RePossessed

PLEASURE, FREEDOM, POWER

TONY **C**RYER

CHE-**G**UEVARA **J**OHN

NICK **H**AEFFNER

CHRIS **L**ANE

DAVID **R**AYBOULD

ANNE **R**OBINSON

SOULI **S**PIROPOULOU

RICHARD **S**TEVENS

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Introduction

Vertigo* and *RePossessed
By Nick Haeffner

Surely, every film student knows by now that Hitchcock had every shot in his head before he filmed it. It is common knowledge that he obsessively storyboarded his movies, down to the last frame. Mastery is the quality habitually attributed to the director and *Vertigo* (1958) is frequently said to be the masterpiece of this master of suspense. Hitchcock was, as everyone knows, the fat control freak and in *Vertigo* we see a thinly veiled confession of his fantastic vision as the mise en scene of his desire to dominate everything in his world, especially women.

This has become such a comfortingly familiar picture of the director and of *Vertigo* itself that to question it borders on heresy. Yet in his splendid study Hitchcock at Work, published in 2003, Bill Krohn blew a large hole in this image. Drawing on a host of memos, shooting schedules, budgets, letters and interviews with collaborators, Krohn provides conclusive proof that the myth of the control freak was largely one of Hitchcock's own fictions. Hitchcock was a willing experimenter on set and many people contributed their vision to his films. Sadly, Krohn's book has not had anything like the impact it deserves. Similarly, Greg Garrett's interview with several of Hitchcock's leading ladies, in which Hitchcock's alleged misogyny is vigorously disputed, remains largely unknown.

The view of Hitchcock the control freak has become entrenched because it fits the dominant ideas our culture has about artistic production. These ideas, like so much else in our society, are founded on an ideology of possessive individualism and to question them is counter intuitive, especially in the culture industries. Even in the sphere of contemporary art practice the ideology of the individual producer/personality remains paramount. Likewise, the idea of Hitchcock as the bearer of a supremely masculine will to dominate and order the unruly feminine fits many ideas about gender which are inscribed throughout our culture but rarely examined more critically.

Inspired by *Vertigo*, *RePossessed* is a travelling exhibition offering the chance to re-make the film and rethink some of the central ideas behind cultural production in our society. It confronts the power relations that exist between audiences and moving image authors. It highlights the legal superstructure which regulates the use of moving images and questions its ethical basis. Because much of the work is interactive, the audience itself constitutes what is in the exhibition, thus calling into question the idea of the individual artist-creator. The project has been assembled by a group of researchers at London Metropolitan University led by Chris Lane. Several of the exhibits, including a DVD jukebox, showcase a new software program called ReFrame (featured in a recent edition of *Vertigo* magazine) which makes it possible to perform operations on commercially bought films which would previously have been illegal since they require the DVD to be ripped. As in the film, surveillance and the law are themes highlighted through the use of smart card and eye tracking technologies.

Hitchcock's one time mentor, the producer David O. Selznick, once complained about the 'god-damned jigsaw cutting' of the director's shooting method which meant that a film could only be edited the way Hitch wanted it. In *RePossessed*, the audience can explore the deep structures of *Vertigo* but also create endless new versions of it by re-assembling elements of the film and even re-shooting famous sequences for themselves. Popular games like Scalectrix and Grant Theft Auto have been re-configured to allow the audience to navigate key moments of *Vertigo*'s narrative in radically new ways. An exhaustive database allows the film to be broken down into tiny fragments according to their formal qualities, and re-assembled either in a kaleidoscopic image of simultaneous 'film moments' happening at once or as a new narrative. Elsewhere, short films explore the idea gender fluidity in the representation of James Stewart's Scottie and play on the liminal and subliminal possibilities of using digital technology to locate images that lie beyond the conventional film frame.

In Hitchcock at Work Bill Krohn argued that there is no such thing as a Hitchcock film and that each of his films should be viewed as bold and unique experiments. It is in homage to Hitchcock the experimental film maker that *RePossessed* offers up his most personal film for public re-appropriation.

RePossessed was devised by Tony Cryer, Che Guevara John, Nick Haeffner, Chris Lane, Anne Robinson and Souli Spiropoulou. It opens at Leeds Metropolitan University Arts Centre on October 24th and runs until 24th November.

ReConstructed

1.418"
(36 mm)

What happens to *Vertigo* on a small screen?

This installation re-presents images from *Vertigo* in a variety of small screen devices and formats. The ideology surrounding the DVD format promises a return to an authentic re-creation of past artifacts through new technology. The combined forces of DVD and widescreen technology promise to deliver this recently and magnificently restored version of *Vertigo* in all its original glory. At the same time, DVD also seems to offer the possibility of moving into a new age in which the notion of authenticity or authorial intention is gleefully abandoned: the artifact becomes merely raw material for the viewer to manipulate as he or she chooses. Similarly, many of the mini-devices of the new technological revolution promise simultaneous portability and ubiquitous access - more with less.

But technology also imposes imperatives and constraints that may go un-noticed by the user. Apart from the obvious reduction in scale, through comparison it is clear that the images on display here - via mobile phone, 'widescreen' TV, standard ratio TV - are variously cropped and distorted by these devices: colours are transformed and parts of the image are missing from the frame. In addition, new technologies of visual display are frequently used within social spaces that may be exclusively gendered, e.g. the male 'gadget den' in the domestic home.


1.485"
(37.7 mm)

ReFramed

Gender onscreen: passive, active or fluid?

'ReFramed1...inVertEgo' is a short film by Souli Spiropoulou which explores the complexities of gender representation in *Vertigo*, bringing the established theoretical controversy - triggered by Laura Mulvey's description of Scottie as the active male hero - onto the screen.

The film visually deconstructs and re-constructs scenes from Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, using digital manipulation of voice, gesture and composition. It seeks, in its form and content, to make the familiar unfamiliar and to destabilise the terms through which it has been received and understood.

The role of classical narrative structure in limiting gender representation is explored as the film is re-cut; creating new unpredictable narratives that leave behind the restrictions of the traditional Oedipal trajectory, and confusing the cinematic binaries of voyeur and victim, sex and violence, strength and weakness. The juxtaposition and mirroring of performances in the final scene of the film becomes a mutual embrace of passive and active, underlining the instability of gender, and creating radical potential for gender fluidity.
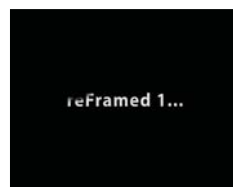
ReMixed

How accessible is DVD?

A low-tech DVD jukebox, with nuclear industry-style gauntlets, secures a collection of DVDs against theft, but allows them to be loaded and unloaded into a DVD player.

With much of the Hitchcock oeuvre available on DVD, it is possible for the operator to trace the progression of ideas from one film to the next. The work also allows the audience to engage not only with the visual language of Hitchcock, but with the film soundtrack too.

The closed perspex box might serve as a metaphor for the 'closed' nature of the DVD format itself and there is a deliberately absurd aspect to the technology at work here: the DVDs are harder to pick up with the rubber gloves. This evokes the paranoia of the 'atomic age' in which *Vertigo* was made but also the paranoia of the media corporations who have surrounded DVD use with copyright restrictions (many of which don't apply to VHS).

There is an apparent democratic accessibility to the DVD format: for the domestic user it seems to offer a range of options previously unavailable to the cinema audience, such as control over the ordering and re-ordering of the DVD's 'chapters' or, for the more technologically adept, the creation of personal bookmarks. This is, however, restricted firstly by the pre-determination of the chapter points themselves and secondly by the limited options offered by the DVD playing hardware and software. These restrictions

can become acutely disabling for other users, such as schoolteachers, university lecturers, artists and media professionals, who are all potentially involved in the re-presentation of film material. Moreover, where the capability does exist to circumvent the limitations of domestic technology, such users will find themselves hedged around by the byzantine inconsistency of copyright laws. The principle of 'fair use', which previously allowed a good deal of freedom in the re-presentation of various media to the public, is currently under sustained attack by media corporations.
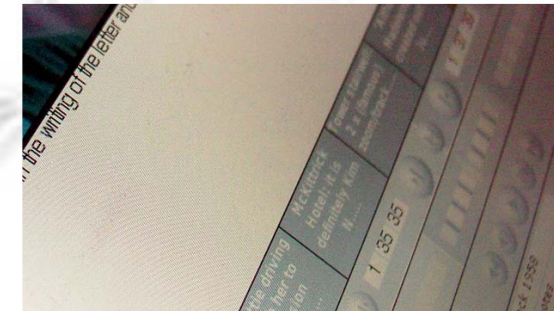
R e P l a y e d

What if *Vertigo* were a game?

RePlayed involves audience members in a console style video game based on *Grand Theft Auto - San Andreas*, which, like *Vertigo*, is set in San Francisco. Part of the film is spent with the camera focused on Scottie (James Stewart) as he follows Madeleine (Kim Novak) behind the wheel of a car. This artefact positions the audience at the controls of an arcade-style driving game, altered so that the driving speed is very slow and all violent action has been removed. The routes taken by Scottie and Madeleine in the film, as they meander around the city (like Baudelaire's celebrated flaneurs), are re-played in virtual reality.

The work compares the approach to 'point of view' taken in computer games such as *Grand Theft Auto - San Andreas* and that taken in *Vertigo*. This is achieved by interrupting the conventional treatment of first person and third person viewpoints in computer games. Here the first person view is repeatedly inter-cut with shots where the camera looks back at the audience member as they drive; they see themselves, whilst playing the game. Usually this kind of 'reverse shot' is not possible in computer games: to look at oneself is to risk losing control, due to the typical pace of the action. However, in this scenario the 'chase' takes place so slowly that there is little risk of coming off the road.

ReTurning

"Only one's a wanderer, two together are always going somewhere…".

The notion of 'wandering' recurs throughout the film. When Scottie is asked about his 'usual occupation', he replies: "oh, just wander about". This space to wander as an artist, dreaming and looking in the city, to be a flaneur, both absorbed in the life of the city and standing outside, has frequently been denied to women, wandering, dreaming, solitary woman like Madeleine is always perceived as mad. This installation has been constructed as a way of inhabiting Madeleine's intense wandering.. her reverie, her desire, her vision of the city, and her madness. The work explores both "...the impossibility of the flaneuse..." (1) as well as the conceptual space of the digital frame.

The installation consists of very slow moving images and still pictures projected in sequence. The five screens in this piece work as a kind of expansion of time, suggesting a dream space between the film frames, and the artist has used re-filming - the process of looking thorough several lenses - to explore dream time and memory. The density, strangeness and intense colour of these images affects eye and emotion, whilst on the soundtrack, the imperfect, slightly distorted and dreamlike singing disrupts our vision. It is at once determinedly cheerful, and slightly 'mad', becoming more and more melancholic with each repeated verse. This unruly tune in the head displaces the spaces of reverie extracted from Vertigo, and pushes us towards a more subjective viewing state, engaging with the doubly fictionalised Madeleine, and reflecting on time, wandering, desire and solitude.

(1) Friedberg, A., 1994, Window Shopping, Univ. California Press, p.36

R e V i e w e d

'Where do we look, and why?'

Using eye tracking technology, ReViewed removes our freedom to voyeuristically observe from the darkness of the auditorium and allows us to expose and re-view our patterns of looking. In an echo of the film's themes of voyeurism and surveillance, ReViewed asks us to reflect upon our sources of visual pleasure, compare them across gender boundaries, and to examine the power of Hitchcock as director to control and manipulate our gaze.

A database of viewing experiences will be built by asking visitors to the gallery to watch a scene from *Vertigo* via an eyetracking screen. The eye tracker emits a harmless low wattage infrared beam of light which is targeted at the participant's eyes and enables the apparatus to detect, track, and record their position every 50th of a second. We can then review these experiences, and simultaneously compare a number of different viewings in novel ways, allowing us to find out more about what happens when we watch a feature film: where is our attention focussed on the screen and why?

ReVisited

Looking? Looked at?

In the original film, Scottie (James Stewart) is trailing Madeleine (Kim Novak). Madeleine knows that Scottie is following her but pretends she doesn't. The result is a combination of 'looks' in which Scottie views her from a series of hiding places. Madeleine never looks in his direction - but makes certain that she is available to his gaze. This play of looks has been interpreted as active/male/looking and passive/female/being looked at.

In this installation, the audience are being 'put in the picture', but are also free to look where they like. In this way the audience can take up different viewing positions within the scene, paralleling those of Scottie and Madeleine, and thereby explore the subjectivity of the characters.

Biographies of Contributors

Tony Cryer t.cryer@londonmet.ac.uk
Tony is Lecturer in Film Studies at London Metropolitan University. His research interests include Jungian and post-Jungian psychology and its application to film and media analysis. He is also concerned with widescreen cinema on both small and large screens and close textual analysis.

Che-Guevara John – che-guevara.john@londonmet.ac.uk
Che Guevara John is a Senior Lecturer and is Course Leader for Digital Media at London Metropolitan University. His career as a programmer and designer in the field of interactive technologies spans from the fledgling 80's home computer game industry, time based media and re-active art installations to the development of terrestrial and satellite digital Interactive TV services. His interest in the moving image, experimental cinematic technologies and VJ culture has seen him perform internationally, headlining events such as the Deadbeat festival, Playlouder at the ICA, Bestival Isle of Wight, Ministry of Sound (Asia tour), Creamfields, as well as residencies and exhibitions in and around London.

Nicholas Haeffner - n.haeffner@londonmet.ac.uk
A former musician, Nick is senior lecturer in Communications at London Metropolitan University. He took an MA in critical theory at Sussex University, then a doctorate in media and cultural studies. In 2005, Pearson Education published his book Alfred Hitchcock. His current research is in the field of digital photography. Nick is also co-editor of the journal Subject Matters which is concerned with questions of subjectivity in media culture.

Chris Lane - c.lane@londonmet.ac.uk
Chris has a background in Fine Art and is currently a Principal Lecturer at London Metropolitan University. He has spent his career involved in community education and digital media production and has worked on exhibitions and media campaigns for a range of community, political and single issue organisations. He teaches new media scripting and cyberculture and leads a BA in Digital Media. His current research is concerned with the relationship between software design, new media language, intellectual property and discourse on interactivity.

David Raybould - d.raybould@leedsmet.ac.uk
David has a background as a professional live sound engineer and is now a lecturer in Music & Creative Technologies at Leeds Metropolitan University. His research interests include methods of interacting with music/sound, including novel interfaces for expression, sound synthesis and the use of improvisation in electronic music.

Anne Robinson - anne.robinson@londonmet.ac.uk
Anne Robinson, is a senior lecturer in Film Studies at London Metropolitan, with a research interest in artists' film & video and new media practice, looking in particular at artists' experiments with time, memory, duration and the frame in moving image work. She is a visual artist, working with & painting, video, film and digital media, and is currently undertaking a practiced based doctorate: 'The Elusive digital Frame, and the Elasticity of Time in Painting'. Anne's work, both as a painter, and using the digital moving image in installations, has been concerned with the freeze frame. She has exhibited work for several years, including recently, Talkshow at Lounge, Fragile at Manchester Metropolitan University, and Curiosities for the V&A. She has also produced work in collaboration with musicians and performers including Stacy Makishi, and recently curated a film and performance event, Time Flesh and Nerve in east London.

Souli Spiropoulou - soulispiropoulou@hotmail.com
Souli has a professional background in graphic design, holds an MA in Digital Moving Image, and is currently conducting PhD research at London Metropolitan University. Her recent work involves the use of found footage from mainstream Hollywood cinema to explore issues of gender and gesture in film narrative. Previous projects have been exhibited at the 'Athenscape: The 2004 Olympics and the Metabolism of the City', RIBA, London, and the '4th International Festival of Film and New Media', e-phos 2002, Athens.

Richard Stevens - r.c.stevens@leedsmet.ac.uk
Richard Stevens is a Senior Lecturer in Music and Creative Technologies at Leeds Metropolitan University. As a Composer, Sound Designer, and Sound Artist his recent work has been increasingly audio-visual and seeks to explore novel interfaces for interactivity. His research interests include film sound, sound and music in interactive games, and the use of eye-tracking technology for game analysis and interaction.

Watermans

Ilze Black
Head of New Media Arts

Rachel Francis
Technical Director

Helen Juan
Digital & New Media Manager

Craig Rooney
Programme Administrator

Leigh Stops
Marketing Director

The Gallery assistants

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