With the six films in this book, *Notorious, The Lady Vanishes, Frenzy, The Wrong Man, The Trouble with Harry,* and *Topaz,* one fails wondrously to fill one's basket, since so many fruitful Hitchcockian orchards go without a visit.[2] This is sad in one way, since there is a great deal more that bears consideration, but it is proper in another: since this writing comes out of a person whose eyes gaze upon many things, that is, from life, it finally proposes a living—a fully living—response to the films of the master. The essence of the thing: one never quite has it; one never stops reaching.

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