

Abstract

Opening the Paratext: the Hitchcock trailer as assertion of authorship

As a filmmaker who frequently enjoyed unusual artistic control over his output, Alfred Hitchcock was known for appearances not merely in his films but also in their trailers. But while the studios understood that Hitchcock's appeal was a key part of his films' selling points, his role in such content was, for the most part, a corollary to the task of having to sell a motion picture. As the director's influence began to grow and his own sense of authorship began concomitantly to develop, in these trailers (filmic paratexts), Hitchcock, as this article argues, increasingly makes the case for his artistic intentions, mirroring the ambiguous and excessive style of his contemporaneous filmmaking in such promotional material. In so doing, Hitchcock promotes ostensibly 'closed texts' not open to interpretation while offering the potential for polysemantic renderings of such texts – opening the paratext. In this way, the trailer serves as both promotional product and critical (self-)appraisal, suggesting in the textual and paratextual construction of the Hitchcock trailer an intersection of the materialism of the commercial package and the abstraction of artistic ambition.

Keywords

Hitchcock, paratexts, trailers, film studies, *Marnie*

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In early 1964, anticipating the US release of Alfred Hitchcock's *Marnie*, Universal Pictures had a film that, on paper, promised success given its star performers and director. Yet the studio felt nervous about how local audiences might receive their product.¹ Given that the film features marital rape, cod-Freudian melodrama, kleptomania, prostitution and several indulgent subplots, their twitchiness in retrospect seems justified. It did not seem to help that *Marnie* came on the back of a decade-long run that had taken in *Rear Window* (1954), *To Catch a Thief* (1955), *The Trouble with Harry* (1955), *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), *The Wrong Man* (1956), *Vertigo* (1958), *North by Northwest* (1959), *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963). The studio was not merely dealing with a tranche of critical or commercial successes (and frequently both); it had also to contend with a marquee director who was, as Keith Johnston suggests, 'big enough to do what [he] wanted'. (2009, p.167)

Marnie and its attendant publicity comes when Hitchcock is at the peak of his powers: he was already enjoying unfettered artistic freedom and personal expression that had begun with his move to Paramount.² Thus, for the studio, its release marked the perfect storm of necessary banker and dangerously unrestrained *auteur* – and here I focus on the trailer of that film and others produced during Hitchcock's ascendant position given their symbolic role in this dynamic, and how they differ from trailers that precede and follow it (during which Hitchcock's influence was either on the rise or had begun to wane).³

In addition, the indulgences of Hitchcock's cinematic preoccupations – indeed those hallmarks *Cahiers du Cinéma* would use to label him as an *auteur* labouring under the Hollywood yoke – had increasingly come to characterise his work within the US studio system.⁴ But these were not limited to his textual output: the director was already substantially involved in the production of his own trailers as well. Bearing in mind Hitchcock's position of near-infallibility and his control over the construction and dissemination of his content, in this article I propose that his excessive style extends to his

promotional material and redefines for Hitchcock his role as artist through self-promotion and the potential for both digestion and interpretation of his work.

For this analysis I will use the terms open and closed text, as well as the term paratext. My use of open and closed texts is aligned with the dialectic proposed by Umberto Eco. For Eco, in an open text ‘the role of its addressee [has not been] envisaged in the moment of its generation *qua text*’ and ‘whose foreseen interpretation is a part of its generative process.’ (1979, p.3). Conversely, the closed text is a text of ‘unadulterable specificity’. (p.49) It refers too to a theoretical perspective of intertextuality that rejects ‘the idea of self-regulating text by emphasizing the crucial role intertextual factors play in the semantic actualization of a text.’ (Klinger, 1989, p.120) In short, the closed text has a predisposition to single interpretation, while the open text offers various or negotiated readings. Significantly, Eco also notes that open texts are ‘reducing such as indeterminacy, whereas closed texts, even though aiming at eliciting a sort of ‘obedient’ cooperation, are in the last analysis randomly open to every pragmatic accident.’ (1979, p.7) Hitchcock trailers, I will argue, are such pragmatic accidents.

My use of the term paratext aligns most with Gérard Genette’s definition, namely that it

offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. [It is a] fringe, always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author [and] constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the services of a better reception for the text and more pertinent reading of it[.] (1997, p.2)⁵

The Hitchcock trailer, as assessed here, is such a transaction, where Hitchcock promotes closed texts while insinuating their openness. With such trailers I assert that he attempts to open the paratext - – gradually and incrementally offering and encouraging a polysemantic rendering of ostensibly straightforward products.⁶

Somewhere between the director's penchant for controlling his audiences and the studio's proclivity to controlling their directors lies a creative-commercial dyad suggesting that Hitchcock was not merely concerned with how the public viewed his films. He was concerned, I argue, with how the public viewed him – and as such promoted his films by embodying their key paratexts, taking ownership in order to generate both audience size and artistic meaning at the same time. This ambiguity is a by-product of his self-expression and the thrust of this article: the use of the trailer by a filmmaker surreptitiously claiming authorship before it would later be bestowed upon him.

'Mr Hitchcock Would Like to Say a Few Words to You'⁷

As a director involved in his own movie marketing, Alfred Hitchcock was a nonconformist. He seemed always to have an instinctive understanding of how 'commodification, as a systematic operation in mass culture, acts vitally on reception.' (Klinger, 1989, p.5) Such understanding began with a conception of his appearance as visual product. Beginning with the serial-format *Alfred Hitchcock Presents...* (1955-1962), Hitchcock always seemed comfortable in front of the camera. His straight-to-audience approach, along with a consistent and easily recognisable – one might argue branded – tone combining satire and dread, became his and the show's calling card. Hitchcock's partiality to self-publicity was certainly nothing new. As Robert Kapsis notes, as early as 1927 Hitchcock, in an open letter to the *London Evening News*, made clear that the director was 'the primary force in filmmaking'. (1992, p.20) Crucially, this force was not, according to Hitchcock, merely a commercial one: the director 'already took himself quite seriously as an artist and recognized the potential of motion pictures as a significant art form.' (p.20).

However, in spite of this early sense of creative self-promotion, Hitchcock's relationship with his ticket-buying audiences in Britain differed from the 'strong bond he would so diligently cultivate with American audiences during the 1950s.' (p.21). It was in this period of his career that he 'used advance notices, press releases, staged interviews, and newspaper and magazine articles reportedly authored by himself to instruct audiences on what to expect in a typical Hitchcock feature film.' (p.35-6). Kapsis's use of the terms 'instruct' and 'typical' are telling: Hitchcock's assumption of his role as

instructor, and his conception of what constituted his archetypal product, were established more than a decade before his move to Hollywood.

By the time of Hitchcock's arrival in California in the late 1930s, the generic trailer was already a well-established paratextual phenomenon, as was their intrinsic mendacity: they were seen as a necessary evil, 'those unbelievable concoctions designed to lure customers with adjectives and promises.' (D. W. C., 1936, p.4). In the post-war period such paratexts pushed this ethos, and were characterised by what Ambrose Heron refers to as 'big fonts proclaiming big things', a key part of a film's marketing package but a tactic primarily used to promote a film's genre and its on-screen star performers. (2011) While Hitchcock's name does not appear in any publicity material in the early stage of his career in the US, it does appear in voiceover for *Rebecca* (1940) and as a title as early as *Saboteur* (1942). Within a year, *Shadow of a Doubt* is marketed in the possessive: *Alfred Hitchcock's* (Kerzoncuf 2005). He had become a bankable director.

With his name thus woven into his films' commercial fabric, Hitchcock begins to become as integral to the trailers as he is to the films. While it is only his name (again in the possessive) that appears in the trailer for *Rope* (1948), it is, as Lisa Kernan notes, a trailer that departs from typical trailer formulas even as it uses a number of conventions. (2004, p.112) The format includes James Stewart in character speaking directly to the audience and discussing the film over a series of publicity portraits of its cast, intercut with diegetic scenes and a quasi-journalistic title that reads *NEW YORK, ONE SPRING AFTERNOON*. Stewart here is both cinematic performer and performative product, and his 'semi-intradiegetic' (p.113) voice-over is meant to jar audiences out of the happy mood of the preceding scene with its direct, almost accusatory address, as if we have seen something we were not supposed to. This method hints at a role later to be taken up by Hitchcock himself, where Hitchcock-as-storyteller offers greater efficacy of message delivery than does one of his subjects.⁸

Beginning with the trailer for *The Wrong Man* in 1956, Hitchcock begins to appear more substantially in paratextual products. In this scripted trailer, he narrates with his by-now familiar direct address to the audience: "Now I'd like you to meet an entirely different person." In so doing, he emphasises the scale of his involvement in a film stylistically different from contemporaneous genre pieces. *The Wrong Man* is an adaptation of a text based on a true story, yet its trailer foregrounds the

director's rendering of such content. Hitchcock, aware of his status as one of the film's stars, is in this way what Johnathan Gray refers to as a 'generic signifier and intertext' (2010, p.51), seamlessly connecting film-as-art to film-as-product. This is hardly without precedent in Hollywood merchandising, with stars often appearing 'as themselves' in trailers, but in those cases it might be argued that they are presented as *part* of the text rather than its originator.⁹ This distinction is key to assessing Hitchcock's approach to the dissemination of his products.

For *North by Northwest*, a higher-budget, altogether glossier affair than *The Wrong Man*, MGM opted for traditional trailers without Hitchcock's contribution, but his presence in paratextual products remains: on official posters he appears as a fifth head carved into the face of Mount Rushmore, site of the film's climax. The film's box office showing enhanced Hitchcock's growing prerogative to be involved in the marketing of his films from then on. (Heron, 2011) This is perhaps because Hitchcock seemed preternaturally to understand the role of the trailer as one of the 'epiphenomena' (Heath, 1977, p.28) that are an inseparable part of the packaging of the film-as-product.

For *Psycho*, Hitchcock not only gave his name to the trailer, in many ways he *was* the trailer, and his screen presence has become almost indissoluble from the plethora of pop-cultural and connotative images *Psycho* has produced. He now had full creative and production control over the format, and appears in the work much like he did in his television hosting role: the *auteur* whose position of privilege is to be in on the dirty secret, his inimitable narrative tone inviting us to be terrified all the while remembering not to take such terror too seriously.¹⁰

The trailer for *Psycho* begins with a crane shot of Hitchcock in the now-famous backlot set for the Bates Motel. He stands in the establishment's atrium-like parking lot behind a title that reads: *The Fabulous Alfred Hitchcock is about to escort you... on a tour of the location of his new motion picture 'PSYCHO'*. Once more, the marketing of the film resists dropping its would-be audience into the film's murky and suffocating diegesis, instead drawing attention to itself as a film (*location, motion picture*) – and that film's maker before anything else. At the risk of his own unmasking, as Barbara Klinger notes, Hitchcock actively and self-consciously 'excorporates the text by activating and appropriating its elements.' (1989, p.7) This activation has the result of blurring the line between text and paratext, if not entirely obliterating it.

The *Psycho* trailer barely mentions the film's genre, with Hitchcock comfortable initially to eschew composer Bernard Herrmann's jarring strings for jaunty music that serves only to reintroduce him as the film's creator – a tone apt to his irreverent delivery. It is only when Hitchcock tells us that this harmless-looking location has become “the scene of a crime” that this tone shifts to something resembling the genre of the product being sold, and Herrmann's composition is at last used. Hitchcock reaches the famous Bates family home and reminds us that this is where the “most dire, horrible events took place”. Hitchcock refers to the film not only in past tense – contradicting the semantic tense of the trailer, whose province is the future – but almost as a form of historical record, edifying (his) fictional narrative to the position of reportage.

The director-as-host method here is unashamedly performative, an approach that for Hitchcock acts almost like an authorial interview with himself. For if he takes on the roles of interviewer and interviewee, he appeals not to the film's largest market – as the studio would have him do – but to his ideal viewer. This is because Hitchcock is subverting the ethos of the trailer, namely to trawl the depths of viewership through broad appeal. Instead, by employing ‘cinematic detours or “digressions”’ (Klinger, 1989, p.4), he seeks to ‘structure reception beyond textual boundaries’ via ‘social and intertextual agencies’. (Ibid.)

Indeed, Hitchcock structures this reception as he moves around the location like a tour guide: the jovial music recurs, never fully freeing us from the impudent presence of the man for whom this space is both workplace and playground. In so doing, Hitchcock begins to dovetail product and producer as he will in trailers to come, described later. But, limited to text and originator-of-text, this trailer contains relatively little of Hitchcock's creative-intellectual motivation. The switch between two methods of instruction balances at once the text and the ownership of that text, an oscillation that exists paradigmatically within a closed text. And later trailers go on to offer this between two texts: closed and open, co-existing in the same commercial-conceptual universe.

Three years later comes *The Birds*, an adaptation of the Daphne du Maurier novel that remains, given its glossy presentation, largely a closed text. Rather than laying out Hitchcock's creative objectives, it reconfirms the cycle of Hitchcock appearing in his own trailers and, with his controller-director status now recognised, he is developing into a form of personal product placement: establishing

and re-establishing the brand of ‘the Hitchcock film’, where ‘the exposure effect’ of such product placement is, Elizabeth Cowley argues, ‘facilitated by repetition’. (2012) But the trailer does come at a time when Hitchcock’s ‘desire to be accepted by both mass and elite audiences’ (Kapsis, 1992, p.82) is at its greatest. This was not merely a case of the studios promoting Hitchcock as ‘the real star’ (p.83) of *The Birds*. Hitchcock made it clear that he ‘did not want the advertising and publicity for the film to create the impression that [it] was just another film dealing exclusively with the killing of human beings.’ (p.85). For Hitchcock, this was a more important film artistically: it was a ‘more elevating film than *Psycho*.’ (Ibid.)

The trailer features Hitchcock once again introducing himself, and this time what he calls his “latest lecture” about birds and their relationship with humankind. Again, the tone is decidedly and inappropriately tongue-in-cheek: Hitchcock describes birds as “our good friends”. This is of course Hitchcock at his most ironic: his soothing words are counterpointed by images of humans abusing birds in different ways. Hitchcock downplays the film’s narrative diegesis in favour of its predominant theme. He does not merely present *The Birds*, he positions himself politically on the side of the film’s collective antagonist by reminding himself that it is humans, as aggressors against nature, who have had it coming. It is high time, he seems to be saying, that the birds exacted their revenge on us for our consistent brutality. If the wrongfully accused protagonist is a Hitchcockian familiar, here the director comes to the defence of the wrongfully accused antagonist: innocent birds driven to the edge by hostile *homo sapiens*. This, of course, is moralistic and interpretive and – save for the film’s apocalyptic ending – a diversion from the primary aim of the film’s funders, namely to sell the film with shock tactics.

It is an example of the closed text made open not through ambiguity per se, but with the potential for inverting the hero-villain duality, and thus offering a momentary opening of the closed text: eschewing this inversion for a sublimation of narrative and theme into an expression of ideas. By emphasising theme over narrative, Hitchcock intimates that the trailer might act as harbinger of artistic assertion.

From *Psycho* onwards, these trailers have a unifying style: Hitchcock’s appearance as ‘host’, a tonal hybrid of *auteur* irony and generic mood, and a revelation of the product not just as a narrative that suspends belief but as the result of the craft of a cinematic producer, where it is the film itself rather

than the entertainment made manifest. But pre-*Marnie* trailers differ in that their methodology works principally as paratext, or ‘texts that accompany a text as part of its dissemination.’ Klinger (1989, p.4) They sell Hitchcock films without resembling or entirely revealing their secrets – closed paratexts for closed texts. However, from the paratextual materials of his works following *The Birds* there is a palpable shift in his ‘allegiance from the general public to a more elitist and or intellectual audience.’ (Kapsis, 1992, p.67) And, in *Marnie*, this reaches its height as Hitchcock’s excessive style begins to render his text open. The resultingly open paratext, with Hitchcock as originator, offers clues to this openness: the director is no longer the stand-in journalistic host – he becomes the self-reflexive witness to his own artistic immoderations.

Excess as polysemantic style

The most commonly used *Marnie* trailer begins with a shot of Hitchcock atop a camera crane, with the studio’s publicity-friendly director-star once more as *de facto* narrator. As the crane descends, Bernard Herrmann’s lush instrumentation accompanies Hitchcock’s straight-to-camera introduction, his Leytonstone accent clipped at the edges by a Californian twang. “How do you do?” he asks, “I am Alfred Hitchcock and I’d like to tell you about my latest motion picture, *Marnie*, which will be coming to this theatre soon.” Then, flush with self-confidence and unapologetic to the point of tactlessness, without skipping a beat he continues: “*Marnie* is a very difficult film to classify. It is not *Psycho*. Nor do we have a horde of birds flapping about pecking at people willy-nilly.” In just two sentences, Hitchcock has succeeded in talking up his oeuvre under the assumption that it has entered popular consciousness, all the while debunking his work and making a mockery of film publicity by wantonly making the very trailer in which he appears instantly redundant.¹¹

And then: “We do have two very interesting human specimens: a man and a woman. One might call *Marnie* a ‘sex-mystery’. That is, if one used such words. But it is more than that. Perhaps the best way to tell you about the picture is to show you a few scenes.” The planting of the term ‘sex-mystery’ in the minds of 1960s audiences cannot be underestimated, painting the scenes that follow with the brush of a genre not yet imagined – and attempting to apply a new taxonomy to a well-worn marketing product, one that by now includes Hitchcock himself. By reclassifying, Hitchcock declassifies.

“This is Mark, coming down the stairs of his family home outside Philadelphia,” Hitchcock continues somewhat unhelpfully over images of what he describes: Sean Connery descending a staircase. “He is a thoughtful man, dark and brooding,” the director explains, as Connery looks at the camera in his churlish, insouciant way. It is footage shot exclusively for the trailer; a revival of the Hollywood star ‘playing themselves’. “He is, in a sense, a hunter.”

“And this is what he is hunting.” Cue a pair of similarly commodified legs, the kind of legs Hitchcock made his province, in a grey pencil skirt moving down a more workaday staircase. “Marnie – seeing her in her mother’s modest house, one wonders how two such different people could cross paths.” Tippi Hedren is revealed, Hitchcock’s objectified ‘this’, similarly breaking the fourth wall with arms folded in dilettantish defiance. “It was certainly not Marnie’s idea.” We cut to Marnie in less glamorous guise stealing wads of cash from an office safe. “Marnie was going about her own business like any normal girl,” Hitchcock smirks, now painfully wry and self-deprecating in the seemingly limitless comprehension of his own sense of dramatic irony. “Happy. Happy. Happy.”

We return to Sean Connery’s patriarchal Mark Rutland, glowering at Marnie from behind his desk, a backlot storm crashing behind his expensive drapes. “Suddenly into this colourful life comes Mark.” Next, we see Marnie’s irrational reaction to a little bit of lightning, and the natural conclusion of the man who must possess his female partner: “At first, he didn’t know what to make of Marnie.” Marnie screams, a Hitchcockian blonde as the director would have her: gleefully in peril and torment. “She does seem a rather excitable type. What would account for this strange behaviour?” This, as with the *Psycho* trailer, is a faux-investigation made with the cover of crude wit: “Has she just realised that she forgot her umbrella?” The lightning flashes red now, a moment of potentially alienating and excessive style not usually included in a trailer. “The colours! Stop the colours!” Marnie wails. Mark: “What colours?” The voice of Hitchcock returns like that of a clinical psychologist changing tack in an unproductive therapy session – “Marnie’s trouble goes deeper than that” – before an entire tree crashes through a Georgian windowpane, sending wood, fake glass and suspension of disbelief scattering across the Persian rug. “Far deeper.”

The inevitable sophomoric relationship with sex – one that Hitchcock usually kept to visual arrangements, perhaps most notably in *North by Northwest*’s phallic final shot of a train entering a

tunnel – is here expressed in words: “And this is the problem which Mark must probe. But first, something must be done to calm this girl.” Robert Burks’s camera moves into an extreme close-up as Mark kisses Marnie. “Our hero applies mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. But that may give you the impression that this picture is all sex and no mystery. Not so at all.”

The scene cuts to a racetrack, where a man has recognised the shapeshifting recidivist Marnie and threatens her with discovery. “Here, for example, Marnie is speaking to... uh... I’m not sure who, actually. But he is a man from her past, a past she seems to be denying.” Enough of that. Marnie and Mark are kissing once more. Hitchcock: “Oh dear, they’re at it again. Let me assure you that this is all in the spirit of investigation.” The scene now cuts to Marnie and Mark, driving. “And this? Here is further proof that Marnie is a talking picture.” Marnie: “You don’t love me. I’m just something you’ve caught. You think I’m some kind of animal you’ve trapped.” Mark: “That’s right, you are. And I’ve caught something really wild this time, haven’t I? I’ve tracked you and caught you and by God I’m going to keep you.”

Hitchcock returns, half embarrassed – “That should be quite enough. If you wish to hear more you will have to buy a ticket.” – and over the film’s notorious rape scene exclaims: “As for which one is a wild animal, there are times when I’m not sure.” For a man deeply involved in the perception of his audiences, it is a moment of astonishingly adroit condescension. As Mark rips off Marnie’s clothes, Hitchcock remarks: “I don’t think that was necessary,” as though his own characters are beyond his control. Yet the director found this moment indispensable to the trailer. “Actually, I think I should withhold comment, since I’m not certain I understand this scene. I shall leave the explanation to your own vivid imagination,” Hitchcock says, perhaps calling on the collusive gaze of the audience. “It would appear that Mark has a single solution for all problems,” he goes on. “This is not so. Mark is a complex man, dark and forbidding. He can also be kind and considerate. And he is also a troubled man.”

Now Marnie, some kind of hysterical impediment to the ‘troubles’ plaguing her husband, is (via crude back projection) on horseback and galloping towards a wall. She is hurtling to disaster. “Troubled because he cannot seem to unravel the mystery of the girl called... Marnie.” As Marnie and the horse appear to crash into the wall, the screen explodes in a series of animated titles:

IS Alfred Hitchcock's MARNIE

..... *A SEX STORY...?*
..... *A MYSTERY...?*
..... *A DETECTIVE STORY...?*
..... *A ROMANCE...?*
..... *A STORY OF A THIEF...?*
..... *A LOVE STORY...?*

...*YES*
AND MORE!

These titles, with their interrogative tone, become through such obscurantism the embodiment of Hitchcock's career-long attempts at both audience manipulation and stylised intrusion. It is the apotheosis of a tradition of trailers consecutively signalling Hitchcock's claims to authorship. With its director's hosting of the diegetic space and reference to the film in historical-biographic or anecdotal terms, the Hitchcock trailer contradicts the ethos of the classical trailer format, where the artifice should never be revealed in order to sustain illusory portrayal of the textual product. The *Marnie* trailer fully embraces this paradox, offering neither a surfeit of narrative information nor mis-selling. Instead it defers to a key Hitchcockian motive: an expression of the film's theme, tone and style as somehow intrinsic to its understanding and its character – the text as paratext.

Ambiguity as paratextual mythmaking

This conflation of the roles and positioning in the production continuum of text and paratext is in large part a result of the ambiguity of the trailer's presentation – embodied best in its attempt to offer up at least six different genres, a hybrid classification analogous to the ambiguity with which Hitchcock approaches his subject matter. But it is also where the excesses that begin with *Psycho* and *The Birds* reach their apex with *Marnie*. The shop-soiled Hitchcock devices recur – the icy blonde, violence, sexual power dynamics, simple psychology to explain complex aberrant behaviour – but, as they

emerge as an agent of Hitchcockian style previously underemphasised, here they fully flesh out the idea of ambiguity as formal component.

So, if their trailers are a by-product of personal involvement in narrative and a rupture in cinematic realism, then the closed texts they attempt to open have an overflowing of excess that inevitably call upon the director and becomes the centre of the ambiguous meaning of the films. The *Marnie* trailer thus offers perhaps the fullest range of Hitchcockian tropes that prior to the film were scattered variously through his oeuvre but here exist in their entirety. As such, the Hitchcock trailer has the role of distilling his films into ideas and themes existing principally to support the Hitchcockian universe.

All of this is in line with Hitchcock's deployment of paratexts for his own ends, and perhaps why in the *Marnie* trailer he describes his protagonists as "very interesting human specimens". This creative taxonomy calls to mind how Klinger notes Barthes's theoretical perspective of intertextuality as depicting 'a kind of *textus interruptus*, a narrative consistently subject to intertextual interferences that result in meaningful excursions from the text during the process of its reading.' (1989, p.6) The *Marnie* trailer described here is such a *textus interruptus*: analogous to the film it markets not as a precis of its source material, but in that it reproduces Hitchcockian paratextual conventions. In these conventions diegetic causality is eschewed in favour of enigmatic elements, direct address to the audience and (special) footage only to be seen by trailer spectators. In this way, the Hitchcock trailer generates interest not in its promise of exciting entertainment or its star performers, but rather in the 'suspenseful workings of the basically known story primarily by evoking its transgressive elements and heightening the shock value.' (Kernan, 2004, p.115)

Hitchcock's red fade is one such transgressive element, shown in the trailer to be somehow beyond his own comprehension. It draws our attention to both the putative cinematic author and the cinematic medium, because we know the diegetic world has not suddenly turned red – we are at the mercy of Hitchcock's manipulation of celluloid. The violence of this extradiegetic shift turns our attention to the material support and, consequently, to the director. As the film draws attention to technique, cinematic plausibility is lost and acts in opposition to the dream-selling role of trailers. It is a moment of excess as knowing disunity of style.¹²

Such devices did not go unnoticed or unpunished. Contemporaneous critics attacked the film for its unrealistic décor, tacky special effects and odd camera angles. (Moral, 2002, p.165) The aforementioned storm exemplifies this criticism, which questioned why the scene was played without a modicum of plausibility. The lightning of the storm flashes in the same red as earlier used in the dissolves, action thematically in the tradition of Sirkian melodrama but also a Hitchcockian wink at pure formalism: style for style's sake. This means once more that for Hitchcock the trailer serves the marketing of the film (an explanation of what it is about), but only as second fiddle to his expressionistic treatment. (Wood, 2002, p.211) He indulges his tastes to relinquish the rigours of the 'invisible' diegesis to draw attention to style and technique and to remind us that we are watching a film, again something that seems counter-intuitive to the purpose of a trailer.

But at this point in his career Hitchcock is no longer burdened by a need to satisfy the imperative of studio-system filmmaking – he is able to deploy an open text. *Marnie* 'failed miserably at the box office' (Kapsis, 1992, p.67) and was, for the most part, poorly received by critics. Eugene Archer in *The New York Times* described the film as:

[T]he master's most disappointing film in years (...) A strong suspicion arises that Mr. Hitchcock is taking himself too seriously – perhaps the result of listening to too many esoteric admirers. Granted that it's still Hitchcock – and that's a lot – dispensing with the best in acting, writing and even technique is sheer indulgence. When a director decides he's so gifted that all he needs is himself, he'd better watch out. (1964, cited by Moral 2002, p.166)

Archer criticises Hitchcock for placing himself and his reputation before the needs the film, namely the supposed duty on the part of the filmmaker to care about his audience and tell a good story. Rather than critiquing the film on its merits or demerits, Archer objects to the film precisely because of the perception that Hitchcock's presence should be enough of a reason for it to be viewed, a fact borne out by the presentation of this and his earlier trailers. But as later, more favourable reviews show, a shift begins to occur in the perception of Hitchcock and the reinterpretation of his canon, in which his recurring themes, ideas, motifs and preoccupations come to form the hallmarks of his singularity of

vision and his 'art'. The role of the trailer changes concomitantly: designed as a film package, it becomes an epigraph.

To this end, Hitchcock seemed not only to understand the liminal space between art (or at least *auteurship*) and the cinema industry, but positioned himself as arbiter of that space. By appearing as the author introducing his own work, he sidesteps both Adorno and Horkheimer's warning about the denial of art (which the studio system embodies) and Barthes's author-death, embracing 'Foucault's concept of the author function [that] allows a middle ground, wherein the author is denied outright authority, but exists as a discursive entity that channels and networks notions of value, identity, coherence, skill, and unity.' (Gray, 2010, p.109). In this way, Hitchcock is the trailer itself, reasserting its function and his role as creator and determinant. And, in the absence of other tools of generic marketing (with the case of *Marnie* as a glaring example), the studio defers to these elements in the director's toolkit and hopes audiences respond in kind.

'Hollywood's Master of Cinematic Art'¹³

Decades later, reviewer Jonathan McCalmont would describe *Marnie* as 'wonderful', focusing on its multi-layered, unashamedly frank approach to psychoanalysis. He writes:

[*Marnie*] is not only a fascinating character study, but also a meditation upon the moral status of psychoanalysis as an activity. So, while *Marnie* is a film that openly accepts a Freudian vision of psychological dysfunction, it is also a film that knows that not everyone is so easily read. (McCalmont, 2009)

McCalmont's serious appraisal of the film's themes and the styles it uses to evoke these are thus a far cry from the film's first reception; why the shift? I would argue that this is not merely down to a changing cultural perspective, nor indeed empty nostalgia for the hidden gems to be found in retrospectively reassessed films. Rather, this reappraisal of mainstream cultural artifacts amounts to a legitimization of Hitchcock within academic discourse, with the result that *Marnie* can be read as both an entertainment and a drama dealing with dark themes in ambiguous ways. This might go some way to explaining how (and why) Hitchcock wilfully committed what might be considered – at least in

commercial terms – the principal *faux pas* of any trailer: deliberately making it unclear to audiences what the film was about. As a studio picture, *Marnie* is *sui generis* designed as a closed text. This closure is key to its commodification, and any paratext that forms part of its marketing must be intrinsically linked to this state of closure; interpretation is not marketable, nor indeed can marketisation be open to interpretation.

Vertigo was marketed (without the presence of Hitchcock) as a genre picture but performed poorly at the box office; it was a critical success primarily thanks to its retrospectively polysemous interpretation.¹⁴ Apparently stung by that experience, the studios supported Hitchcock's re-emergence in the trailers of the films that followed, to great success. *Marnie*, given its glossy presentation and bankable stars, begins as a closed text and is turned open by Hitchcock in the trailer. In so doing, Hitchcock, it might be said, is protecting his material from what Klinger describes as the 'social environment that subjects it to interference and dissociation from its original authorial intent.' (1989, p.8) So, to what extent was his determination from *Psycho* onwards to begin to open closed texts – grounded in ambiguity – the basis for such reappraisal?

There is a sense that he believed his integrity – whether in the form of entertainment, incipient meaning or critical acclaim – could only be maintained if a work were open, regardless of its production context, because 'the open work is able to ward off these social intrusions because of its difficult form, and it thus maintains a closer bond with the sender of the message.' (Ibid.) Hitchcockian style as plot device becomes a mark of intent: his attempt at safeguarding the polysemanticity of his work. As an extension of the psychological musings of *Psycho* and *The Birds*, *Marnie* is not just a film with narrative elements of psychoanalysis, it is 'explicitly coloured by psychoanalysis.' (Heath, 1977, p.29) Hitchcock thus seems to argue that a film about psychoanalysis needs to be as open to interpretation as is the discipline used to unlock its mystery.

Perhaps most tellingly, *Marnie* was a commercial failure as well. Was this a result of the studio failing to support it, or confusing audiences with a 'suspenseful sex-mystery' that promised too much? It is hard to say, but only four films followed for Hitchcock, each as critically undistinguished as the next even with the revisionism of academic hindsight. *Marnie* turned out to be the *ne plus ultra* of a

career that had seen commercial and stylistic highs and lows. That this was a high point is evidenced by the successive disappointments that would follow, and by the trailers that accompanied them.

Torn Curtain (1966) came next, a curious confection of spy thriller, romance and soap opera, with Brian Moore's screenplay and Julie Andrews's miscasting – along with her lack of on-screen chemistry with Paul Newman – largely to blame for the alienating effect the film had on viewers.¹⁵ Hitchcock was not involved in its trailer.

For *Topaz* (1969), he reappears in a split-screen configuration alongside the trailer narrator and diegetic extracts, from which we are asked: “Does the name *Topaz* mean anything to you?” Hitchcock responds with: “A story of espionage in high places.” Even with his career on the wane, the director remains the drawcard here: no star name is quoted other than his. Indeed, the film offers us the somewhat obscure promise that, for this film *Hitchcock tops Hitchcock*. But for this fleeting line, Hitchcock does not appear in person or in voice for the rest of the trailer, which follows a classical format of diegetic footage/generic narrator, while posing questions about the mystery at its heart without answering them. Hitchcock does not answer these questions or claim that *Topaz* might be anything other than a closed text. There is no marketing gimmick here: the answer to what ‘Topaz’ might be is contained in the film's diegesis and not in the preoccupations or excesses of a director-presenter.

Then, in 1972, Hitchcock appears in the trailer for *Frenzy*. His introduction is a recreation of the opening scene of the film, a black comedy moment in which a city official promises to clean the Thames of the “waste products of our society” and that it will carry “no foreign bodies”, shortly before a corpse bobs ashore. Here, however, the body is substituted with Hitchcock's: a floating, talking cadaver who to camera intones: “I dare say you are wondering why I am floating around London like this. I am on the famous Thames river... investigating a murder. Rivers can be very sinister places, and in my new film *Frenzy*, this river you may say is the scene of a very horrible murder.”

The scene cuts back to *Frenzy*'s diegesis, and the floating corpse of its introductory scene for which Hitchcock was doubling. Once more, producer-as-paratext and text-as-product intermingle, and as Hitchcock reminds us “one can never be sure where danger lurks”, he plays detective: “My investigation led me to this innocent alley, of which there are hundreds in London, but I don't think we should stay long, something unpleasant is about to happen.” While the jocular tone offers some

polysemantic interpretation, suddenly this *shlick* feels shop-worn, as the trailer cuts to what is in many ways the film's most discussed scene, in which Hitchcock's camera moves into a building with the murderer and his next victim, following them through a gloomy corridor and up the stairs before retreating down the same path as if too horrified to witness the crime, forcing the audience to construct it in their imagination. Such camerawork draws attention to itself and, once more, to Hitchcock, and its use – beyond any sense of practicable film language – is deliberately open to interpretation. One such is that of Gilles Deleuze, who unravels the scene thus: 'She went in free, but cannot expect any help - the murder is inexorable'. (1986, p.19) It is an open intertextual moment in a closed paratext. Yet the trailer does not allude to this momentary intrusion of the film's author, reducing the movement to its generic origins. In the midst of Hitchcock's decline, could it be that his influence over his paratexts, and the ambiguity sewn into their style, had lessened too?

With his tongue-in-cheek tone pushed to the point of self-parody, in one of the trailers for *Family Plot* (1976), his final feature, Hitchcock reappears. Sweeping a graveyard, he is introduced by a generic narrator, who offers: "The master of suspense, Alfred Hitchcock, is involved in a family plot." Hitchcock jokes about his credentials as a spiritualist before peering into a crystal ball in which his directing credit appears, a name he finds "strangely familiar". He then looms in front of a back projection, gasping "My word!" at the sight of an old woman kicking over a headstone – a merging of film and trailer footage again conflating text and paratext. "What a grave insult," Hitchcock continues, evoking the gallows humour of *The Trouble with Harry*. Hitchcock goes on to introduce the film's characters – "live ones" as he calls them – before the narrator takes over, imploring us to find the answers to the questions Hitchcock poses on the back of a ticket stub. Hitchcock's role here has been reduced to a gimmick: a faux-narrator, or irresponsible creator whose appearance is to sell tickets but not to explain why they should be bought, or to open up any possible interpretations.

Thus, the potential for polysemanticity, or indeed allusions to thematic ambiguity, brought up in earlier trailers and gradually lessened in post-*Marnie* iterations, proposes in the construction of Hitchcockian paratexts an intersection of the materialism of the commercial package and the abstraction of artistic ambition. Given the depth of its performative nature, his trailers iteratively border on spoof with respect to their abstruseness, where 'the artistry of authorial intent and the machinations of

commercialism are woven together.’ (Hesford, 2013) As such, they represent an ever-shifting bellwether in not only Hitchcock’s career, but also the degree to which he maintained control of his semantic products – and how they were to be disseminated and interpreted.

Given the costly failures at the twilight of his career, if Hitchcock’s trailers can be seen as analogous to his cinematic output, in the absence of formal explanation they remain something of an oddity – outliers even in the varied output of a director for whom actors should be ‘treated like cattle’. (Scott & Truffaut, 1985, p.140) In many ways, Hitchcock’s obscurantism is a symptom (or by-product) of marketing methods that collectively represent filmmaking myths preternaturally and emphatically revealed: the three-card trick convincing us not just to pay for what we’re seeing, but to understand what it might be worth.

Such a critique of the idiosyncratic nature of trailers has the potential to act as corollary to the uniqueness of films in Hitchcock’s oeuvre, as well as to the canon of other directors making similar claims to authorship.¹⁶ As I have attempted to show, such an analysis offers speculation and a reconsideration of directorial ‘epiphenomena’. It therefore has ramifications not just for a reassessment of Hitchcock’s work as being understood in terms of its full scope, namely the tension between text and paratext, but also for other filmmakers to engage in similar paratextual subterfuge wherever the codified use of closed-text marketing for open-text work persists.

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- ¹ Posters used a similar marketing approach, some carrying the somewhat baffling description of “Suspenseful Sex Mystery”.
- ² Decades of financial (and therefore creative) insecurity for Hitchcock came to an end with his signing of a Paramount contract in 1954. Here, agent and studio executive Lew Wasserman was ‘able to escalate all the terms, protecting Hitchcock’s independence and autonomy; improving his salary, expenses, and perks; and implementing profit and (finally) gross percentages that put Hitchcock on a par with any director in Hollywood.’ McGilligan (2003, p. 478). This decade of relatively unimpeded creative and commercial freedom included work with other studios, such as MGM, from 1958. (p. 565)
- ³ Prior to 1960, Hitchcock’s name appears frequently in trailers for his films, and the director appears in several trailers as himself, either through voiceover or in person. Such films include *Rear Window* (1954) and *The Wrong Man* (1956).
- ⁴ This canonisation did not seem to sit well with everyone. An *Evening News* critic of the time of *Marnie*’s release asked: ‘Has high-brow [sic] praise in *Les Cahier* [sic] *du Cinéma* gone to his head?’ See Tony Lee Moral, *Hitchcock and the Making of Marnie* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2002), p. 164.
- ⁵ For more on this usage, see Gérard Genette, *Paratexts*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- ⁶ It is worth noting that for several films listed here, more than one trailer was produced. The trailer to which I refer is therefore not necessarily the only such example, but has content apposite to this discussion, namely the paratextual product Hitchcock deployed for polysemantic style.
- ⁷ Title text from the introduction to the trailer, hosted by Hitchcock, for *The Birds* (1963).
- ⁸ Hitchcock was reputed to have had creative control of most of his trailers, and although this trailer was made by the Warner Bros. trailer department (which after 1940 had a contract with NSS as well but still produced trailers), we can assume that for the most part, Hitchcock made it. See Kernan (2004, p. 256, n36.)
- ⁹ A notable contemporaneous example is the trailer for *Magnificent Obsession* (Douglas Sirk, 1954). Jane Wyman, the film’s star, appears by picking up a copy of the film’s source material – the Lloyd C. Douglas novel of the same name. Wyman talks about being “so thrilled to be have been selected” to appear in the film, but, in spite of Sirk’s later canonical re-assessment (in the Hitchcock mould), the emphasis here is on the film’s performers and its literary as opposed to cinematic author. The ‘big font’ title refers to Lloyd C. Douglas’s *Magnificent Obsession*. Indeed, the trailer makes no mention of Douglas Sirk.
- ¹⁰ Hitchcock’s assistant Peggy Robertson notes that ‘every Hitchcock picture was 99.9/100 Hitchcock. It was always Hitch, and the trailers worked the same way.’ Goodwin (1981, p. 87)
- ¹¹ “Such was Hitchcock’s elevated status at this point – note how he literally ascends from a lofty position at the beginning – that he could refer to his previous films with the expectation that the general audience would know what he was talking about.” Heron (2011)
- ¹² The repetition of the same device throughout the film fulfils Kristin Thompson’s hallmarks for the evidence of excess. Thompson refers to how ‘the repeated use of multiple devices to serve similar functions tends to minimise the importance of their narrative implications’. In so doing, Thompson argues, ‘they become foregrounded primarily through their own innate interest [...] and take on an importance greater than its narrative or compositional function would seem to warrant.’ (Thompson, 1998, p.517) The prominence of Hitchcockian excess in *Marnie* seems to have been enough to influence other directors, including Martin Scorsese, who employed the fade-to-red technique in his 1991 remake of *Cape Fear*, a similarly florid and stylised melodrama. Long-time Hitchcock collaborator Bernard Herrmann scored both films.
- ¹³ A marketing manual provided for theatre owners upon the release of *Marnie* described Hitchcock thus. (Kapsis, 1992, p.93)
- ¹⁴ The *Vertigo* trailer begins with a helpful dictionary definition of vertigo, before employing the classical format of diegetic scenes re-cut. Hitchcock does not appear in person or in voice, and while the film’s themes, such as reincarnation and obsession, are hinted at, the presentation is that of the thriller genre, as the trailer climaxes with what is the film’s opening chase scene, offering the title: *Only Hitchcock Could Weave This Tangled Web of Terror*.
- ¹⁵ Richard Schickel, writing in *Life Magazine*, notes how *Torn Curtain* is not a failure because Hitchcock has failed artistically, in which case one might still be ‘respectfully intrigued by the gropings of one of the few genuine artists to function successfully in the commercial cinema.’ Rather than an ambitious failure the film is a disappointment, where Hitchcock fails ‘through lack of ambition’. Schickel (1966, p. 17)
- ¹⁶ A modern equivalent can be drawn with film director Paul Thomas Anderson, a multiple award-winning filmmaker. Anderson is more involved in his promotional material than most: he cut his own trailer for his 2012 film *The Master*, using footage never included for theatrical release.