

## 5 “Someone I Would Have Hated to Be”

### The Threat of Love in *Rear Window* and *Vertigo*

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Tell me everything you saw, and what you think it means.

Lisa (Grace Kelly), in *Rear Window*

#### Introduction

Both *Rear Window* and *Vertigo* center on the image of a dangling man. In *Rear Window* the image comes at the film’s climax, as R. B. Jefferies, the protagonist, grips the windowsill of his apartment for a few moments before falling to the ground below. But this is only the visual literalization of Jefferies’ existential predicament: he has, in fact, spent the entire film in a state of spiritual suspension—a suspension that centers on romantic love and his fears, hesitations and anxieties regarding such love. *Vertigo* finds its protagonist, John “Scottie” Ferguson, dangling over a void just a few minutes into the film. Scottie avoids falling to his death in this scene but will soon find himself plunged into a chaos of impassioned infatuation and irrational obsession. In the process, he will suffer and endure many of the things Jefferies feared. Since these protagonists are, in a significant sense, our stand-ins, our onscreen representatives, we can say that he ends up realizing many of *our* fears about love as well.

This chapter explores these two films’ treatment of some of our ideas, feelings, and anxieties about romantic love. The image of the dangling man—high-up, indecisive, detached, and removed from life—is central, as are the symbols of falling (which connotes death, of course, but also falling in love, and at the same time a loss of freedom and a lack of control over one’s body) and the existential void over which we are suspended and into which we risk plunging.

Romantic love causes considerable anxiety. In part this is because we worry about not having it, about not being loved. But the thought of loving, and being loved, can also be frightening. We may feel that we stand to lose our independence, our autonomy, our sense of what matters to us, of what we want. Because love can invite or provoke radical change,

we might fear that it will cost us our identities, our very selves. We may feel possessed when we love, or are loved, as if we belonged to someone other than ourselves. *Rear Window* and *Vertigo* explore and dramatize these worries, giving us ways to think and feel more adequately, sensitively, and deeply about essential elements of what it means to live a human life.

### ***Rear Window*: The Threat of Marriage**

One of the clearest forms [American thinking about autonomy] takes is the idea that individual autonomy is to be achieved by erecting a wall of rights between the individual and those around him. [...] The logic of this is that the most perfectly autonomous man is thus the most perfectly isolated.

Jennifer Nedelsky (2011), *Law's Relations*

Let us start by noting a similarity between these two films that I take to be crucial: both *Rear Window* and *Vertigo* revolve around an act of violence against women. In particular, each film revolves around a murder plot in which a man kills his wife. In both films, moreover, the protagonist is a kind of detective figure whose work is centered on *seeing*—a magazine photographer, in the former case, and a police detective turned private eye in the latter. This character is anxious about his autonomy in the way mentioned above: he is tempted by the enticing possibilities of a romantic or sexual entanglement but concerned that in giving in to temptation he might lose his independence. Both films, indeed, foreground and literalize the issue of freedom by placing that protagonist (portrayed by James Stewart in both cases!) in a state of physical bondage at or near the start of the film: *Rear Window*'s Jefferies with a broken leg in a cast, and confined to a wheelchair; *Vertigo*'s Scottie in a "corset," and also burdened with a debilitating case of vertigo that afflicts him whenever he ascends to heights.

*Rear Window*'s plot can be summarized briefly. The protagonist, L. B. Jefferies, temporarily confined to a wheelchair as the result of an accident, whiles away his hours observing his neighbors, whose apartments he can see across the courtyard of his building. He begins to suspect, and eventually becomes convinced, that one of those neighbors—a salesman named Thorwald—has murdered his wife and disposed of her body. Jefferies' associates, in particular his girlfriend, Lisa Fremont, are at first skeptical, but in the end they are drawn in and help him investigate. Thorwald, after becoming aware of Jefferies' surveillance, confronts him directly and throws him out the window; but he survives and is vindicated, as it is proved that his suspicions were correct.

What this brief summary leaves out is as important—indeed, more so—as what it includes. (In particular, it says little about Jefferies'

relationship with Lisa, which will be my main concern; in my view, the investigation plot is in a sense secondary.) Jefferies' identity as an independent, an adventurer, indeed a bit of a rogue, is communicated to the audience before we even hear him speak. In a visual tour of his apartment, conducted while he is asleep in his wheelchair, we see a set of photographs he has taken in the course of his career. They depict exciting subjects (fire, explosions, a car flipping on a racetrack) in exotic locales, suggesting a life of intrepid escapades. His current situation, trapped in a wheelchair, and hence in his apartment, on a sweltering day in New York City, offers a stark contrast. His apartment's "rear window" faces the courtyard of his building, and through it, he can see his neighbors in their various domiciles; observing them seems to have become his primary source of entertainment in his confinement. As for genuine interactions, there is the occasional telephone conversation, and there are two people, both women, who visit him on a regular basis. Stella (Thelma Ritter), a nurse hired by the insurance company, comes to give him massages and opinions. Lisa Fremont, a model and socialite, comes because she is in love with Jefferies and wants to marry him.

The contours of Jefferies' predicament with Lisa are outlined in a series of three conversations: the first, by phone, with his editor, Gunnison; the second with Stella; and the third with Lisa herself. Gunnison, having mixed up the dates of Scottie's release from his cast, is calling to offer him an assignment. Jefferies insists that he be given the assignment despite the obvious impracticability of this; then, on being denied, he insists that Gunnison give him something:

JEFFERIES: Listen if you don't pull me out of this swamp of boredom, I'll do something drastic.

GUNNISON: Like what?

JEFFERIES: I'll get married. Then I'll never be able to go anywhere.

GUNNISON: it's about time you got married, before you turn into a lonesome and bitter old man.

JEFFERIES: Yeah, can you see me, rushing home to a hot apartment to listen to the automatic laundry, the electric dishwasher, the garbage disposal, and a nagging wife.

GUNNISON: Jeff, wives don't nag anymore. They discuss.

JEFFERIES: Is that so? Is that so? Well maybe in the high rent district they discuss. In my neighborhood they still nag.

To a degree this comes across as typical misogynistic masculine banter; and on a first viewing, in particular, it is likely to be taken as such. In fact, Jefferies is expressing some deep anxieties. It is worth noting that the first words we hear in the film are not spoken by an onscreen character, but by a radio announcer; as the camera conducts an initial circuit

of the courtyard, giving us glimpses of Jefferies' various neighbors, the voice, emitted by a radio in a neighbor's apartment, intones: "Men, are you over forty? When you wake up in the morning do you feel tired and run-down? Do you have that listless feeling?"

Anxiety about aging, then—about settling down, becoming complacent, losing one's youth, one's powers, and one's freedom—is quite literally in the air. (Moreover, for audiences at the time Stewart would have brought with him shades of certain *earlier* roles—that of George Bailey in Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), for instance, another male character who wanted travel and adventure but who ended up trapped, in this case in the little town of Bedford Falls, by marriage, children, and the family business.) Jefferies' characterization of marriage as a "drastic" action, then, speaks to a deep concern, as does Gunnison's warning that, at his age, he is risking becoming a "lonesome and bitter old man." These concerns, about the fading strengths of one's energetic and masculine youth, and the increasing difficulty of remaining independent and self-sufficient, are only exacerbated by the state of stasis and isolation Jefferies' recent accident has placed him in—a state in which, being himself rendered inactive, he is resigned to passing his days by watching the activities of others.

Two things are worth observing about Jefferies' accident. The first is that it was, by Jefferies' own admission, the result of his becoming too directly involved in his work. (Gunnison says to Jefferies: "I didn't ask you to stand in the middle of that automobile race track"—to which Jefferies defensively responds: "You asked for something dramatically different! You got it!") Jefferies' current incapacitation, then, is the result of his having momentarily abandoned his typical role, that of the detached observer who, rather than plunging himself into the thick of life, stands apart from life, contemplating it and making images of it from a safe distance. Now he is a detached observer again, watching his neighbors carry out their romantic lives while attempting to hold his own as motionless as possible. Having once made the mistake of eschewing the safety of detachment in favor of active participation in life—and having learned the hard way that the result of such boldness can be a state of *enforced* non-participation, one which offers little in the way of interesting, diverting entertainments—Jefferies is, perhaps, more reluctant than usual to make the same mistake again, and thus even more resistant to Lisa's enticements of marriage and a life together.

The neighbors observed by Jefferies include a young attractive single woman, a newlywed couple, and the Thorwalds, the long-married couple whose marital strife will culminate in the wife's murder at her husband's hands. It is if Jefferies were a movie viewer being offered a panoply of stills and short sequences depicting all the various stages of married life—with the notable exception, that is, of a couple that has

remained happy and in love while growing older with each other. And this relates to our second observation about Jefferies' accident and its aftermath—one that is likely fairly obvious by now: there is a strong sense in which the state of dependence caused by Jefferies' injuries serves, for him, as a kind of trial marriage. It gives him the chance, that is, to learn what it means to stay home, to be taken care of, to be tamed, and to a certain degree to be trapped; to see only a few people, to not be in the habit of keeping a bag packed and being ready to dash to the airport at a moment's notice.

Since Lisa has been pressing Jefferies to marry her, this trial run possesses a certain gravity. His anxiety at being more or less caged in his apartment is thus not only closely tied to but is emblematic of the tapestry of anxieties about committed romantic love that *Rear Window* and *Vertigo* set out to explore. As suggested earlier, the salient anxiety here is the fear that such love, particularly once it is institutionally solidified by marriage, is by nature constraining, requiring one to limit one's activities and pursuits, to abide by conventional rules, to give up much of what one desires, and thus to sacrifice a good deal of one's freedom.

### Jefferies' Dilemma

The essence of being human is that one does not seek perfection; that one is sometimes willing to commit sins for the sake of loyalty ... and that one is prepared in the end to be defeated and broken up by life, which is the inevitable price of fastening one's love upon other human individuals.

George Orwell, "Reflections on Gandhi"

Does this anxiety, so characterized, exhaust the sources of Jefferies' reluctance to marry Lisa? On the one hand, it is surely a significant part of it. It is doubtful, however, that it comprehensively captures Jefferies' concerns—a fact that is made more evident over the course of the ensuing conversations, first with Stella, then with Lisa herself. Stella seems largely to represent the voice of conventional thought about romantic matters: in her view, men and women are meant to get married, it is good for men to settle down, and Lisa is the perfect partner for Jefferies. None of this is unexpected, but the mention of Lisa's perfection provokes an interesting response from Jefferies:

JEFFERIES: She's just not the girl for me.

STELLA: She's only perfect.

JEFFERIES: *Too* perfect. Too beautiful, too talented, too sophisticated, too everything—but what I want.

The most obvious reading of this exchange would take Jefferies' claim that Lisa is "perfect" as ironic, trading on an ambiguity between being perfect according to widely accepted conventional standards and being a perfect match for his desires. This reading is surely not wholly wrong, and it fits with Jefferies' comment, which follows shortly, that Lisa "belongs in that rarefied atmosphere of Park Avenue, expensive restaurants, and literary cocktail parties." But it faces two serious objections. First, it implies, implausibly, that Jefferies does not himself desire a romantic partner who is beautiful, talented, or sophisticated. This is an implausible position to attribute to anyone, but particularly so in Jefferies' case, given that he *is* already romantically involved with Lisa and clearly has strong feelings for her. Second, the suggested interpretation leaves unanswered a significant question: if Jefferies knows that Lisa is not perfect for him, then why does he seem to regard himself as facing a dilemma? If the situation represented mere disagreement between conventional attitudes and Jefferies' own views, it is unlikely he would find himself very troubled. What does a man like Jefferies care about conventional views? He could dispose of Lisa, knowing that she was not what he wanted, and be done with it.

A more promising interpretation distinguishes two kinds of reason that are relevant to love. Following Sara Protasi, we can identify reasons that speak in favor of "social relationships"—including marriage—and distinguish these from "love's reasons"—that is, those reasons that speak in favor of love itself. "There are all sorts of reasons," Protasi writes, "to enter into a social relationship with someone: social duty, interest, kindness, desire to fall in love, and so forth. These reasons are, however, distinct from *love's* reasons" (Protasi 2014, 217). Making this distinction helps us preserve the thought that Jefferies faces a painful dilemma: he has strong reasons for loving Lisa—she is, from the perspective of love, "perfect"—but also has strong reasons for refusing to commit more thoroughly to a romantic relationship with her. From that perspective, she is deeply imperfect. (Indeed, it might be—for reasons that should become clearer as we proceed—that he is worried that in becoming as involved with her as he has, he has already acted against some very important reasons.) Moreover—and here we begin to get at the true root of Jefferies' painful dilemma—the things about Lisa that inspire Jefferies' passionate love for her are the very things that would make it impossible for the two of them to achieve a happy marriage. (Or at least, Jefferies takes this to be the case. Lisa presumably disagrees; perhaps she would say that this whole way of thinking about love and its reasons is deeply wrongheaded.)

Jefferies' claim that Lisa is "perfect" is not ironic but entirely sincere. As a desirable woman, she is perfect: beautiful, talented, sophisticated, and a thousand other attractive things. And his comment about "that rarefied atmosphere of Park Avenue, expensive restaurants, and literary cocktail parties" need not and should not be read as mocking or scoffing. It is not *his* world, perhaps, but it is a world, one that has real value, and one in

which Lisa has risen in virtue of her beauty, grace, and intelligence, to a kind of pre-eminence. The problem is not that Jefferies sees no value in her or in what she does. The problem rather is that he cannot see how she can continue to live a life governed by such values while also somehow accommodating herself to him—unless, of course, he were to change in order to accommodate her; and this does not seem desirable either.

“Can you see her tramping around the world with a camera bum who never has more than a week’s salary in the bank?” he asks Stella. And then adds: “If only she was ordinary.” This comment is also not as ironic as it might at first appear. Such irony as it contains gestures toward Jeffries’ dilemma, the paradox that drives his impossible situation. An ordinary woman, after all, would not present the problem he is faced with. An ordinary woman might be willing to adapt to him, to accommodate his unconventional life, to alter or even give up her identity so as to make a life together possible. And because she began as “ordinary,” this would be no great loss. Indeed, it would not be a bad thing to ask an “ordinary” person to change in this way; nor would it make one a bad person to want this. The hitch is that Jefferies would not have fallen passionately in love with an ordinary person. It takes an extraordinary woman—a “perfect” person, a Lisa—to make him fall in love. (He is, again, an independent, detached man, one who prefers to observe rather than participate.) And one can’t ask a perfect person to change; one can’t even desire that, not consistently anyway, for that would be to desire that what one loves just as it is cease to be as it is. Indeed, when we turn to our discussion of Jefferies’ counterpart, Scottie, in *Vertigo*, we will find a person who is willing, indeed driven to force his beloved to undergo a revision and reconstruction process of just this sort; and we will see, there, just how ugly such a thing can be. If the possibility that Lisa might refuse to change for him—that her professions of willingness to do precisely that are false or represent a kind of ignorance of her own abilities to change—makes Jefferies fearful, he is even more afraid that staying with Lisa might in fact change her; for he does not *want* her to change, and he certainly does not to be the one who changes her.

Have we put our finger on a general problem, dilemma, or paradox with respect to love? It is not, we may perhaps reassure ourselves, a universal one: that is, we could imagine people who manage to avoid it, if not through wisdom and stratagem then through luck. One might, after all, fall in love with a person whose lifestyle is already compatible with yours. Jefferies might have fallen in love with a fellow independent adventurer. Of course, it is quite possible that Jefferies would never, in fact, have been strongly attracted to such a person. Perhaps he would have found such a woman too masculine, too “mannish,” or simply too much like him. (Who wants to marry, or take to bed, a mirror image of oneself?) For all we know, Lisa might meet Jefferies’ peculiar preferences, proclivities, kinks, and quirks in various other ways as well. Kant’s

observation that “out of the crooked timber of humanity nothing straight was ever made” is nowhere more true than with respect to what we are sexually and romantically attracted to—a fact which undermines Stella’s somewhat naïve view that, given Lisa’s attractions and perfections, *any* man would be out of his mind to pass up the chance to marry her.

Thus, even if we suppose that Jefferies would in principle be open to being with a woman who was not a model or socialite, who enjoyed sleeping on hard ground and subjecting herself to physical discomfort and danger, who enjoyed eating fish heads and rice as much as (or more than!) a fine dinner at 21—a woman, that is to say, very much like him—there would remain the practical difficulty of finding such a woman, who was available, and to whom he was attracted, and who was attracted to and willing to be with *him*. And of course *he* would need to be available too—which, in *Rear Window*, given his emotional bonds with Lisa (as complex and unstable as they may be) he most certainly is not. These pragmatic considerations may fall short of constituting *in principle* impediments to marriage, but they do not fall as far short as one might like. The fact is that a great many of us, indeed probably most of us, will end up at some point attracted to and romantically involved with a person who is sufficiently perfect (from the perspective of love) and sufficiently imperfect (from the standpoint of social relationships) to pose a version of the problem. Jefferies’ particular traits and quirks may exacerbate the issue in his case, which is part of what makes his situation a useful illustration for our purposes; but it only exemplifies and clarifies a predicament that many of us, in some way, find ourselves in.

Jefferies’ dilemma, then, is not straightforwardly reducible to the conflict between the perspective of love (which involves considering a person almost aesthetically, as a thing in itself, a bearer of intrinsic values) and the perspective of social relationships (which invite an assessment in terms of pragmatic and even somewhat utilitarian considerations: will the two of us *work* together as a couple?). There is a deeper reason—or rather, a deeper set of reasons—for Jefferies to fear getting (more) involved with Lisa. Because he loves Lisa, and sees her as perfect, Jefferies strongly desires that Lisa not change. And because he is happy with himself as a person, he also desires that he himself not change. But love, by its very nature, has a tendency to change people. Perhaps some people are romantically drawn to those they regard as highly imperfect, with the hope of “fixing” them. (Scottie’s attraction to Madeleine in *Vertigo* is clearly pertinent in this connection.) They may avoid the problem I am sketching here (though they no doubt face significant problems of their own). But for others—those who are attracted to people they see as already inherently attractive, and not needing to be “fixed”—the fact that lovers tend to be changed as the result of romantic love may well suggest that there is a deep tension, and indeed a kind of self-defeating element, in such love. Some of our most powerful reasons for avoiding love, it turns out, seem to arise from love itself.

## Love, Union, and Transformation

But however much I loved her, it seems I continually wanted to conceal from myself how much she actually affected me, which really does not seem appropriate to erotic love.

Kierkegaard's (1978) journals

It is worth reminding ourselves that Jefferies' fear is not merely the fear that being in a love relationship would require lifestyle changes that might prove to be constraining, and hence that he might stand to lose a certain degree of his freedom. People sometimes speak of such losses in terms of autonomy, but if we think of autonomy, as is common, as primarily an internal matter—a matter of how one's personality is organized, and of how much control one has over one's own decision-making powers and the capacity to act on one's decisions—then we will likely not see changes in the external circumstances of one's life as threatening autonomy in a deep sense. Thus, while Jefferies surely fears that his life will be changed by marriage, his deeper fear is that *he* will be changed. It is himself that Jefferies stands to lose. To fall in love is to open oneself (or to be opened, since it often feels that one has little choice in the matter) to becoming a different person. That said, it is worth saying—and recognizing this will, presumably, only strengthen the grounds for Jefferies' anxiety—that the two phenomena are not unrelated; agreeing to changes in the external conditions of one's life can, over time, enable and lead to unintended yet quite radical changes in one's very self. Margaret Gilbert's description of the process makes it fairly clear how easily such a transition can take place:

Marriage, I suggested, is a fruitful field for fusion. [...] [O]ver time negotiations take place and agreements are reached on a multitude of issues, major and minor, such as whether we can afford to buy a house, who is the best babysitter, and how often we should eat fish. Such agreements arise in part in the course of carrying out joint projects. There are also many random conversations that result in joint acceptance of some proposition, value, or principle. [...] In any case, the parties come continuously jointly to accept numerous beliefs, values, and principles of action. [...] What I call *stable* fusion has its own special import. Even when difficult compromises have been made over an opinion or a principle of action there is some likelihood that when a couple continuously cohabits and interacts, personal preferences will pale or get converted. The couple's practices may, as a psychological matter, so predominate that the individual has no countervailing tendencies any longer. Being committed to acting and speaking a certain view in Mr. Jones's presence, Ms. Jones may

eventually lose some of her own original view: it may cease to be her personal view. Indeed, there is some normative pressure upon her to let this happen. For each party will probably better sustain “our view” in being if they have no countervailing tendencies, and they are committed to sustaining that view as best they can. There is some likelihood, then, that stable fusion will also be *untrammelled*. There will be no countervailing tendencies within the individuals concerned.

(Gilbert 2015, 266–267)

Gilbert, it should be noted, views the forging of this kind of joint agency in a mostly positive light. (Whether and to what extent one shares this view depends on a number of matters, including how much one tends to regard love as a kind of union between the lovers—a topic to which I will return—and how much one tends to identify with one’s own “countervailing tendencies.”) And after all, this is precisely what some people long for from love: to be changed, improved, saved. The hitch, though, is that from the perspective of someone who is happy with himself the way he is—and, moreover, happy with his lover the way *she* is—love’s promise to erode, erase, or transform the boundaries of the self (and, along with them, the self) can seem less like a promise and more like a threat. One would like, perhaps, to be able to accommodate one’s partner on an external level but hold one’s self separate in order to preserve its integrity and maintain one’s autonomy. But while one may intend, and even promise (whether to one’s partner or to oneself) to do precisely that—this seems to be the intention and promise Lisa articulates in her somewhat tense post-dinner conversation with Jefferies—the realities of the constant process of negotiation Gilbert describes, and indeed of the very nature of friendship and love, imply that such a resolution will likely be far more difficult than one might suppose to carry out successfully. There are, at any rate, no guarantees:

[T]he forward-looking element in friendship makes every relationship risky. When I approach you in friendship my hope is that you will make me wish for things I couldn’t even have thought to wish for without you. I give you power over myself and trust you not to exploit it. I put my identity at risk because, despite the certainty that love inspires, it is impossible for me to know what our relationship will ultimately mean for me and whether it will be for good or bad. Nothing ensures that my feeling or my judgment is right [...] Worse, nothing ensures that our relationship won’t harm and degrade my judgment itself, making me feel happy to have become someone I would have hated to be, perhaps rightly, had you not come into my life.

(Nehamas 2016, 136–137)

I do not think it matters much, if at all, that Alexander Nehamas is speaking in this passage of friendship and not specifically of romantic love. Romantic love shares many features of friendship, including this element of risk; and if anything it will pose an even greater risk than ordinary friendships, for a variety of reasons. Not the least of these reasons is people's tendency to lose their heads while infatuated—a tendency that is central to Scottie's tragic story in *Vertigo*. There is, too, the fact that we tend to think of romantic love as involving, to use Gilbert's word, a kind of "fusion"—that is, we often think of romantic love as a matter of unification between two people, in which their individual boundaries are to some degree, or perhaps entirely, erased. Genesis 2:24 tells us that in marriage, "a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." In Plato's *Symposium* Aristophanes tells the symposium guests that the desire "to make one out of two and [thus] heal the wound of human nature" is "the source of our desire to love each other" (Plato 1989: 27). And in *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud observes:

Towards the outside, the ego seems to maintain clear and sharp lines of demarcation. There is only one state [...] in which it does not do this. At the height of being in love the boundary between ego and object threatens to melt away. Against all the evidence of his senses, a man who is in love declares that 'I' and 'you' are one, and is prepared to behave as if it were a fact.

(Freud 1995, 66)

Even those philosophers who stop short of the claim that love unites distinct individuals or dissolves their boundaries frequently allow that the characters and identities of the individuals involved are changed through love. Dean Cocking and Jeanette Kennett's "drawing view" sees friendship as involving a "process of mutual drawing [...] clearly shows how the self in friendship is, in part, a relational thing that is developed and molded through the friendship" (Cocking and Kennett 2000, 284–285). In a related vein, John Armstrong notes that goals, desires, and values a person has previously regarded as fixed and perhaps even fundamental may be altered by being in a love relationship:

[P]riorities change through a relationship. A woman who has—as she thinks—no interest in having children may, from within a loving relationship, come to have a different view. And here, the ground of the change is the relationship itself. She may have learned, with her partner, to recognize capacities and concerns she did not know she had. [...] [A] relationship [is not] a kind of garment which merely goes on top of, and does not in any way change, the inner person.

(Armstrong 2002, 35)

The changes prompted by love can be, and I believe often are, positive; and it is at least possible that they might leave one's self, or large parts of it, intact. But neither of these is guaranteed. Being prompted to recognize capacities and concerns one already possesses hardly sounds threatening. But if this is all that love involved, then it would look somewhat superficial, a mere garment that covered or revealed but did not alter one's "inner person." Nehamas comes closer to the source of Jefferies' anxiety when he notes that in loving, I "put my identity at risk" and that "nothing ensures that our relationship won't harm and degrade my judgment itself, making me feel happy to have become someone I would have hated to be, perhaps rightly, had you not come into my life."

Indeed we should refer to Jefferies' *anxieties* rather than his anxiety, for this recognition may ground several species of fear. There are, after all, multitudinous ways in which Jefferies might be changed for the worse. (There are also multiple ways in which he might be changed for the better. But since Jefferies does not feel that he needs to be improved, the possibilities of improvement speak less persuasively here.) He might become less adventurous, less open to new experience, more settled, weaker, softer. He might come to hate travel or learn to enjoy dining at 21 every night and wonder how he ever managed to choke down fish heads and rice. These are perhaps the first possibilities that spring to mind, but they are not the most threatening ones. For these possibilities are, at least, compatible with Jefferies' maintaining a highly significant part of his current identity: the part that loves, values, indeed cherishes Lisa.

In the darker transformations, Jefferies loses that as well. We know that such possibilities are on his mind because of the amount of his attention that he focuses on Thorwald; for it is precisely these possibilities that Thorwald represents. If the newlyweds across the courtyard seem to symbolize the mostly pleasant, mostly happy initial stages of wedded life, Thorwald exerts his particular fascination by symbolizing a considerably more ominous later stage, the stage at which love has somehow managed to transform the lover into his very opposite: the person who hates the person he once loved. Of course, Jefferies is presumably aware that this does not happen in every case. But when he looks at the various apartments across the way—the array of miniaturized urban dioramas presented for his, and our, contemplation—a happily married older couple is the one thing he pointedly does not see. It is almost as if the "happily ever after" so often spoken of in stories and Hollywood films is the one possibility that Jefferies cannot, in fact, imagine.

So to the extent that Jefferies values *himself*, and conceives of himself as (among other things) one who loves Lisa, he has something real to fear from love. Moreover, to the extent that he is concerned about *Lisa*, he has further reason to fear. For Jefferies' being transformed from someone who loves Lisa into someone who hates her would be a terrible

thing, not only for him, but for Lisa as well. This is true even if their marriage does not follow the lead of the Thorwalds and devolve into uxoricide (though all the more true, of course, should it prove to do so). And since Jefferies *does* care about Lisa—again, he loves her—the fact that this imagined future threatens her as well as him must be taken seriously. If it is true, as Nehamas suggests, that love’s changes cannot be predicted or controlled, then Jefferies is at the very least not entirely wrong to take himself to have some quite powerful reasons to try to avoid committing fully to his love for Lisa. And ironically enough, the more he loves Lisa, the stronger these reasons are.

Moreover, as was briefly alluded to above, the fact is that *both* lovers are subject to being transformed by love; and thus, everything we have said to this point about Jefferies could be said about Lisa as well. That is, the risk is not only that he will come to hate her, but that she will come to hate him; or, more generally, that she will be changed by love into someone her current self (not to mention Jefferies’ current self) would not love, or like, or even perhaps recognize. (To anyone who gazes into the Thorwalds’ apartment, it is clear that he has no love for her; but she doesn’t seem to like *him* very much either.) Keeping this in mind helps us understand why at times Jefferies seems so distressed by the fact that Lisa is so “perfect.” It is not *merely* the fact that the more perfect she is, the less likely she is to change in order to adapt to him. He does not *want* her to change, for he loves her, truly and sincerely, as she is. And what love promises—or threatens—is, precisely, change. To dismiss Jefferies’ anxieties about marriage, then, as nothing more than a shallow or immature desire to refuse to commit or settle down in order to hold on to the pleasures and convenient freedoms of his single life would be to badly misunderstand him, and to refuse to take his situation as seriously as it warrants. Jefferies’ dilemma is both genuine and deep.

### ***Vertigo*: The Power and the Freedom**

[H]uman love is normally too profoundly possessive and also too ‘mechanical’ to be a place of vision.

Iris Murdoch (1970)

Although *Rear Window* takes Jefferies’ dilemma seriously, it does not seem to suggest that well-intentioned lovers cannot, in some cases, overcome it. Rather, it seems to end with the suggestion that Jefferies and Lisa will indeed go on to establish a successful romantic relationship—though not, presumably a frictionless one, and not one entirely free of deception. The final scene finds Jefferies asleep once again in his wheelchair, with both legs now broken as the result of his confrontation with Thorwald. Despite this, his face displays a contented smile. Lisa, reclining near him, is casually dressed and reading William Douglas’s *Beyond*

*the High Himalayas*. This is, we are meant to understand, the new, more adventurous Lisa, whom love has already changed, and who will be able to fit into Jefferies' life. Almost immediately, however, after confirming that he is indeed asleep, and that she is unobserved (for the first time in the film), she replaces her book with an issue of *Bazaar*, a fashion magazine (The "Beauty Issue," as it happens!)

Is Jefferies still afraid of changing Lisa, or of being changed? One assumes, from the placid and comic tone of the film's conclusion, that his fear has at the very least been lessened. He has if nothing else learned that Lisa really is more adventurous than she might have seemed, that life in New York might be more exciting than it might have seemed (there are murders and other crimes to be dealt with, and one doesn't even need to leave one's apartment to find them), and that he and Lisa have the ability to work together to confront and deal with the challenges posed by this life. All of this might suggest to him that at the very least it is not at all inevitable that their being together will change either of them into persons their former selves would have found either unrecognizable or intolerable.<sup>1</sup> And Lisa's swapping out of *Beyond the High Himalayas* for *Bazaar* surely suggests that she has not entirely given herself up but has rather retained a core of herself; while her triumphant smile, the fact that she gets the film's final shot and the fact that Jefferies (who in this shot is seen essentially from Lisa's point of view), has been returned to a state in which he depends on her, all suggest both that she is pleased with the outcome and that, in her view—which we seem meant to share—she was right all along in maintaining that it would be possible for the two of them to live together without betraying themselves. The scene is, indeed, a simultaneously ironic and affectionate symbolic portrayal of married life, a life in which the man is somewhat constrained, and in which both partners have to adapt their identities to the other to a reasonable degree, but in which none of this forestalls the possibility and promise of further future adventures.

Of course it is also surely true that seeing Lisa in danger, and thus being faced with the possibility of losing her, has forced Jefferies to realize how much he cares for her. Indeed, both the experience of witnessing her vulnerability and that of working on a joint project with her have likely taught him to see Lisa, for the first time, as genuinely her own person, and in doing so reminded him of an important truth about love: that it is a *person*, and not a set of attractive (but changeable) qualities, that a lover is committed to. Here we have slid into *Vertigo* territory—or perhaps we have been there all along. If, as previously noted, the two films have a great deal in common, it is at the same time true that *Vertigo* offers a far darker vision. In many ways, indeed, *Vertigo* may strike us as the actualization of Jefferies' worst fears. (Some have suggested that everything following the opening sequence of *Vertigo* might be considered a hallucination experienced by Scottie as he hangs from

the precipice at the start of the film. An equally interesting possibility, it seems to me, is that the entire film is a nightmare Jefferies might have had while dozing in his wheelchair in the sweltering heat of summer.<sup>2</sup>) Unlike Jefferies, who remains detached for much of his film, Scottie is rapidly sucked into the whirling vortex of his passion for Madeleine Elster and is, ultimately, destroyed. *Vertigo*, moreover, goes farther than *Rear Window* in dramatizing some of the extreme depersonalizing effects of romantic love in its more malignant forms. This theme appears in a variety of contexts: Scottie's dramatic loss of identity and autonomy following Madeleine's death, Judy's treatment as an object at the hands of both Elster and Scottie, and, of course, the rich metaphor of possession, which runs throughout the film.

The film's plot is complex and, moreover, implausible. For our purposes, it will be enough to say the following: John "Scottie" Ferguson, formerly a police detective, is hired by a wealthy man, Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore), to watch his wife, Madeleine (Kim Novak), who is behaving oddly. Scottie falls in love with Madeleine and begins an affair with her, which ends tragically when, under his watch, she throws herself off a tower to her death. Scottie is shattered by this event and apparently unable to recover from it until he meets Judy Barton, who reminds him of Madeleine. They begin a relationship and he tries to make her over into a replica of Madeleine. The remarkable success of this endeavor is explained by the fact—revealed to the viewer in a flashback from Judy's point of view—that Scottie has been deceived: Elster, plotting to murder his actual wife (whom Scottie never met), hired Judy to pretend to be her, so that Scottie could function as a "made to order witness." Scottie's discovery of the deception and subsequent confrontation with Judy leads, tragically, to Judy's accidental death in a fall from the same tower from which the actual Madeleine had fallen.

As in *Rear Window*, the central crime plot concerns a man who murders his wife; and as in *Rear Window*, the murderer functions as a possible future version of the protagonist. (Here, though, he is not recognized as such until Scottie has already begun to resemble him.) Its main protagonist (James Stewart again!) is a kind of observer: in this case, a former police detective and private eye, a man who, once again, begins the main part of the film in a state of constraint (he wears a "corset," which he, like Jefferies, looks forward to getting free of). This is, again, the result of an injury sustained while taking an active role in his work: Scottie fell while chasing a suspect across the rooftops of San Francisco. In *Vertigo* we see the events leading up to the injury, as the opening scene depicts the chase, and it is significant, surely, that the first person we see in this film is a man escaping to his freedom—a man who, moreover, escapes so successfully that he disappears from the film altogether, so that we in the audience never learn what his name was, what his crime was, or anything else about him. (Watching this sequence, we might

well recall that Camus writes that “existential philosophies [...] without exception suggest escape.” (Camus 1955, 33.) As the film progresses we will see multiple failed escape attempts, including Scottie attempting to leave Elster’s office, but turning around to stay; Judy in her hotel room, packing her things to flee Scottie, but changing her mind; and Judy, still later, in the midst of Scottie’s transforming project, expressing the wish to leave him, then saying she can’t because she doesn’t want to.

This dreamlike opening sequence, which functions almost as a mythological backstory against which the remainder of the film’s action plays out, is followed immediately by a much more sedate scene, set in the apartment of Scottie’s friend, Midge (Barbara Bel Geddes).<sup>3</sup> Here, in addition to learning about Scottie’s corset and his vertigo, we learn a bit about his life and past. He is single, but was once engaged to Midge, who still, it seems, desires him. We begin to sense that he, like Jefferies, is a man who values his independence, perhaps to his own detriment, and that his secret wish—again, like Jefferies—is to view the world from a detached perspective, as if from on high, in order to be safe from the risks and threats posed by a genuine engagement with life. But Scottie is incapacitated for such a task in a way that Jefferies is not: the end of this scene provides a vivid symbolic representation of its impossibility, as Scottie climbs up a small step stool in an attempt to overcome his vertigo and then, when he looks down at the streets far below, is instead overcome by it. He collapses, falling into the arms of Midge, the woman he rejected years ago but still keeps around as, apparently, a safe alternative to an actual romantic relationship. Scottie, then, much as he might like to, lacks Jefferies’ ability to keep himself detached from life, to stay safe by standing above the fray. When Madeleine appears he will plunge almost immediately into a passionate and ultimately ruinous pursuit.

As in *Rear Window*, the murderer—Gavin Elster—represents a possible future for Scottie, someone he might well become. Like Thorwald, Elster is what Jefferies fears: a man trapped by his life and marriage, who escapes by betraying and destroying the person he presumably once loved (and in doing so, betrays his former self as well). Scottie’s meeting with Elster finds the latter, who comes across as a somewhat sophisticated and romantic gentleman, longing for “the power and the freedom” of the old days in San Francisco, while confessing that he “married into” the shipbuilding business, a business he does not enjoy. When Scottie says “You don’t have to do it for a living,” Elster replies, “No. But one assumes obligations.” We do not yet know, and will not learn for some time, that Elster is planning to deal with his assumed obligations by disposing of his wife, and that the power and freedom he envies is largely that of free, powerful men to deal with inconvenient women in this manner. Nor have we yet realized what is apt to become apparent on later reflection, that every time the coupling of the words “power” and “freedom” appears in the film (it will occur twice more), it is in connection

with the disposal of a female victim. The words are next uttered by Pop Leibel, a local historian, who tells Scottie and Midge the tragic story of Carlotta Valdez. (*Vertigo* is, among other things, a compendium of stories about women, some of them told by the characters, others enacted. The told stories are told, mostly, by men, with the exception of the true story about herself Judy writes in a letter to Scottie, before tearing it up.) Valdez is connected to several spots Madeleine has visited, and Scottie begins to wonder whether her spirit is possessing Madeleine. This is, of course, part of Elster's plan, and his choice of this particular story seems emblematic both of his own personality and of the film's concerns.<sup>4</sup> For Carlotta, Leibel tells us, was used and then abandoned by her husband, causing her to go mad. He then says:

I cannot tell you how much time passed, or how much happiness there was. But then he threw her away. He had no other children; his wife had no children. He kept the child and threw her away. Men could do that in those days. They had the power ... and the freedom. And she became the Sad Carlotta. Alone in the great house ... walking the streets alone, her clothes becoming old and patched and dirty ... the Mad Carlotta ... stopping people in the streets to ask, "Where is my child? ... have you seen my child?" [...] There are many such stories.

There are, indeed, many such stories, though on a first viewing it will not yet have occurred to us that we are watching yet another one. The third utterance of "power" and "freedom" comes later, spoken by Scottie himself, who has finally discovered Judy and Elster's deception. "Oh, Judy!!" he says to her. "When [Elster] had all her money, and the freedom, and the power, he ditched you? What a shame!" In his anger at her, his rage at his having been betrayed, he is being ironic, but not, one suspects, entirely ironic; there remains, after everything, a dimension of his character that is, in fact, capable of feeling compassion for her at the way she has been treated. Like Carlotta—and like Scottie himself—she, too, has been used by a man who commanded enough power and freedom to treat other people as mere means to his ends and get away with it.

It becomes apparent through the course of the film that Elster treats woman as his possessions, and possession is indeed one of the central metaphors in *Vertigo*, and perhaps the key to its dark vision.<sup>5</sup> Like the historical Carlotta, of whom Leibel says, "she was found ... by that man, and he took her [...] But then he threw her away," and like the actual Madeleine to whom Elster was married, who was also, literally, thrown away when she became inconveniently constraining, Judy has been treated as a tool, an object to be utilized and then "ditched." (And Scottie, too, has been manipulated in ways highly damaging to him, and

hence treated as a mere means.) But more than being treated as a possession, she has been viewed as one, not only by Scottie, and of course Elster, but by the film's audience. For we have not only bought Elster's claim that Judy is Madeleine, we have also at least partly swallowed the implausible idea, planted by Elster, that his wife is possessed by the spirit of Carlotta Valdez; and as a result we have found ourselves not only seeing Judy as someone she is not, mistaking an actor for her role and taking Elster's creation for a real woman; we have constantly scrutinized the woman we thought we were seeing for signs that she was not really herself, that she was being controlled by an outside force, and that this would explain her odd behavior. In all of this, we are deceived like Scottie and respond to what we see much as he does. (The irony of all this, of course, was that the story was true—Madeleine *was* possessed—but not in the way we were led to believe.) Of course, we are released from our deception sooner than Scottie, via Judy's confessional flashback, with the result that when *he* finally learns the truth we are able fully to appreciate, and to feel, the sick horror of his realization.

It is in the interim between the audience's learning of Elster's plot and Scottie's discovery of it that Scottie himself seems to become possessed, in a different sense, by Elster. (Here, too, he seems to realize Jefferies' fear that falling in love will compromise one's autonomy.) Seeing the resemblance between Judy and Madeleine, he takes control of Judy and forces her to alter her appearance to become, as much as possible, a duplicate of his lost love. Once again directed and possessed by a controlling man, once again treated like a possessed object, a mere thing, Judy can only plead, "Couldn't you like me, just me, the way I am?" The disturbing and downright creepy scenes that depict Judy's forced transformation at Scottie's hands—scenes in which Scottie wrests control over Judy's physical appearance away from her, insisting that it is more important to him than it could possibly be to her—put his delusional obsessiveness blatantly on display:

SCOTTIE: The color of your hair ...

JUDY: No!

SCOTTIE: Judy, please, it can't matter to you.

JUDY: If ... if I let you change me, will that do it? If I do what you tell me, will you love me?

Indeed, just prior to this Judy herself has admitted, in another of the film's abortive escapes, that although she could protest her treatment and put a stop to it by simply leaving, she cannot bring herself to do it:

JUDY: I wish you'd leave me alone. I want to go away.

SCOTTIE: You can, you know.

JUDY: No, you wouldn't let me. And ... I don't want to go.

Is it Scottie's grip, or Judy's lack of will to escape, that keeps her in place? The two have so merged, perhaps, that one cannot really distinguish them. It is no more clear whether Judy knows how to relate to a man other than by becoming his object than it is clear that she knows whether she really is Madeleine or someone else, and if someone else, who. Scottie, meanwhile, shattered by Madeleine's death, has barely started to rebuild an identity of his own, and what he has now is constructed around the delusional hope of going back in time to (re)possess (another) Madeleine. It is frequent for viewers of *Vertigo* to conclude that Scottie cannot really love, but from a certain perspective his problem is that he loves too well: he is so devoted to Madeleine that he cannot leave her behind, cannot imagine a life without her. Viewed in this way, Scottie represents the ideal of monogamy pushed nearly to its logical extreme, from the perspective of which the idea that a lost lover might be replaced by someone else is objectionable, even offensive. As spoken by the narrator of Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*,

To lose someone you love is to alter your life forever. You don't get over it because 'it' is the person you loved. The pain stops, there are new people, but the gap never closes. How could it? The particularness of someone who mattered enough to grieve over is not made anodyne by death. This hole in my heart is in the shape of you and no-one else can fit.

(Winterson 1993, 155)

Scottie, who would have rejected the idea that a "new" person could have filled the hole in his heart, has experienced the miracle of finding another person with the same exact shape as his lost Madeleine; it is as if she were not a new person at all. The irony, of course, is that Judy *is* Madeleine, and so not a new person; but we know that before Scottie does—indeed, we know it through the entire process of his attempt to convert Judy *into* Madeleine—and so we can see, as he can't, that his belief that an exact replica of Madeleine would *be* Madeleine proves not how profound his attachment is but that it is attached to the wrong object. Then again, from Scottie's perspective, his eventual discovery that Madeleine was Judy all along might seem to vindicate his mad project. Madeleine, it turns out, was Elster's creation. Why could she not also be Scottie's?

### Love, Self-Knowledge, and the Future

Anxiety has a similar effect to vertigo: it is the "dizziness of freedom," and "he whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy." Yet it is not the abyss (the possibility) that creates the anxiety but rather the individual who looks upon it: some do not look down, subjective perceptions about the size of the chasm

differ, and the passion with which individuals approach the abyss and leap differs enormously.

(Skye Cleary 2015, *Existentialism and Romantic Love*)<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the most threatening aspect of love is that it makes our well-being and our identity contingent on the actions and continued well-being of another vulnerable human subject. In the months following Madeleine's death, Scottie is devastated, a shell of a man. For some time he is nearly comatose and confined to a psychiatric hospital, suffering from "acute melancholia together with a guilt complex." Even after his release he is barely functional. Aimless, afflicted by terrifying nightmares, he can think of nothing to do with himself but return to sites where he once went with his lover, or else wander San Francisco at random. Watching him, we recall that when she was first seducing him Madeleine had said, "Only one is a wanderer. Two, together, are always going somewhere." Here, too, he represents the realization of one of Jefferies' deep fears: that love, by demanding that our identity be re-forged with the beloved at the center, makes us entirely dependent on that beloved, so that if they were lost we would be left with no identity at all. We might be reminded, here, of Harry Frankfurt's view that all values and reasons are ultimately grounded in love. "Love is the originating source of terminal value. If we loved nothing, then nothing would possess for us any definitive and inherent worth" (Frankfurt 2004, 55–56). Thus, if we had no final ends—if we loved nothing—"it is more than desire that would be empty and vain. It is life itself. For living without goals or purposes is living with nothing to do" (Frankfurt 1999, 84). The Scottie Ferguson of this period is clearly a man for whom nothing possesses "any definitive and inherent worth," whose life is "empty and vain," and thus someone who is "living with nothing to do." He has no reason to do anything, other than to hope against hope that the world can somehow be magically restored to what it once was.

Why does Jefferies fare so much better than Scottie? To some degree he is simply lucky. Scottie loses Madeleine—twice—while Jefferies, despite his reluctance to commit, does not lose Lisa. And Scottie is the victim of a plot, whereas the murderer in *Rear Window* is barely aware of Jefferies and does not attempt to make him part of his machinations. But Scottie also has a less firm grip on his own identity than Jefferies does; he merges with Madeleine, reconstructing his life around his desire for her. As we have noted, his vertigo is, among other things, a symbol of his (excessive) inability to remain detached. (Jefferies, by contrast, excels at detachment.) Scottie is more of a romantic than Jefferies, more willing to sacrifice his identity and autonomy in love, less able to hold himself apart in order to preserve an integral core in a love relationship, and hence less able, one presumes, to recover from love's loss. Although Scottie sometimes appears diffident, particularly

in the first part of the film, that appearance seems to conceal and protect a man for whom nothing is more important than the possibility of impassioned love.

But there is one more significant difference between their narratives. I have suggested that Thorwald represents a possible future for Jefferies—someone that he might become—and that Elster does the same for Scottie. If this is so, then the timing of the meetings between the protagonists and their possible future selves, and the nature of those meetings, is important and indeed decisive. Scottie meets Elster three times in the film, before he has any reason to suspect him. By the time he has learned the truth about his situation, Elster, like the fleeing man we glimpsed in the opening shots, has escaped from the film, and the only person who remains whom Scottie can confront about the deception and manipulation he has suffered is Judy. Jefferies, by contrast, is in possession of most of the story when he finally meets Thorwald in person. Thus he, unlike Scottie, has the chance to confront, and so symbolically vanquish, his undesired possible future self. Jefferies literally struggles with that possible future self and essentially delivers him into the hands of the police; in doing so, he decisively rejects that aspect of his own identity. In the process, he sees this version of himself up close (using his flashbulb not only to momentarily paralyze him, but more importantly, to shed light on him) and so obtains a kind of self-knowledge. Self-knowledge, indeed, is the answer to the question Thorwald confronts him with in this scene: “What do you want from me?”

Early on in the film Stella had said to Jefferies, “People need to get outside their own house and look in for a change. How’s that for homespun philosophy?” Since he represents a possible future version of Jefferies, getting outside of himself and looking in is exactly what Thorwald allows Jefferies to do; it is, in a sense, what he has been doing all along. And the confrontation with Thorwald ends, of course, with Jefferies literally getting what Stella said he needed—that is, getting outside of his own home. Thus, although he is injured in the struggle, being thrown out the window by Thorwald, this should not be seen as a defeat; rather, Jefferies’ ejection from the apartment where he has been able to live in isolation and play the detached observer represents his re-entry into life—which is why the next time we see him, in the film’s final scene, he is no longer dangling suspended over an existential void, or living vicariously through voyeurism, and he and Lisa seem to have achieved a genuine relationship.

In rejecting Thorwald, Jefferies is liberated from his fear of becoming “someone [he] would have hated to be,” and finds the strength and courage to overcome his resistance to commitment and to join with Lisa. She is, of course, a changed Lisa, having discovered, with Jefferies’ encouragement, interests and capacities that had previously been latent within her. But Lisa has changed less than Jefferies, or at any rate is less surprised by the changes: she suspected all along, and had even tried to

assure him, that she could become such a person. The prospect of change is threatening, but also promising. Of course, the final shots of any film, particularly those that suggest a happy ending, indulge in a pleasant fiction: *this is how things will be from now on*. Obviously, we cannot say with certainty what Jefferies and Lisa's future will be like. Indeed, if my reading is correct, the idea that we *cannot* know—that where true love is involved, the only thing we can predict is that we may well be changed in ways we cannot control or predict—is central to these two films' thinking about love and its place in human life.

## Notes

1. Moreover—and more important than any of this, I suspect—there is the fact that by the end of the film, Jefferies has directly confronted his feared future self and, by bringing him to justice, vanquished him. I return to this point in the final section.
2. Which would mean, of course, that Scottie's nightmare, suffered just past the halfway point of the film, is a nightmare within a nightmare.
3. Sadly, limited space prevents me from discussing the Midge character at any length. This is a real loss, for Midge is in fact quite important to what the film has to say about love.
4. Since Elster is, as many commentators have pointed out, a kind of stand-in for Hitchcock (who makes a cameo appearance directly outside Elster's office, as if the two had just switched places), it makes sense that the story would be emblematic of the director's concerns as well.
5. The connection of autonomy with property in American political thought is highly significant. A fuller version of the quotation from Jennifer Nedelsky used as the epigraph to section 2 reads as follows: "One of the clearest forms [American thinking about autonomy] takes is the idea that individual autonomy is to be achieved by erecting a wall of rights between the individual and those around him. Property [...] is, not surprisingly, the central symbol for this vision of autonomy. The logic of this is that the most perfectly autonomous man is thus the most perfectly isolated."
6. The quotations in the passage are from Kierkegaard (1980), 61.

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