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The Enduring Shadow of "Maternal Emptiness": From Hitchcock's Distorted Mother Image to Contemporary Cinema's Maternal Representations

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Abstract: Alfred Hitchcock, the master of suspense, is renowned for his unique cinematic style and profound insights into the complexity of human nature. Among the various female characters in his films, the mother figure holds a particularly significant place. This article proposes the concept of "maternal emptiness" to describe the predicament of the mother figures in Hitchcock's films, where they are often depicted as distorted, dark, and somewhat lacking in maternal essence. Drawing on psychoanalytic and feminist film theories, especially the works of Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and Laura Mulvey, this study aims to deconstruct Hitchcockian "maternal emptiness" and explore its deep-rooted causes. Through a systematic examination of the mother figures in Hitchcock's filmography, this article identifies the following three main categories: the mother roles of blonde women, the mother roles of female protagonists, and the mother roles of male protagonists. Close textual analysis reveals that these mother figures, despite their apparent diversity, share a common plight—a deviation from the maternal essence of love, care, and nourishment. This "maternal emptiness" is further traced back to Hitchcock's childhood traumas, the patriarchal ideology in the cultural context, and the changing status of motherhood in modern society. By engaging critically with existing Hitchcock scholarship, including the works of Tania Modleski, Paul Gordon, and Slavoj Žižek, this study situates the concept of "maternal emptiness" within the broader discussions of motherhood in cinema. It explores how Hitchcock's representation of mothers both reflects and challenges contemporary understandings of maternity. Furthermore, this study examines the enduring influence of Hitchcock's maternal representations on contemporary cinema, analyzing films such as Darren Aronofsky's "*Mother!*" (2017) and Ari Aster's "*Hereditary*" (2018) to demonstrate the ongoing relevance of "maternal emptiness" in modern film discourse. The study concludes by considering the legacy of Hitchcock's maternal representations in contemporary cinema, demonstrating the ongoing relevance of the concept of "maternal emptiness" in film analysis and its potential for reimagining maternal subjectivity in cinematic representation.

Keywords: Alfred Hitchcock; maternal emptiness; psychoanalytic film theory; feminist film theory; male gaze; maternal subjectivity; contemporary cinema

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1. Introduction

Alfred Hitchcock, one of the most influential filmmakers of the 20th century, is globally acclaimed for his distinctive aesthetic of suspense and profound insights into human nature. Throughout his cinematic oeuvre, female characters constitute a core dimension of Hitchcock's film aesthetic, with the mother figure emerging as a crucial recurring theme. As early as his 1925 debut film "*The Pleasure Garden*", Hitchcock began experimenting with innovative cinematic techniques—such as characters gazing directly into the camera and extensive use of subjective shots—that blurred the boundary between screen and audience, involving viewers directly in the narrative discourse and transforming them into objects of the "gaze" (Lacan 1977).

This study builds upon and extends the rich tradition of Hitchcock scholarship, particularly works focusing on maternal figures in his films. We propose the concept of "maternal emptiness" as a unifying framework for understanding Hitchcock's complex and often contradictory portrayals of mothers, while also tracing the legacy of these representations in contemporary cinema. This concept allows us to synthesize psychoanalytic, feminist, and cultural approaches to Hitchcock's work, offering a new perspective on his treatment of maternal figures and their enduring influence.

Gordon's "*Dial M for Mother: A Freudian Hitchcock*" (Gordon 2008) provides a comprehensive psychoanalytic reading of Hitchcock's maternal figures, arguing that the director's complex relationship with his own mother deeply influenced his cinematic portrayals. Gordon's work is crucial in understanding the psychological underpinnings of Hitchcock's mother figures, offering insights into how personal experiences shape artistic expression. Our concept of "maternal emptiness" builds on Gordon's analysis, extending it to encompass the broader cultural and societal factors that contribute to the depiction of mothers in Hitchcock's films and beyond.

Modleski's "*The Women Who Knew Too Much*" (Modleski 1988) offers a feminist perspective, exploring how Hitchcock's films both reinforce and subvert the patriarchal notions of motherhood. Modleski's analysis is particularly valuable in its deconstruction of the male gaze in Hitchcock's work, revealing the complex power dynamics at play in his representation of women and mothers. Her work provides a foundation for our understanding of the ambivalence inherent in Hitchcock's maternal figures, which we further develop through the lens of "maternal emptiness".

E. Ann Kaplan's seminal work on motherhood and representation in popular culture and melodrama offers valuable insights into the cultural construction of motherhood. In her book, "*Motherhood and Representation*" (Kaplan 2013), Kaplan analyzes the "angel" and "witch" mother paradigms in nineteenth-century women's writing and twentieth-century women's melodrama, providing a historical context for understanding Hitchcock's maternal figures. Our concept of "maternal emptiness" extends Kaplan's paradigms, offering a more nuanced understanding of how these archetypes manifest in Hitchcock's work and continue to influence contemporary cinema.

Žižek's analysis in "*Looking Awry*" (Žižek 1991) is particularly relevant to our concept of "maternal emptiness", as he discusses the 'ferocious maternal superego' unburdened by phallic or patriarchal law. While Žižek's concept aligns closely with our notion of the irrational and desire-laden maternal figure, "maternal emptiness" goes further by exploring how this figure is simultaneously present and absent, powerful and powerless, in Hitchcock's cinematic universe.

Furthermore, Mladen Dolan's assertion that "Hitchcock's universe is a maternal universe" (in Žižek's "*Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan: But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock*", Dolan and Žižek 1992) provides a crucial foundation for our exploration of maternal themes in Hitchcock's work. Our study extends this perspective by examining how this 'maternal universe' is characterized by a pervasive sense of emptiness or lack.

While Mulvey's original concept of the male gaze remains foundational to our understanding of Hitchcock's portrayal of mothers, more recent developments in gaze theory offer additional insights. For instance, (Kaplan 1997) work on the 'imperial gaze' and Bell Hooks' (1992) concept of the 'oppositional gaze' provide frameworks for considering how race and power dynamics intersect with gender in cinematic representations. Moreover, (Chandler 1998) expansion of gaze theory to include 'the spectator's gaze', 'the intra-diegetic gaze', and 'the camera's gaze' offers a more nuanced approach to analyzing the complex dynamics of looking in Hitchcock's films. This paper will apply these updated perspectives on gaze theory to further illuminate the concept of "maternal emptiness" in Hitchcock's work.

Our study identifies three main categories of mother figures in Hitchcock's filmography as follows: the mother roles of blonde women, the mother roles of female protagonists, and the mother roles of male protagonists. Through close textual analysis, we explore how

these different categories of maternal figures contribute to the overall concept of "maternal emptiness" in Hitchcock's work and how they relate to broader cultural representations of motherhood.

The generative logic of the "maternal emptiness" predicament in Hitchcock's films is rooted in the complex psychological mechanism present in his shaping of mother figures, reflecting a profound contradiction and unconscious anxiety about maternal power. This article traces this "maternal emptiness" back to Hitchcock's childhood traumas, the patriarchal ideology in the cultural context, and the changing status of motherhood in modern society.

This paper concludes by examining the legacy of Hitchcock's maternal representations in contemporary cinema. By analyzing recent films such as "*Mother!*" and "*Hereditary*", we demonstrate how the concept of "maternal emptiness" continues to resonate in modern filmmaking. Our findings suggest that while Hitchcock's influence remains strong, there are also emerging attempts to transcend this paradigm, pointing towards new possibilities for representing motherhood in cinema.

In summary, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of maternal representations in Hitchcock's films, situating them within broader cultural and theoretical contexts. By introducing the concept of "maternal emptiness", we offer a new perspective on Hitchcock's work that synthesizes psychoanalytic, feminist, and cultural approaches. This concept not only provides a unified framework for understanding Hitchcock's complex portrayal of mothers but also opens up new avenues for exploring the representation of motherhood in cinema more broadly. As we continue to grapple with the legacy of Hitchcock's work and its influence on contemporary film, the concept of "maternal emptiness" offers a valuable tool for critically examining and potentially reimagining the role of the mother in cinematic narratives.

2. Maternal Emptiness: Theoretical Tracing and Connotation Definition

2.1. "Maternal Emptiness": Proposing a Theoretical Problem

Through our preliminary examination of the mother figures in Hitchcock's films, we propose the theoretical concept of "maternal emptiness". While this term has not yet been fully defined in the existing literature, several scholars have touched upon the predicament and absence of maternity in contemporary cultural contexts, drawing on perspectives from psychoanalysis and feminism.

E. Ann Kaplan's work is particularly relevant here. In "*Motherhood and Representation*" (Kaplan 2013), Kaplan explores the cultural construction of motherhood, identifying two dominant paradigms—the "angel" mother and the "witch" mother. These paradigms, rooted in nineteenth-century women's writing and twentieth-century melodrama, provide a historical context for understanding the complex and often contradictory representations of mothers in Hitchcock's films. Kaplan's analysis of how these paradigms evolve and persist in popular culture offers a valuable foundation for our concept of "maternal emptiness".

Our concept of "maternal emptiness" builds upon and extends Kaplan's paradigms. While Kaplan's work focuses on the dichotomy between idealized and demonized mothers, "maternal emptiness" explores the space between and beyond these extremes. It addresses the sense of lack, absence, or incompleteness that permeates maternal representations, even when mothers are present or seemingly fulfilling their expected roles.

Swigart (1991) explored the emotional emptiness faced by mothers behind the myth of the "bad mother", a concept that aligns closely with our notion of "maternal emptiness". Arnold (2013) pointed out that the pathological mother figure in horror films reflects the male cultural imagination's fear of maternity, which resonates with Hitchcock's often sinister portrayal of mothers. Fischer (2014) revealed the common metaphor of the "absent mother" in classic Hollywood films, embodying the suppression of maternal identity by the male-dominated film discourse.

These studies provide important theoretical groundwork for the generation of the concept of "maternal emptiness". However, our concept goes beyond these individual

observations to propose a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex and often contradictory representations of motherhood in cinema, particularly in Hitchcock's work and its legacy in contemporary film.

2.2. Lacan's Theory of "Lack of the Mother" and Its Cinematic Interpretation

In the realm of psychoanalytic theory, Lacan's concept of the "lack of the mother" has important implications for understanding the maternal predicament. Lacan posits that the mother, as the primordial "other" of the subject, is both the object of the subject's desire and marks the "castration" that the subject must accept to enter the symbolic order. The "lack of the mother" thus constitutes the traumatic condition for the formation of the subject (Lacan 1977).

Žižek (1991) and Samuels (1998) further point out that many cinematic texts unfold around a potential theme of "lack of the mother", presenting the sense of emptiness and violent impulses of the subject after separation from the "maternal body". In Hitchcock's films, the mother figure often appears as an "absent presence", "real" in a symbolic sense, reflecting a trauma deep within the subject that is difficult to salve.

Our concept of "maternal emptiness" builds upon Lacan's theory but extends it to encompass not just the subject's experience of maternal lack, but also the ways in which maternal figures themselves are depicted as lacking or empty. This dual perspective allows us to explore both the psychological impact of maternal absence on characters and the broader cultural implications of depicting mothers as incomplete or inadequate.

Žižek's concept of the 'ferocious maternal superego' is particularly relevant to our understanding of "maternal emptiness". This concept describes a maternal figure unburdened by phallic or patriarchal law, aligning closely with the irrational and desire-laden maternal figures often found in Hitchcock's films. The 'ferocious maternal superego' can be seen as a manifestation of "maternal emptiness", where the mother's subjectivity is replaced by an overwhelming, often threatening presence that dominates the psychic landscape of the film.

2.3. Kristeva's Theory of the "Semiotic Chora" and Its Cinematic Interpretation

French feminist theorist Julia Kristeva's theory of the "semiotic chora" provides another important path for understanding the maternal predicament in depth. Kristeva defines the "semiotic chora" as a nonsymbiotic realm of desire, the primordial state of unity between the subject and the maternal body before entering the symbolic order. However, under the discipline of male discourse, the "semiotic chora" often becomes suppressed, marginalized, and even "abjected" (Kristeva and Roudiez 1982).

Creed (1993) and Fischer (2014) use this as a theoretical resource to analyze the figure of the "monstrous mother" in horror films, revealing the fear and desire for a return to the "semiotic chora" hidden within. In Hitchcock's films, the shaping of figures such as the mad mother and the over-possessive mother all reveal a deep anxiety about the power of the "semiotic chora".

The concept of "maternal emptiness" draws on Lacan's theory of 'lack of the mother' and Kristeva's notion of the "semiotic chora", synthesizing these ideas to explain how Hitchcock's films simultaneously idealize and negate the maternal figure. However, our concept goes beyond these theories by exploring how this simultaneous idealization and negation results in a pervasive sense of emptiness or lack in maternal representations.

While the application of Kristeva's concept of the "semiotic chora" to Hitchcock's work remains relatively unexplored in existing scholarship, our analysis suggests that it offers a fruitful lens through which to understand the complex and often contradictory representations of motherhood in his films. The "semiotic chora", as a pre-linguistic realm associated with the maternal body, can be seen as both a source of anxiety and a site of potential disruption in Hitchcock's cinematic universe.

For instance, in "*Psycho*" (1960), the overwhelming presence of the mother, even after her death, can be interpreted as an eruption of the semiotic into the symbolic order.

Norman's inability to fully separate from his mother to the point of adopting her identity represents a failure to fully enter the symbolic order and a regression to the semiotic realm. Similarly, in "*The Birds*" (1963), the inexplicable and irrational attacks of the birds can be seen as a manifestation of the "semiotic chora", disrupting the ordered world of the characters and coinciding with the appearance of a new maternal figure in the protagonist's life.

By applying Kristeva's theory to Hitchcock's work, we can gain new insights into the director's complex portrayal of motherhood and its relationship to language, identity, and social order. This application not only enriches our understanding of Hitchcock's films but also demonstrates the ongoing relevance of Kristeva's theories to film analysis.

2.4. The Concept of "Maternity" from a Feminist Perspective and Its Critique

Feminist theory provides rich perspectives for interpreting the concept of "maternity". On the one hand, feminists emphasize the positive significance of maternity as a constituent of female identity, viewing it as a unique and potentially subversive female experience (Rich 1995). On the other hand, feminism also critiques the objectification and instrumentalization of maternity in patriarchal discourse.

O'Reilly (2004) points out that the concept of maternity faces many predicaments in the contemporary social context, such as the rupture of public/private domains, the singularization of motherhood, and the lack of maternal subjectivity. These theoretical insights provide an important reference point for examining the predicament of maternal representation in contemporary cinema.

Kaplan's work is again crucial here. Her exploration of the appropriation of minority mother discourse and her charting of the contesting and often contradictory discourses of the mother in present-day America through cultural perspectives, with emphasis on reproductive technologies, science and consumerism, as well as on new fathers, offers a broader framework for situating Hitchcock's maternal representations within larger cultural narratives. This perspective allows us to see how Hitchcock's portrayal of mothers both reflects and contributes to broader cultural discourses about motherhood.

Our concept of "maternal emptiness" builds on these feminist critiques, offering a way to understand how the contradictions and tensions in societal attitudes towards motherhood manifest in cinematic representations. It provides a lens through which we can examine how Hitchcock's films, and subsequently contemporary cinema, grapple with these complex and often conflicting views of maternity.

2.5. Defining the Connotation of "Maternal Emptiness"

Synthesizing the aforementioned theoretical resources, we can construct a preliminary definition of the connotation of "maternal emptiness". "Maternal emptiness" refers to a symptom in cinematic representation where the mother figure exhibits a lack of maternal identity, a devaluation of maternal value, and an emptying of maternal subjectivity. This concept encompasses the various ways in which mothers in Hitchcock's films are portrayed as absent, excessive, or objectified, reflecting both the subordinate position of the maternal subject in male discourse and the universality of the maternal predicament in the contemporary cultural context.

Building on Kristeva's notion of the abject mother (Kristeva and Roudiez 1982) and Mulvey's concept of the male gaze (Mulvey 1975), "maternal emptiness" offers a new lens through which Hitchcock's complex portrayal of motherhood can be examined. In the classic cinematic texts of Hitchcock and others, the mother figure often exists in a field of tension and paradox, where they are either absent (like the deceased mother in "*Rear Window*"), excessively present (like the authoritarian mother in "*North by Northwest*"), or degraded into objects of desire (like Mrs. Bates in "*Psycho*"); they are rarely depicted as independent subjects displaying maternal love.

The various symptoms of "maternal emptiness" indicate the systematic suppression, marginalization, and even stigmatization suffered by the maternal subject in the patriarchal order's imagination of maternity. This concept allows us to critically examine not only

Hitchcock's works but also the broader cultural representation of motherhood in cinema and beyond.

3. The Genealogy of Mother Figures in Hitchcock's Films

Based on the theoretical framework established, we will now systematically examine the genealogy of mother figures in Hitchcock's films. We have identified three main categories of maternal figures in Hitchcock's filmography, namely the mother roles of blonde women, the mother roles of female protagonists, and the mother roles of male protagonists. Through close textual analysis, we will explore how these different categories contribute to the overall concept of "maternal emptiness" in Hitchcock's work.

3.1. Special Mother Roles: The Maternal Predicament of Blonde Women

As illustrated in Table 1, Hitchcock's blonde characters often embody complex maternal roles, reflecting a tension between sexuality and motherhood.

Table 1. Hitchcock's blonde characters often play complex maternal roles.

Special Mother Roles (Blonde Women)		
"The Lodger" (1927)	Blonde Woman	Shows protectiveness toward her daughter but also has a self-defense mechanism
"The Man Who Knew Too Much" (1934)	Blonde Woman	Daughter is kidnapped; mother figure suffers severe psychological trauma
"Sabotage" (1936)	Blonde Woman	Brother dies tragically; mother figure is shrouded in the shadow of tragedy
"The Trouble with Harry" (1955)	Blonde Woman	Son witnesses a corpse; mother figure is connected with death imagery
"The Man Who Knew Too Much" (1956)	Blonde Woman	Son is kidnapped; mother figure faces threats and trials

As the central iconic female figure in Hitchcock's films, the blonde woman often carries the projection of male desire. However, many of these blonde women also simultaneously play the role of mother. In these compound images that combine sensual charm and maternal aura, the identity as a mother often degenerates into a mere appendage of male desire, becoming a repressed and exiled "other". This lack of maternal identity recognition causes the deep predicament of the blonde woman mother role.

In "*The Lodger*" (1927), the blonde woman as a mother not only shows protectiveness toward her daughter but also has a certain self-defense mechanism. This contradictory psychology suggests the awkward situation of a maternal identity extant under the projection of desire. In both versions of "*The Man Who Knew Too Much*" (1934 and 1956), the blonde woman's mother roles experience the tragedy of their children being kidnapped, and their maternity suffers severe threats and trauma. "*Sabotage*" (1936) and "*The Trouble with Harry*" (1955) place the mother figure under the shadow of death, linking the mother role closely with trauma and death imagery.

The representation of blonde mothers in Hitchcock's films aligns with what E. Ann Kaplan describes as the "male melodrama", where "the mother figure is split between the 'good' (asexual) mother and the 'bad' (sexual) woman" (Kaplan 2013, p. 76). This splitting reflects the inherent tension in Hitchcock's portrayal of maternal figures, where their sexuality and motherhood are often presented as mutually exclusive, contributing to the sense of "maternal emptiness".

3.2. Mother Roles of Female Protagonists: The Contradictory Transformation from Protection to Control

Table 2 demonstrates the evolution of mother figures associated with female protagonists in Hitchcock's works, showing a shift from protective to controlling maternal behavior.

Table 2. Mother Roles of Female Protagonists in Hitchcock's Films.

Mother Roles of Female Protagonists		
"Blackmail" (1929)	Mother	In a supporting role, the mother is protective toward her daughter but lacks narrative dominance
"Mr. & Mrs. Smith" (1941)	Mother	In a supporting role, the mother hopes to repair her daughter's marriage, exhibiting traditional maternal expectations
"Shadow of a Doubt" (1943)	Mother	The narrative weight of the mother role increases in trying to influence her daughter's emotional life
"Spellbound" (1944)	Mother	In a supporting role, the mother tries to manipulate her daughter's romance, reflecting the tension in the mother–daughter relationship
"To Catch a Thief" (1955)	Mother	The mother role begins to influence the main narrative line, taking an interventionist attitude toward her daughter's romance
"Marnie" (1964)	Mother	The mother figure influences the narrative of the entire film, and her relationship with her daughter is complex and contradictory

In Hitchcock's films, the mother roles of female protagonists often experience a subtle transformation from protectiveness to control. This transformation reflects the complexity of the mother–daughter relationship and embodies the change in the status of the mother role in the narrative.

In Hitchcock's early films such as "*Blackmail*" (1929) and "*Mr. & Mrs. Smith*" (1941), mothers mostly feature in supporting roles, occupying the traditional maternal role of protecting their daughters. However, starting from "*Shadow of a Doubt*" (1943) and "*Spellbound*" (1944) in the mid-1940s, the agency of the mother role in the narrative begins to increase. By the 1950s–1960s, in films like "*To Catch a Thief*" (1955) and "*Marnie*" (1964), the mother figure has already become a key factor influencing the direction of the narrative, with her desires and actions leading directly to her daughter's fate.

This transformation aligns with what Lucy Fischer terms the "cinematernal", where "the maternal is not only a theme in film, but also a structuring absence in cinematic texts and film theory" (Fischer 1996, p. 29). The increasing control exerted by mothers over their daughters in Hitchcock's later films can be seen as an attempt to fill this "structuring absence", albeit in a way that often reinforces patriarchal notions of motherhood.

3.3. Mother Roles of Male Protagonists: The Dual Bondage of Authoritarianism and Love

The complex and often problematic relationships between male protagonists and their mothers in Hitchcock's films are summarized in Table 3, highlighting the theme of maternal dominance.

Table 3. Mother Roles of Male Protagonists in Hitchcock's Films.

Mother Roles of Male Protagonists		
"Notorious" (1946)	Mother	Occupies a dominant position in the mother–son relationship, showing control and possessiveness toward her son
"Strangers on a Train" (1951)	Mother	There is a morbid psychological attachment between her and her son, becoming the inducement for her son's pathological behavior
"North by Northwest" (1959)	Mother	Has a strong control over her son's life and emotional relationships, restraining his independent personality
"The Birds" (1963)	Mother	The mother figure is closely related to her son's psychological trauma, and the mother–son relationship is distorted and pathological

Unlike the mother roles of female protagonists, the mother figures of male protagonists in Hitchcock's films often embody a pathological duality; they have an almost morbid possessiveness toward their sons, yet they cannot escape the emotional bondage of maternal

love. This contradictory mother–son relationship reflects Hitchcock's deep anxiety about the mother figure in his subconscious.

In films like "*Notorious*" (1946), "*Strangers on a Train*" (1951), "*North by Northwest*" (1959), and "*The Birds*" (1963), we see mother figures who occupy and dominate their sons' fate in a morbid, almost terrifying way. Here, maternal love is completely distorted into a tool of psychological bullying.

In "*Psycho*", Norman Bates' relationship with his mother exemplifies Lacan's concept of the 'lack of the mother'. The absent yet omnipresent Mrs. Bates represents what Lacan (1977, p. 218) terms 'the primordial other', a figure both desired and feared. This ambivalence manifests in Norman's simultaneous identification with and rejection of the maternal figure, leading to the splitting of his personality.

This portrayal of mother–son relationships in Hitchcock's films resonates with what Barbara Creed describes as the "monstrous-feminine", particularly in her analysis of the archetype of the castrating mother. Creed argues that "the presence of the monstrous-feminine in the popular horror film speaks to us more about male fears than about female desire or feminine subjectivity" (Creed 1993, p. 7).

4. The Generative Logic and Crux of Maternal Emptiness

Having examined the various manifestations of "maternal emptiness" in Hitchcock's films, we now turn to explore the generative logic and deep-seated causes of this phenomenon. We will consider this from three perspectives—trauma theory, patriarchal culture, and social context.

4.1. Traumatized Childhood Memories and Mother–Son Relationships

Numerous studies have shown that Hitchcock's creations are deeply rooted in his personal life experiences, especially his relationship with his mother during childhood. Hitchcock's biographer, Donald Spoto, records in detail the growth trajectory of the film master in his book "*The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock*" (Spoto 1983). Hitchcock's complex relationship with his mother, Emma, a devout Catholic who imposed strict discipline on her children, seems to have left an indelible mark on his psyche and his cinematic portrayals of mothers.

This traumatic mother–son relationship is embodied intensively in Hitchcock's later autobiographical film, "*Marnie*" (1964). The film takes the childhood trauma of the female protagonist, Marnie, as the entry point and flashes back to her troubled origin with her mother, Bernice. As the critic Robin Wood said, "For Hitchcock, the mother is never a safe haven, on the contrary, she symbolizes a potential threat, a source of betrayal and guilt" (Wood 1989, p. 361).

4.2. The Suppression and Exile of Maternity under the Patriarchal Order

In Hitchcock's cinematic imagination, the generation of "maternal emptiness" must also be examined in the context of the entire patriarchal cultural order. Feminist theorist Julia Kristeva points out in her book "*Powers of Horror*" that the patriarchal order is predicated on the exile and suppression of maternity. In the male-dominated symbolic order, the mother represents a primordial, non-logocentric "semiotic chora", the source of all meaning, but must also be severed and expelled to complete the subject's self-identification (Kristeva and Roudiez 1982).

In Hitchcock's films, maternal identity often appears under the shadow of the projection of male desire. These films vividly portray the patriarchal culture's contradictory psychology toward maternity; on the one hand, expecting the consolation of maternal love, and on the other hand, fearing the engulfment of maternal authority over the male self.

In "*Vertigo*", the image of the mother is split into two—the blonde bombshell and the white-robed nun, the saint and the whore. This either/or symbolic imagination precisely reflects the stereotypical imaginative representation of maternity in a patriarchal culture. James Maxfield, in his article "A Dreamer and his Dream: Another Way of Looking at

Hitchcock's Vertigo" (Maxfield 1990), argues that this splitting of the mother figure into two extremes in "*Vertigo*" reflects Hitchcock's ambivalent attitude towards the maternal image, further embodying the concept of "maternal emptiness".

4.3. The Maternal Crisis in the Modern Context

Hitchcockian "maternal emptiness" should also be understood in conjunction with the role transformation of motherhood in the context of twentieth-century modern society. Since the Industrial Revolution, the role of the mother has experienced a positional misalignment from the private domain to the public domain. The traditional family structure has disintegrated, and the mother is no longer synonymous with staying at home and raising children but increasingly becomes an emerging force in workplace labor.

As Adrienne Rich points out in her seminal work "*Of Woman Born*", "The institution of motherhood is not identical with bearing and caring for children, any more than the institution of heterosexuality is identical with intimacy and sexual love" (Rich 1995, p. 42). This institutional nature of motherhood, as depicted in Hitchcock's films, often leads to the emptying of maternal subjectivity.

E. Ann Kaplan's work is particularly relevant here. In "*Motherhood and Representation*" (Kaplan 2013), Kaplan explores how the representation of motherhood in popular culture has evolved in response to changing social and economic conditions. She argues that the "angel" and "witch" mother paradigms, while rooted in nineteenth-century ideology, continue to influence twentieth-century representations of motherhood, including those in Hitchcock's films. Kaplan's analysis helps us understand how Hitchcock's maternal figures reflect broader cultural anxieties about the changing role of women and mothers in modern society.

The various mother figures in Hitchcock's works embody this predicament precisely, where they are either too strong or too weak, too sacred or too secular, and always unable to attain the "just right" homeostasis as mothers. This sense of crisis in the maternal role is closely related to the contextual era in which Hitchcock himself lived. During the two world wars, a large number of women took up work outside the home, and the traditional mother image was strongly impacted. After the war, with the return of the male labor force, women were pressured to return to the family again. This role misalignment triggered a general anxiety among women: How could they achieve a balance between the dual identities of mother and worker?

In this sense, Hitchcock's films' revelation of the maternal predicament precisely confirms feminist scholar Betty Friedan's accurate diagnosis of contemporary maternal women in "*The Feminine Mystique*": "The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the 20th century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone" (Friedan 2001, p. 15). The ubiquitous "maternal myth" in Hitchcock's films, which often presents mothers as either overbearing or absent, can be seen as a cinematic representation of this "problem with no name" that Friedan identified.

5. Conclusions: The Enduring Shadow of "Maternal Emptiness" and Its Transcendence

The concept of "maternal emptiness" that we have explored throughout this paper provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex and often contradictory portrayals of mothers in Hitchcock's films. By synthesizing psychoanalytic, feminist, and cultural approaches, we have demonstrated how Hitchcock's maternal figures embody the tensions and anxieties surrounding motherhood in mid-twentieth-century Western society.

Our analysis has revealed that the "maternal emptiness" in Hitchcock's films manifests in various forms, such as the following: the blonde mothers who struggle to reconcile their maternal identity with their status as objects of desire; the mothers of female protagonists who transition from protective figures to controlling forces; and the mothers of male protagonists who embody a pathological duality of possessiveness and love. These

representations, we argue, reflect not only Hitchcock's personal psychological complexes but also broader societal attitudes towards motherhood and femininity.

The application of Kristeva's concept of the "semiotic chora" to Hitchcock's work, a relatively unexplored area in existing scholarship, has provided new insights into the director's treatment of maternal figures. We have shown how the eruption of the semiotic into the symbolic order in films like "*Psycho*" and "*The Birds*" creates a sense of horror and unease, reflecting deep-seated anxieties about maternal power and influence.

Moreover, the shadow of Hitchcock's "maternal emptiness" continues to loom large over contemporary cinema. As we have seen in films like Darren Aronofsky's "*Mother!*" (2017) and Ari Aster's "*Hereditary*" (2018), modern filmmakers continue to grapple with the complexities of maternal representation, often echoing Hitchcock's themes of maternal absence, excess, and ambivalence.

However, while acknowledging this influence, it is crucial to recognize the potential for transcending the paradigm of "maternal emptiness". Future filmmakers and scholars alike should strive to create and analyze representations of motherhood that move beyond the binary of idealization and demonization, instead portraying mothers as complex, multifaceted individuals with their own subjectivity and agency.

One potential avenue for this transcendence lies in the exploration of what we might call "maternal fullness"—representations of motherhood that acknowledge its challenges and complexities while also celebrating its potential for empowerment and self-realization. Films like Greta Gerwig's "*Lady Bird*" (2017) and Alfonso Cuarón's "*Roma*" (2018) offer glimpses of this approach, presenting mother figures who are neither saints nor monsters, but fully realized human beings navigating their own desires and struggles alongside their maternal responsibilities.

Furthermore, the intersection of "maternal emptiness" with other aspects of identity—such as race, class, and sexuality—warrants deeper investigation. How do these factors influence the representation of mothers in cinema, and how might they complicate or challenge the notion of "maternal emptiness"?

In conclusion, the concept of "maternal emptiness" that we have developed in this paper offers a powerful tool for analyzing and critiquing cinematic representations of motherhood. However, it is not an endpoint, but rather a starting point for the further exploration and reimagining of maternal subjectivity on screen. As we move forward, let us strive to fill the void of "maternal emptiness" with representations that honor the fullness and complexity of the maternal experience, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of motherhood in both cinema and society at large.

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