HITCHCOCK: THE MIND OF A MASTER

A VISUAL INVESTIGATION OF NORTH BY NORTHWEST & THE WORLD OF FILM

PART II, CHAPTERS 21-45

by

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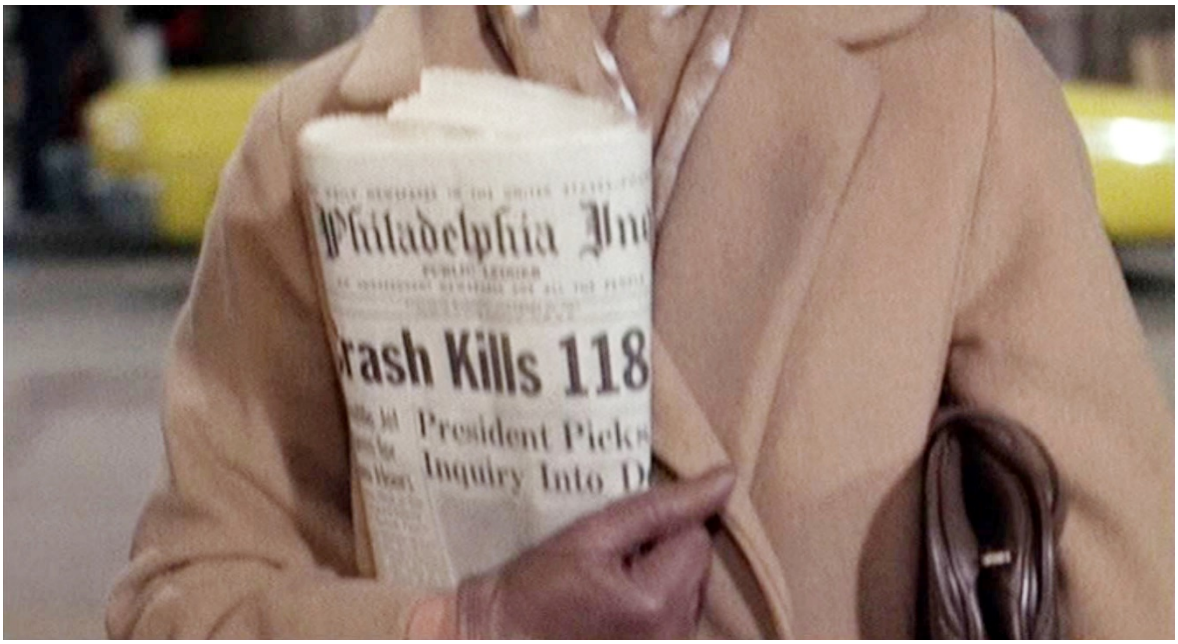
21. UNTRUSTWORTHY NEWSPAPERS

North by Northwest [1959] (02:43)

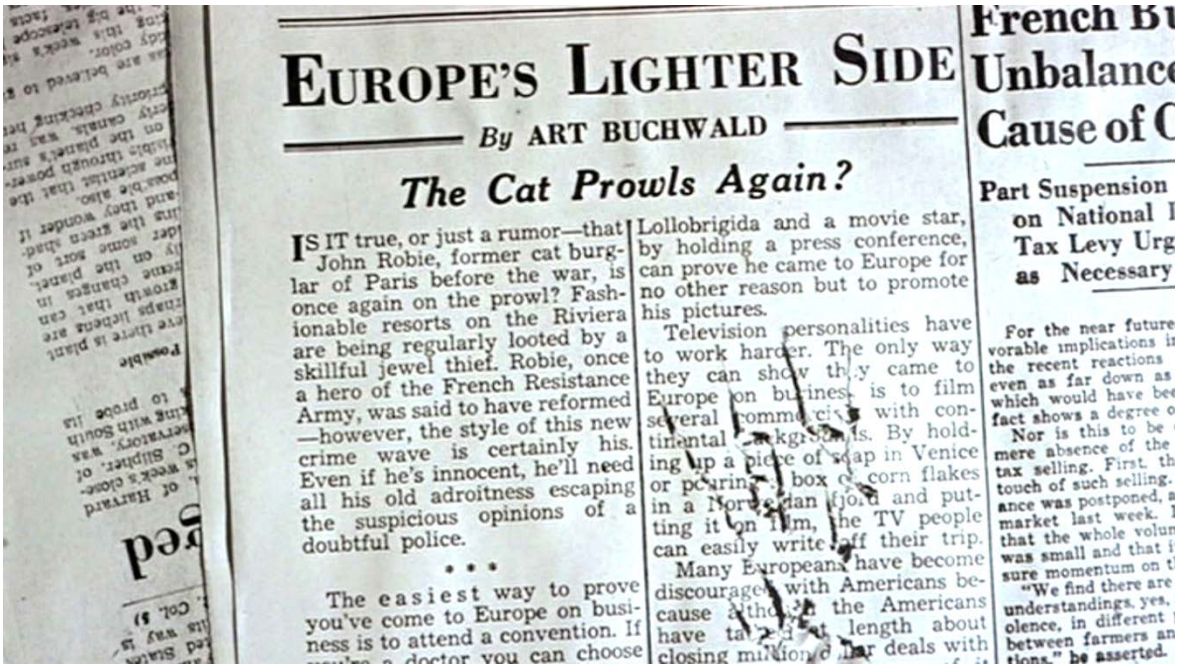
On his way out of the building, Thornhill stops to buy a newspaper – one of which will soon feature his picture as the "most wanted man in America."

This introduces another Hitchcockian theme. Throughout the film, newspapers (carefully manufactured props, of course) become sources of information, both correct and false. At this point, however, there is no reason to assume Thornhill, like the average American, does not put complete trust in the information gleaned from the press.



Marnie [1964] (19:54)

Newspapers appear in Hitchcock's films many times and for various purposes. For instance in *Marnie* [1964], the newspaper carrying the job advertisement that will lead to her ultimate downfall also carries an ominous headline, "Crash Kills 118" (a reference to the Trans Canada Air Lines flight 831 from Montreal to Toronto that crashed on November 29, 1963 about five minutes after takeoff) and a sub headline, another "downfall," "President Picks . . . Inquiry Into . . ." (a reference to the establishment of the Warren Commission to investigate the assassination of John Kennedy). Are these predictive of Marnie's fate?



EUROPE'S LIGHTER SIDE

By ART BUCHWALD

The Cat Prowls Again?

IS IT true, or just a rumor—that John Robie, former cat burglar of Paris before the war, is once again on the prowl? Fashionable resorts on the Riviera are being regularly looted by a skillful jewel thief. Robie, once a hero of the French Resistance Army, was said to have reformed —however, the style of this new crime wave is certainly his. Even if he's innocent, he'll need all his old adroitness escaping the suspicious opinions of a doubtful police.

* * *

The easiest way to prove you've come to Europe on business is to attend a convention. If you're a doctor you can choose Lollobrigida and a movie star, by holding a press conference, can prove he came to Europe for no other reason but to promote his pictures.

Television personalities have to work harder. The only way they can show they came to Europe on business is to film several commercials with continental backgrounds. By holding up a piece of soap in Venice or pouring a box of corn flakes in a Norwegian fjord and putting it on film, the TV people can easily write off their trip.

Many Europeans have become discouraged with Americans because although the Americans have talked at length about closing million dollar deals with

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tions," he asserted.

To Catch a Thief [1955] (04:20)

In *To Catch a Thief* [1955], a newspaper falsely accuses John Robie of returning to his previous career as a cat burglar. The paper is torn by cat claws and, ironically, the article is titled, "Europe's Lighter Side" even though this will cause John endless trouble. "Even if he's innocent, he'll need all his old adroitness escaping the suspicious opinions of a doubtful police," says the paper. Further describing Robie's situation is the partial headline in the upper right corner of the paper, "French . . . Unbalanced … Cause …"

Lifeboat [1944] (24:23)

Hitchcock's use of newspapers occasionally takes on a life of its own. In *Lifeboat* [1944], Hitchcock's cameo is in a weight reduction advertisement in a newspaper. The "before" and "after" photographs are real – Hitchcock lost almost 100 lbs. However, the product, "Reduco Obesity Slayer," (a pun on *Reductio Ad Absurdum*?) is a fabrication. It is reported Hitchcock received hundreds of letters inquiring where it could be purchased.

Newspapers will appear several times in *North by Northwest*, each time in a significant role, but always providing the incorrect information.

Hitchcock's distrust of newspapers and presumably those who report the news becomes evident in *Foreign Correspondent* [1940], a wake-up call to an America ignorant of European politics in 1940 because of ineffectual news reporting. While the recently-promoted All-American working class Johnny Jones prevents an international incident, professional correspondent

Stebbins (played to the laconic hilt by Robert Benchley), presumably symbolic of all incompetent political reporters, is portrayed as a philandering, alcoholic career drone.

22. THE RED HAT

North by Northwest [1959] (02:48)

After Thornhill buys the newspaper, several people pass in front of him and his secretary. Most important among these is a woman in a bright red hat. Her movement is such that Thornhill seems to be following her. This is a continuation of Hitchcock's use of the red symbolism.

Once outside the building, Thornhill continues dictating to his secretary while they stride down the street. When she complains her feet hurt, he grudgingly agrees to take a cab the few blocks to his next meeting.

23. STEALING A CAB

North by Northwest [1959] (03:27)

Roger Thornhill is constantly moving, physically, mentally, and soon psychologically. This is represented in both the way he is photographed and because of the sheer physical energy Cary Grant brings to the role. For the rest of the film, he will be in taxis, on trains, in cars, and so on, always in constant motion, all the time trying to figure out – at the surface level – what is going on and trying to figure out – at the psychological level – who he is. At this point, all this movement has little purpose (like taking a taxi for two blocks), but as the film progresses every movement will take on more and more meaning. Everything will be directed toward a single point – Thornhill's psychic growth as a human being.

From the very beginning of his career, Hitchcock has been deeply concerned with his characters' psychological changes, even before he became interested in thrillers. For instance, the 1931 comedy *Rich and Strange* is about the resolution of a mid-life crisis (long before that term slipped into our everyday vocabulary).

Thornhill now rudely steals a cab for himself and his secretary. By shear physical bluster, brashness, and a few quick words, he manipulates the would-be passenger into passivity and confusion. His blind disregard for human feelings is demonstrated when he justifies his actions in the glibbest terms imaginable – it made the other man feel better. On the positive side, we learn that Roger is a quick-witted and ambitious man.

His excuse for stealing the cab is that his secretary is ill, "We have a very sick woman here. You don't mind?" Could this be a reference to Roger's own interior feminine aspects? Is he unconsciously aware he is not communicating with his own internal feminine and, at the same time, or perhaps because of it, has no meaningful relations with women in the real world?

This is our first glimpse into another central theme of the film: Here is a fast-talking man who is in the business of manipulating others but will soon be himself the victim of manipulation. Though he thinks he is "somebody," he will soon become nobody, literally. His task, then, will be to construct a new self. What is cynical in him now will soon be exaggerated into nightmarish proportions and will be turned against him, almost as retributive punishment for a life of manipulating others. Here is a man who uses the "expedient exaggeration" who is about to become the victim of someone else's far greater "expedient exaggeration."

During the cab ride, there is one particular incident I find rather amusing. Thornhill glances at the newspaper and, in response to something he saw there, is suddenly aware of his weight. He wants to "think thin." I cannot but wonder what it was Roger saw in the paper to trigger this train of thought. In his 1944 film, *Lifeboat*, Hitchcock makes his cameo by appearing in a newspaper ad in the form of a "before and after" picture for a diet plan (shown above). I wonder if this is the same ad Roger now sees!

There is, however, a more serious side to this off-hand comment. Roger asks his secretary to put a note on his desk to remind him to *think* about his weight. Notice that this note is not a reminder to eat less or exercise more, but to "think thin." We have just learned another important aspect of Roger Thornhill's life – to solve problems, he does not take action, but believes simply thinking about something will take care of it. He is about to learn differently.

North by Northwest [1959] (04:50)

Roger asks his secretary to call his mother to remind her of the dinner and theater date for that evening. During the conversation, Thornhill mentions that by then he will have had two martinis at the Oak Room bar and that his mother will sniff his breath. To his secretary's disbelief, he says, "Like a bloodhound." And at that very moment on the street behind the cab we see a man walking a dog! This type of visual/verbal pun that Hitchcock is so enamored of, will be discussed in detail later.

Roger's taxicab ride ends with two actions involving women. Both show his inability to make contact with the feminine – social or psychological. First, he hands the cabby some money, with the abrupt comment, "Take this lady back where she belongs." Thus, according to Roger's philosophy, all women have their place, and this one belongs back in his office. We also learn he has a dinner and theater date . . . with his mother, who, by the way, will sniff his breath for alcohol.

Now, he makes a seemingly innocent error. Thornhill tells his secretary to call his mother and then, too late, realizes she is not at home but off playing cards where there is no telephone. "Innocent" errors do not exist in the universe of Alfred Hitchcock.

If he had been able to make contact with his mother – and I ask you to consider all the psychological implications this statement contains – he would

have avoided the whole painful adventure of *North by Northwest*. He would not have to risk his life several times, get manhandled, get shot at, and so on. However, he also would not have met a woman he can relate to and he would have missed the opportunity to develop into a mature male human being. This seemingly innocent error marks the beginning of his adventure.

North by Northwest [1959] (03:49)

Hitchcock now continues with his color symbolism. Green: A greenish car is following their cab during Thornhill's comment about "expedient exaggeration," a statement of Thornhill's disease. Red: By the time they arrive at the Plaza Hotel, Thornhill is enveloped in red – the red seats behind and steering wheel before. There is a red taxicab behind him as he arrives at the Plaza Hotel.

North by Northwest [1959] (04:31)

A slight error in continuity shows how deliberate is Hitchcock's use of the color red. When Thornhill gets out of the cab – presumably now on location in New York City near the corner of 5th Avenue and 59th Street – the red cab is nowhere to be seen – presumably because the previous scene was shot in the studio where Hitchcock could pick the image he wanted projected behind the cab.

24. MUSIC IN THE OAK ROOM

North by Northwest [1959] (05:07)

As the cab pulls away, Thornhill realizes his secretary cannot contact his mother as he had asked. Again, we have a breakdown in communication, not only with his secretary, but also with his mother.

Once inside the Oak Room Bar, he undertakes the task of communicating with his mother himself. As psychological symbolism, this makes perfect sense. For the psyche to become whole, it must communicate with the psychological Mother and other aspects of the internal feminine; this must be done "in person" and not ascribed as a task for others to undertake.

Here begins a series of adventure-nightmares for Thornhill. One of the minor lessons of this film is never to walk into a bar when a string quartet is playing "It's a Most Unusual Day." Hitchcock has a long history of using musical comments on his films' proceedings. Here are a few examples:

- In 1930, in his first sound film, *Blackmail* [1929], the blackmailer, enjoying a "free," i.e., extorted, breakfast and a fine cigar, whistles, "The Best Things in Life Are Free."
- In 1940, Hitchcock was apparently not a fan of jazz. In *Foreign Correspondent* [1940], Chick Webb's "Harlem Congo" is used to "torture" diplomat Van Meer into revealing the secret clause of a peace treaty.

- In the 1941 *Suspicion,* Lina and Johnnie's first waltz is to *Wiener Blut* (Viennese Blood), the title predictive of her suspicions that her husband is a murderer.

- In *Shadow of a Doubt* of 1943, the constant playing of "The Merry Widow Waltz" is ironic bordering on the grotesque: the widows victimized by Uncle Charlie are anything but merry.

- In 1947, the music in *The Paradine Case* not only demonstrates Hitchcock's sense of humor, but also his attention to the minutest of details. On Mrs. Paradine's piano sits, "Appassionato Op. 69 by Francesco Ceruomo." The composer's name is an Italianized version of Franz Waxman, the composer of the film's score, and what is printed on the sheet music is the very music being heard at that moment.

- In the 1950 *Stage Fright*, the song, "The Laziest Girl in Town," lugubriously performed by Marlene Dietrich as Charlotte, has a line, "who was so lazy, she couldn't be bothered with lovers." This is a good description of Charlotte's relationship with the various men around her.

- In the 1954 *Rear Window*, the newlywed couple moves into their apartment to the strains of "That's Amore." In the same film, the "Lisa" theme, which had been developed piecemeal by The Composer, actually saves the life of the suicidal Miss Lonely-Hearts.

Rear Window [1954] (1:50:52)

- In the 1955 *The Trouble with Harry*, the music under the titles consists primarily of oboes and clarinets until Hitchcock's name appears accompanied by a loud blast of trumpets as if announcing the master. The macabre nature of the black comedy that follows is indicated by the horns playing the *Dies Irae*, the chant for the dead, which is then taken up by a church bell as we view a presumably idyllic New England landscape at its most beautiful fall display of colors – with a dead body in the middle of a field.

- In the 1963 *The Birds*, while crows slowly land on a schoolyard play structure gradually increasing in number, the children inside the school are singing an "accretion song," one that gathers in length because each verse contains elements of the previous verses. *Risseldy Rosseldy* is the Americanization of the Scottish folk song *Wee Cooper O'Fife.*

The Birds [1963] (1:09:49)

- In the 1964 *Marnie,* Hitchcock uses a group of children almost as a Greek chorus. They chant the children's rhyme, "Mother, mother, I am ill; send for the doctor over the hill." Of course, this is Marnie's unconscious speaking – she is indeed ill, and the illness stems from her relationship with her ill mother. To further emphasize the point, mother lives a few yards from the wharf, where the water meets the land, where the symbolic unconscious meets the symbolic conscious.

25. HANDICAPS & DISABILITIES

North by Northwest [1955] (05:25)

As Roger walks into the Oak Room bar of the Plaza Hotel, another aspect of Thornhill's personality is revealed. He is recognized by the maître at the bar and he responds with his name, Victor, much as he knew the name of the elevator boy, Eddie, at the building in which he works. Apparently, Roger knows and respects the men whose job is to serve him anonymously.

In the Oak Room he meets three business acquaintances. One of the men is hearing impaired. Again, this is intentional, a decision on the Hitchcock's part; we can be certain the actor sent down from central casting did not just happened to be hard of hearing. The man's deafness represents another breakdown in communication. We have already seen that Eddie and his wife "ain't talkin'," his secretary sent on an impossible errand, and soon Roger won't be able to get a message to his mother. Communication will continue to be disrupted throughout the film. At another level, the man lifting his hand to his ear is an indicator to us, the audience, that we should part careful attention to the aural environment of the Oak Room bar where, in the background, George Kaplan is being paged.

Hitchcock used deafness before. In 1939 in *Jamaica Inn*, it is used simply to have the speaker repeat several important words to the impaired hearer for the audience's benefit.

Marnie [1964] (47:53)

By 1964, deafness becomes more complex. When Marnie robs the Rutland factory in *Marnie*, she succeeds only because the cleaning woman is deaf. One character succeeds because of the deficit of the other. This idea describes quite well the relationship between the two main characters, Marnie and Mark. Marnie succeeds, up to a point, because of Mark's "deafness" to her true character and Mark succeeds, up to a point, because of Marnie's "deafness" to the origins of her psycho/sexual disabilities.

Torn Curtain [1966] (12:03)

And in the following year, in *Torn Curtain* [1966], the bookseller who sends Michael Armstrong on his adventure has a hearing aid. This allows him to cavalierly ignore his assistant's pointed questions about the nature of his clandestine, undercover spy work.

The Big Combo [1954] – Joseph Lewis

While it is not common, Hitchcock is not alone in his use of disabilities as filmic symbols. One of the best is in the *film noir The Big Combo* [1954] where a hearing aid not only illustrates who is in the superior position when a hoodlum boss Mr. Brown (Richard Conte) shouts amplified commands to his long-suffering underling McClure (Brian Donlevy), but it is later used to mercilessly torture the hero, Lt. Leonard Diamond (Cornel Wilde).

Sabotage [1936] (03:27)

Hitchcock uses other physical disabilities symbolically. In *Sabotage* [1936], for example, a near-sighted man adheres all too strictly to "the law," frivolously complaining about contracts being broken when the lights go out in a movie theater because a power plant has been sabotaged by Nazi agents. Clearly the man cannot differentiate his own private – near-sighted – reality from the larger reality of England at war.

I Confess [1953] (1:07:25)

In *I Confess* [1953], Father Logan, is hampered – indeed, crippled – by his inability to reveal his own innocence because of what he heard in the sanctity of confession. About to be arrested, the downcast priest passes a woman on very symbolic crutches.

Marnie [1964] (13:26)

In *Marnie* [1964], Marnie's mother uses a cane, her physical handicap symbolizing her emotional problems.

Topaz [1969] (1:51:12)

By 1969 things become a bit more obvious. In the totally humorless *Topaz,* the villain, Henri Jarre, not only shakes hands with his left hand but uses a crutch.

Saboteur [1942] (46:16)

However, handicaps are not always debilitating. In *Saboteur* [1942], for instance, Pat's blind uncle can immediately perceive the falsely accused Barry's innocence. Later, a groups of sympathetically portrayed circus side-show performers, all with various disabilities, protect the young couple from capture.

26. PAINTINGS

North by Northwest [1959] (05:23)

In their conversation, Roger's business associates strongly imply Roger is a heavy drinker and compare his drinking to horse racing. While Roger is entering "the race" late, the man is sure that Roger will soon catch up. And just in case we don't get the point, there is an Everett Shinn painting of a horse in the background.

Hitchcock uses paintings (he was an art collector) in the backgrounds as commentary in almost every one of his films.

The Lodger [1927] (12:49)

Even as early as the 1927 *The Lodger*, art objects are of considerable importance. The lodger finds his room filled with bourgeoisie paintings of various blonde women. As these remind him of his murdered sister, he asks they be removed. This brings suspicion on him as "The Avenger," a murderer who only kills blondes.

Blackmail [1929] (35:21)

In *Blackmail* [1929], Alice just killed her would-be rapist. A garish painting of a clown accusingly points at her and mocks her feelings of guilt.

Foreign Correspondent [1940] (1:34:38)

A decade later in *Foreign Correspondent* [1940], when a gang of grim-faced spies try to pry from Van Meer that portion of a political treaty that will help them win the war, Hitchcock hangs a painting of a dog in the background, arranged so as to be one of the interrogators. Is he saying these people are acting like dogs torturing an old man or is this a representation of the "dogs of war" that are, in 1940, on the Europe's horizon?

Suspicion [1941] (23:52)

A painting is prominent to the plot of *Suspicion* [1941]. “He doesn’t like me,” Johnnie comments about the General’s portrait, his suspicious father-in-law, as it interrupts his lovemaking to Lina.

Suspicion [1941] (1:10:23)

The same painting reappears when Lina learns of the death of their friend Beaky under circumstances implicating her husband Johnnie in Beakey's death. The painting of her father, rising out of a bouquet of funereal flowers, looking down on her, seems to be saying, "I told you so."

Suspicion [1941] (39:43)

Still later in the same film, when Johnnie quickly fabricates an elaborate lie about his wife's heirloom chairs, which he hocked to pay gambling debts, a lie that will shortly be the beginning of her doubts about him, Hitchcock photographs Johnnie with a still-life painting just behind him . . . and with a knife pointed at his head.

Spellbound [1945] (54:37)

In *Spellbound* [1945], when Constance goes to visit John in the hotel he is hiding in, her emotions – the "flowering" of her emotions – are telegraphed by a painting of flowers in the background. Later in *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock will use the same symbolism – bare branch versus lush flowers – to represent Roger and Eve's rapidly changing emotional state.

Stage Fright [1950] (06:28)

Hitchcock presents one of his most ghoulishly funny painting comments in *Stage Fright* [1950]: the camera slowly rises from a dead body on the floor to the closet doors just behind. These are decorated with paintings of dancing women, seemingly dancing on the body in the same way as the (at this point presumed) murderess, Charlotte Inwood, is celebrating the death of her abusive husband.

Stage Fright [1950] (10:57)

Later in the same film, when Johnny is supposedly overwhelmed with guilt and fear, a Salvador Dali-like painting behind him is perfectly aligned behind his head comments on his mental state: a couple at the far right and a spiral building pointing toward his head (Dali is mentioned in the novel *Stage Fright,* but in a different context).

Strangers on a Train [1951] (17:28)

In *Strangers on a Train* [1951], we are clearly intended to see the almost German Expressionist portrait, horrible and distorted, as a representation of Bruno's psychosis: his relation with his father. Bruno's mother, who made the painting, naively thinks she is making a portrait of Saint Francis. Through this painting it is clear that she, too, contributes considerably to Bruno's psychosis.

Rear Window [1954] (38:48)

A variation in *Rear Window* [1954]: an overweight woman makes a sculpture she calls, “Hunger.” The sculpture’s empty center may be a psychological hint to the source of her overeating. Or it may reflect L. B. Jefferies’ psychological problems. It may also be a precursor of Roger Thornhill’s matchbook with his initials printed on it, “R. O. T.” He states that the “O” stands for “nothing,” i.e., his empty center.

The Trouble with Harry [1955] (16:00)

In 1955 we get a hint that Hitchcock's taste seems to be primarily for representational art. In *The Trouble with Harry*, we get a very common critique of abstract art: Mrs. Wiggs admires one of Sam's paintings while unknowingly holding it upside down.

The Wrong Man [1956] (06:35)

Hitchcock also uses paintings in the background to symbolize positive relationships as in *The Wrong Man* [1956]. Manny comes home to greet his

loving wife before two paintings of flowers in vases, clearly reflecting their relationship. Hitchcock will use this idea again in *North by Northwest* in Eve's hotel room in Chicago, but in a much more complex manner.

Vertigo [1958] (28:27)

Vertigo [1958] (1:10:57)

In *Vertigo* [1958], the two versions of the portrait of Carlotta are not in the background, but central plot elements. Cleverly, the two painting chart Scottie's "progress." The first marks the beginning of his obsession with

Madeleine and the second becomes a measure of the depth of his inability to escape that obsession.

Topaz [1969] (2:15:45)

In *Topaz* [1969], a Picasso-like painting is cropped to show only an arm echoing a man just wounded in his arm.

Frenzy [1972] (1:34:20)

In *Frenzy* [1972], Bob Rusk, the psychopathic murder/rapist, is shown with two portraits of strangely colored women behind him, clearly reflecting his distorted view of women.

27. THE ALCOHOLIC HEART

North by Northwest [1959] (05:38)

After introductions, Roger sits down to have drinks with his business associates. They comment that while they may be a few drinks ahead of him, he will soon catch up. We have just seen how Hitchcock uses the painting of race horse behind the table to symbolize Thornhill's ability to "catch up," i.e. his alcoholism.

In addition to the painting, Hitchcock uses a second device to indicate Thornhill's drinking problem: props and camera placement. Hitchcock places the camera so the cocktail glass appears directly in front of Thornhill. In fact, if we look at the image in two dimensions rather than three, we see the glass is placed directly over Thornhill's heart. And if we look carefully, we can see that the cocktail glass itself is a gigantic prop, at least twice normal size. (Hitchcock used the same technique to achieve the close-up in *Dial M for Murder* [1954] in which a gigantic wooden finger dials an enormous telephone dial. And, with much less success, a massive and obviously wooden hand holding a mammoth gun pointing at the audience in *Spellbound* [1945].)

Dial M for Murder [1955] (43:05)

Spellbound [1945] (1:57:01)

The huge cocktail glass that takes the place of his heart makes Roger's alcoholism visually explicit. This offers several interpretations. Does it mean that at heart, Roger is an alcoholic? Or does it mean that deep within his center, Roger has spirit?

Hitchcock uses this visual device – placing an object, sometimes inordinately large, over a person to combine meanings – in other films.

The Lodger [1927] (30:26)

Very early in his career, in the silent *The Lodger* [1927], the worried mother waits for her daughter's return. Hitchcock photographs the recumbent woman with her night table before her, placing the camera so that the focus of her worries, the clock, is placed directly over her heart. He even places a heart-shaped water beaker next to the clock to make sure we get the idea. To further symbolize the poor woman's worries, a candle topped with a snuffer – clearly a symbol of death – completes the still life.

The Lady Vanishes [1938] (1:07:40)

Glasses containing a knock-out drug appear very large, dark, and threateningly close in *The Lady Vanishes* [1938].

Notorious [1946] (10:34)

In *Notorious* [1946], when alcoholic Alicia wakes up with a hangover, Devlin prepares her a curative drink. Presumably, the ache in her head will be cured by the drink photographed directly over her head. This will continue into one of Hitchcock's most over-the-top subjective camera moves: from Alicia's point of view, Devlin, at a radical tilt, walks across the room to wind up upside down looking at her. Perhaps that curative drink should have been served to the audience.

Notorious [1946] (18:39)

Later, to emphasize Alicia has cut down on her drinking, the glass “at her heart” is now soda water and mostly empty.

The Paradine Case [1947] (18:10)

In 1947, Hitchcock uses this same positioning device but with slightly different meaning. The lecherous Judge Lord Thomas Horfield of *The Paradine Case* [1947] (played with over-the-top glee by Charles Laughton) places Gay Keane's hand on his leg and blatantly propositions a lawyer's wife. A bottle with a cork about to pop out is placed directly over his crotch – a wonderful phallic symbol.

Strangers on a Train [1951] (05:21)

In 1951, Hitchcock can be seen honing and polishing this idea. In *Strangers on a Train* [1951], eight years before *North by Northwest*, in an almost identical situation to Thornhill in the Oak Room bar, the waiter sets before Bruno a cocktail glass, again directly over his heart, containing nothing but an inordinately large ice cube. What better way to portray a cold-hearted killer?

Strangers on a Train [1951] (1:39:42)

And later in the same film Hitchcock uses a gigantic telephone so both the telephone in the foreground and the woman behind it, Ann Norton, desperately expecting a call from her fiancée, are in focus.

Dial M for Murder [1954] (1:27:50)

In *Dial M for Murder* [1954], Hitchcock places a partially eaten, broken hardboiled egg over a man's heart. The police inspector, who just "cracked" the case, is himself the traditional stiff-upper-lip Englishman – a hardboiled egg.

Topaz [1969] (1:19:33)

In *Topaz* [1969], Hitchcock returns to this idea of sexual symbolisms used in 1947 in *The Paradine Case*, but now for the opposite sex with a carefully arranged and placed bowl of fruit.

28. GRAY FLANNEL THUGS

North by Northwest [1959] (05:56)

A few moments later Hitchcock uses his camera to make an interesting social comment. The camera pans from Thornhill's three business-suited companions with only a slight movement to the two business-suited kidnappers. Here Hitchcock is saying at least two things, first is the idea that there is little difference between the business men and the thugs, and, second, while the kidnappers will become his physical enemies, the world of business has been an equally formidable psychic enemy all along. Only much later in the film will Roger Thornhill be able to shed his suit – the symbolic uniform of a life that has robbed him of his soul.

29. IDENTITY & KIDNAPPING

North by Northwest [1959] (06:03)

Here we see two of Hitchcock's favorite themes combined – the breakdown of communication and the random victimization of an innocent man – coming into play.

A few examples of miscommunication: In *Shadow of a Doubt* [1943], young Charlie's telegram to her Uncle Charlie brings a serial killer into her house. In *Spellbound* [1945], the plot is revealed by two signatures not matching. In *The Lady Vanishes* [1938], the reading of an elusive tea wrapper is central to the film. In *Rich and Strange* [1931], what appears to be good news in a telegram turns out to be a curse. In *Sabotage [1936]* a note, "Don't forget, the birds will sing at 1:45 p.m.," is at the root of one of the most suspenseful sequences Hitchcock ever made.

The Manxman [1929] (09:13)

Sometimes the results are comic. In *The Manxman* [1929], Hitchcock uses the breakdown of communication for some rather low humor: an old man, mistaking a fountain pen for a pencil, puts it in his mouth to lick it before adding his name to a petition. At the level of symbolism, we see that the older generation wants things the way they were; the old man feels the same way about a modern fountain pen as he does about modern politics.

In *North by* Northwest, in the Oak Room bar the conversation between the businessmen and Thornhill is full of miscommunications – often quite funny. One man confuses Roger's secretary and Roger's mother (though they both do have red hair). A further breakdown of communication is mentioned when Roger describes the apartment where his mother is playing bridge: no telephone.

But now the breakdown in communication in *North by Northwest* is given a far more serious turn. All the while, in the background a bellman is calling "George Kaplan, George Kaplan." Thornhill's obliviousness to this

call, perhaps the most important breakdown in communication, is his entry into the adventure to follow.

In his attempt to send a telegram to his mother, Thornhill simply raises his hand and unknowingly summons the same bellman who is, coincidentally, looking to deliver a telegram to George Kaplan. Therefore, the thugs mistake Thornhill for Kaplan! Miscommunication now turns into its variation: mistaken identity.

It should come as no surprise Hitchcock often uses the idea of mistaken identity. While some of his films are a direct case of mistaken identity, Hitchcock manages to invent many variations.

- In *The Lodger* [1927], the man hunting Jack the Ripper is himself mistaken for Jack the Ripper. A man is ironically hunted by police and public, accused of crimes he did not commit.

- In *The 39 Steps* [1935], Hannay is falsely accused of murdering the spy Annabella. And Hannay mistakes the spymaster Professor, masquerading as an upstanding citizen, as an ally.

- In *Secret Agent* [1936], British agents Ashenden and The General, mistaking an innocent man for a spy, kill the wrong man.

- In *Suspicion* [1941], as the title indicates, Lina falsely suspects her loving though flaky husband Johnnie of being a murderer.

- In *Saboteur* [1942], Barry is framed for the murder of his friend.

- In *Shadow of a Doubt* [1943], young Charlie's telegram to Uncle Charlie brings not the kind uncle she was expecting, but a serial killer. The confused police attempt arresting the wrong man in a different state.

- In *Spellbound* [1945], Hitchcock presents us with two layers of mistaken identities: John Brown masquerades as Dr. Edwards. But when his true identity is revealed, he is mistakenly arrested as Dr. Edwards' killer.

- In *Dial M for Murder* [1954], Margot is unjustly accused of killing the man who actually attempted to kill her.

- In *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1956], Dr. McKenna is mistaken by the Marrakech police for an FBI agent in league with French spies.

- In *The Wrong Man* [1956], Manny is mistaken for a robber and positively identified by several "eyewitnesses." His frustration is much like Thornhill's except for Manny there is no happy ending despite his being proven innocent.

- In *Vertigo* [1958], Scottie mistakes Judy for Madeline while following who he thinks is Elster's wife and repeats the mistake later under the influence of his psychosis.

- In *Psycho* [1960], we mistake Norman Bates for his mother, Mrs. Bates, during the various murders.

- In *Frenzy* [1972], due to an almost random set of circumstances, Richard Blaney is mistaken for the notorious Necktie Strangler.

In addition to the mistaken identity theme, in *North by Northwest* Hitchcock works out another of his favorite themes: the ordinary person, who through no fault of his or her own except perhaps being psychologically ripe, is thrust into extreme circumstances by something as simple and innocent as trying to send mother a telegram.

The result for Roger Thornhill is kidnapping at gunpoint. This is the polar opposite of Roger's regular and conforming life. He is off on an adventure of self-discovery, which, according to Hitchcock, will turn his life around and change it into a life of personal – and public – fulfillment. However, at the onset of the adventure there is typically an overwhelming feeling of being trapped and powerless.

A corollary to the plight of the "innocent man" theme is Hitchcock's idea of a world that is randomly vicious. Many of his movies begin with people living unsuspecting, seemingly ordinary lives: Bob and Jill on holiday in Switzerland in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1934], young Charlie bored with the repetitious sameness of her family in *Shadow of a Doubt* [1943], a

Canadian on holiday in London taking in a theater in *The 39 Steps* [1935], an ordinary man, almost anonymously part of a crowd, going to work every day in a factory in *Saboteur* [1942], the exciting but by no means unusual worlds of tennis in *Strangers on a Train* [1951] and *Dial M for Murder* [1954], a reporter covering a political speech in *Foreign Correspondent* [1939], and so on. All these "ordinary" people are, through no fault of their own, thrust into a life-changing adventure. Hitchcock's world is a cruel, impenetrable, and arbitrary construct that can, at any moment, bring down unimaginable catastrophe on the innocent and unsuspecting.

Thornhill simply raises his hand at the wrong moment. It is the innocence and ordinariness of this gesture that fascinates Hitchcock. It is finding meaning and consequence where meaning and consequences could not possibly exist: The touching of two shoes in *Strangers on a Train* [1951]; watching a vaudeville in *The 39 Steps* [1935]; or, perhaps most frightening of all, doing absolutely nothing at all in *The Wrong Man* [1956].

North by Northwest [1959] (06:28)

The only moderating principle that also recurs in Hitchcock's films is that the victim, while undeserving of his or her fate in the physical world, is unknowingly psychologically prepared, in fact one could say far overdue, for the adventure to come, an adventure that inevitably leads to psychic growth and maturity.

And this is certainly the case with *North by Northwest*'s Roger Thornhill. In the adventure to come, he will rid himself of his cynicism, change from being a nobody to being a somebody, begin a meaningful relation with a woman, learn to care about something bigger than himself, and, last but certainly not least, cut the apron strings that have bound him for several decades longer than necessary (or healthy) to his domineering and manipulating mother.

Lifeboat [1944] (01:15)

This idea of growth through apparent disaster applies to almost every Hitchcock film. Though sometimes he takes on a slightly larger subject than a single individual. In *Lifeboat* [1944], for example, we begin by seeing a boat's stack sink into the sea belching symbolic black smoke and steam. It plunges into the symbolic unconscious of the ocean. What transforms in what follows is not an individual, though that does happen, not a group of individuals, though that too happens, but all of America represented by the nine people on that lifeboat.

North by Northwest [1959] (06:17)

Thornhill is now strong-armed out of the hotel at gunpoint into a waiting car.

North by Northwest [1959] (06:54)

Hitchcock's use of the color symbolism he so carefully established tells us that what appears to be a disaster is actually a positive step for Thornhill.

As Thornhill is being hustled into the Cadillac limousine, a red bus passes behind the car echoing what the color red represents.

The Wrong Man [1956] (19:13)

Three years previously, Hitchcock used an almost identical scene in *The Wrong Man* [1956], but instead of hoodlums, it was the police who were taking Manny away. Since many of the same graphics and almost identical images are used in the two films, I assume the intent is the same – an innocent man removed from his comfortable environment into a world of confusion and chaos. Unfortunately, in Manny's Neo-Realist world, there is no place for personal growth or positive outcome.

Even during his kidnapping, Thornhill is hopelessly and inappropriately concerned about his business associates and the date with his mother. He retains the glib banter of a good Madison Avenue advertising man. His animation is clearly contrasted by the almost death-like demeanor of the two kidnappers – they seem to be in (or from) another world. While Thornhill is electric with energy and exasperation, someone seems to have pulled their plug. Only Thornhill is alive and functioning, though at this point perhaps not functioning particularly well. Despite all his activity, Thornhill, normally sheltered by his wealth and privilege, is powerless for the first time in the film and probably the first time in his life. His powerlessness is demonstrated by his ineffective thrashing about in the limousine.

The Wrong Man [1956] (19:43)

North by Northwest [1959] (08:37)

Manny Balestrero, in *The Wrong Man* [1956], is also portrayed as helpless, seated in the back of a police car between two immobile and statue-like policemen. Again, Hitchcock is equating the thugs of *North by Northwest*, with the police of *The Wrong Man*.

30. KIDNAPPED INTO LUXURY

North by Northwest [1959] (08:14)

At the end of the long ride, Thornhill and his captors arrive at a large mansion. The name associated with this mansion is "Townsend" (a real mansion, the Phillips Estate at 71 Westbury Road, south of Glen Cove, Long Island). This reference to geographic extremity – town's end – is equivalent to the forest of fairy tales where people get hopelessly lost, a symbol of the unconscious. Thornhill is abducted into his own unconscious, there to meet his enemies. So far, his most obvious encounters are with his own drinking and glibness. Here he is about to be confronted by the loss of his own identity.

Seeing the mansion, certainly more luxurious than his own apartment, Thornhill looks in shocked curiosity at the thugs, unable to comprehend their relationship with the posh mansion and why he would be kidnapped into such plush surroundings.

Strangers on a Train [1951] (1:04:25)

This is not the first time Hitchcock used a baronial mansion as a seat of evil. The manses in *Rebecca* [1940], *Strangers on a Train* [1951], and *The Paradine Case* [1947], and the palatial halls in *Saboteur* [1942] and *Notorious* [1946] are all loci of various unsavory events. These aristocratic structures become characters in their own right.

Rebecca [1940] (02:42)

This is especially true in *Rebecca* [1940] where the narrators says, “time could not mar the symmetry of those walls,” while what Hitchcock shows us is the very opposite of symmetry.

Rebecca [1940] (29:19)

Later in the same film as the newlyweds drive up to the mansion it begins to rain. Our first view of Mandalay is through a car windshield streaked with rain, cleverly predictive of the tears to come.

Suspicion [1941] (27:16)

Similarly, in Suspicion [1941], we know Johnnie and Lina's wedding is doomed to failure because Hitchcock photographs the ceremony through a window in the rain, their future tears flowing down the glass.

Shadow of a Doubt [1943] (1:06:34)

These stately mansions, abodes of the rich, are examples of how Hitchcock relates elements of the 19th century to evil, especially those that have encroached unabated into the 20th. Perhaps the most striking example is Uncle Charlie in *Shadow of a Doubt* [1943]: while fantasizing his murders, he envisions a costumed Viennese waltz dancers, something he himself could never have historically experienced. The film with the most pernicious past is *Vertigo* [1958] with Carlotta's ghost haunting everybody.

Now in the Townsend mansion we meet villain Vandamm, in many ways, like the mansion, a leftover from previous times – a sophisticated gentleman spy who plays by a strict set of rules today outdated. Compare Vandamm's behavior as a spy to that of the sober, gritty, cynical and double-dealing Alec Leamas (Richard Burton) in Martin Ritt's version of John le Carre's *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* [1965] done only six years after *North by Northwest*.

The Spy Who Came in From the Cold [1965] – 34:14 – Martin Ritt

31. THE CRIMINAL WEALTHY

North by Northwest [1959] (09:00)

In addition to the exteriors, the palatial interiors of these mansions are also identified as the centers of evil. Typical are the magnificent foreign embassy in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1956], the immense New York City ballroom of *Saboteur* [1942], the chess-board-floor of Alex Sebastian's Brazilian palace in *Notorious* [1946], and the baronial hall in *Jamaica Inn* [1939]. One class of villain running through Hitchcock 's oeuvre is the upper class, their villainy signified by their possessions.

The Man Who Knew Too Much [1956] (1:55:27)

Saboteur [1942] (1:07:52)

Notorious [1946] (1:02:19)

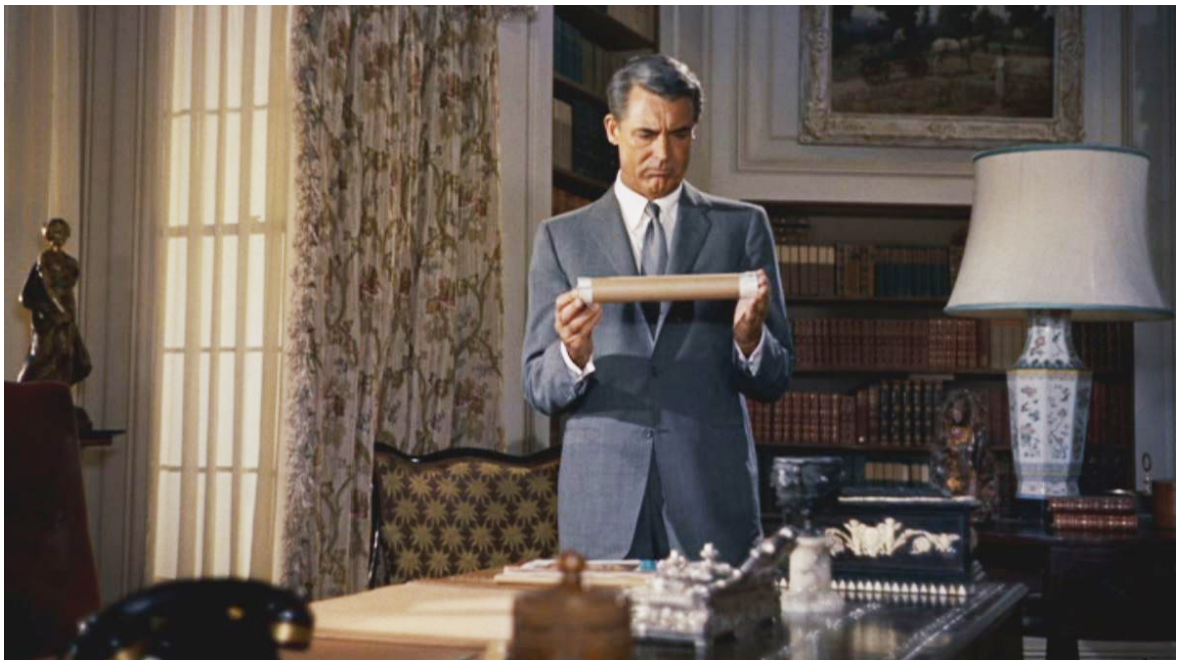
Jamaica Inn [1939] (50:20)

Interestingly, Hitchcock rarely had sets built to represent these places. In most cases they are real mansions. For instance, in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1956] the scenes in the "embassy" were filmed in the Park Lane House in London (now replaced by a Hilton Hotel).

Thornhill, still gaping at the splendor of the mansion, is escorted from the car to the front door. A red-haired women, the first of several, answers the door and shows him in. Roger makes quips about dinner – he still does not comprehend the seriousness of his situation.

North by Northwest [1959] (09:47)

In the tow of the thugs, Thornhill is deposited into a huge library with floor to ceiling bookcases. In Hitchcock's films, the villains are typically better read, better educated, and more sophisticated than the heroes. When Alicia enters Alex's house in *Notorious* [1946] Schuman and later Chopin are being played on the piano. Bruno in *Strangers on a Train* [1951] is better educated, even if thrown out of multiple schools, than Guy. The Professor in *The 39 Steps* [1935] is far more erudite than Hannay. In one of the rare films where the protagonist is an intellectual, *The Paradine Case* [1947], lawyer Anthony mentions the first date with his wife was to see a George Bernard Shaw play. Yet his sophistication does not prevent his downfall.



North by Northwest [1959] (09:37)

Once inside the mansion, locked in the opulent library, Thornhill participates in another miscommunication. He assumes his captor's name is Lester Townsend by reading his mail (only much later he learns it is actually Philip Vandamm). In a moment, he mistakenly calls Vandamm, "Townsend" but the ever-cool spy exhibits no reaction.

Indeed, it is not only the villain Vandamm who is more sophisticated than hero Thornhill, but so is Vandamm's collection of thugs who speak a better and more cultured English than Thornhill can muster.

32. LEONARD & HOMOSEXUALITY

North by Northwest [1959] (09:43)

It is through the library window we now catch our first glimpse of Leonard, a fascinating and, as it turns out, a pivotal character in the story. Leonard is summoned to the house to help interrogate Thornhill. For a very brief moment, we see Leonard outside strangely entertaining himself with a solitary game of croquet!

What an odd pastime for a murderous thug. All sports have their symbolic values. Ever since "Alice in Wonderland," we associate croquet with pre-pubescent girls in pink dresses. I believe that in this brief glance, Hitchcock is giving us a hint of Leonard's homosexuality that was, for 1959, very levelheaded and non-hysterical comment. I cannot but wonder if Hitchcock had in mind the relation of the visual image of croquet, that is, rolling a ball through a hoop seen at Leonard's feet and the visual image of the scene that closes the film, that is, a train rolling into a tunnel. Both have sexual connotations.

Like Hitchcock's fascination with blonde actresses, writing about his portrayals of homosexuality (and his own gender performance) is a minor academic industry. I will try not to repeat too much of what has been published

elsewhere. However, despite the dozens of books and close to a hundred articles, there remains much, as I will show below, to be discovered.

The Pleasure Garden [1925] (16:48)

Almost from the beginning of his career, Hitchcock was fascinated with gender representation. He often touches, usually with delicacy and restraint, on non-mainstream sexuality. Not, however in his first film, *The Pleasure Garden* [1925]. The briefly seen costume designer, with his clichéd effeminate gestures, is an obvious stereotype.

In his first "Hitchcockian" film in 1927, *The Lodger*, the hapless, jealous and crude policeman/boyfriend comments to Daisy about his rival, assuming he is gay, "Anyway, I'm glad he's not keen on the girls." In his macho posturing, he is, of course, wrong, wrong for Daisy as a lover and later wrong as a policeman. Putting a gender slur in the mouth of a crude, corrupt dunce is comment enough on Hitchcock's part.

Murder! [1930] (1:23:30)

As time passed and the society in which Hitchcock worked became more permissive, his references to homosexual characters become less buried and less clichéd. For instance, the villain in the 1930 *Murder!*, Handell Fane, is homosexual and a transvestite.

He is portrayed as a sympathetic character suffering in a prejudiced society because of his mixed-race background – his cross-dressing is portrayed primarily as a means of making a living as a circus performer, not as a psychological aberration. Fane's homosexuality is presented a very matter-of-fact manner and not connected in any way with his crimes. Transvestitism returns in *Psycho* [1960] as a symptom of serious psychological disturbance.

Rebecca [1940] (1:09:33)

There are many relationships that are, perhaps intentionally, portrayed ambiguously; after all, through most of his career Hitchcock had to deal with various film censorship boards. For example, when the surly Mrs. Danvers in *Rebecca* [1940] lovingly displays the first Mrs. de Winter's underwear, is this the sign of a lesbian relationship or just a variation of the self-sacrificing, naive, and over-dedicated servant James Stevens in James Ivory's *Remains of the Day* [1993]?

The Lady Vanishes [1938] (29:57)

And, on the male side, we have the two cricket-obsessed Brits in *The Lady Vanishes* [1938] sleeping in the same bed. Again, it is not at all clear whether Hitchcock wants to portray them as a gay couple or simply embarrassed by circumstances in a crowded hotel and trying desperately to keep a stiff upper lip.

Suspicion [1941] (1:27:27)

Other portrayals are not so ambiguous. For instance, his films have a smattering of mannishly dressed women: the crime writer and her female companion in *Suspicion* [1941] are good examples.

Strangers on a Train [1951] (03:52)

In *Strangers on a Train* [1951], Guy Haines has a cigarette lighter, a gift from Ann Morton inscribed, "A to G," "from Ann to Guy." However, Bruno's fascination with Guy, in light of the hatred of his father and the strange relationship with his mother, borders on the homoerotic. And Bruno says things like, "I'm your friend. I like you. I'd do anything for you." The inscription could easily mean, "From Anthony to Guy." And indeed, Bruno later uses the lighter as a link between the two men.

In 1948 Hitchcock made *Rope* [1948], a film with homosexuality at its core, even though it is never mentioned directly. The two major characters, Brandon and Phillip (both played by gay actors), are based on the infamous gay couple of Leopold and Loeb who murdered a young boy in 1924.

The film is full of sexual double entendres. For instance, in a rather obvious reference to mutual masturbation, Brandon accuses Phillip, as a youth, of "strangling chickens." When Phillip denies it, Brandon says, "You were quite a good chicken-strangler, as I recall." Later Brandon, referring to the body in the box, says, "Go ahead and look. I hope you like what you see." In

addition, Hitchcock's use of the camera could also be considered a homosexual double entendre for many of the "cuts" in the film (where he necessarily fades to black in order to connect the 10-minute takes relatively seamlessly), the black that the camera photographs is often a man's back sides.

Rope [1948] (44:34)

In the play on which *Rope* [1948] is based, *Rope's End*, it is clearly stated that their boarding school master, Rupert, had sexual relations with one or both of the boys. Because of the censorship code of the mid-1940s, this reference had to be eliminated (still the film was banned in several American cities). Hitchcock, however, gives us a visual clue as to Rupert's gender performance by giving him a pair of symbolic but rather obvious breasts.

Hitchcock presents these various forms of gender performance pretty much without comment. He does not moralize. Rather he trusts his audience that, if they understand the symbolism he is presenting, they can make up their own minds. Certainly the audiences of today would have a very different reaction to the subtle (and often not-so-subtle) references to homosexuality

than the audiences of the 1940s and 1950s when it would probably induce an intense discomfort – an effect that Hitchcock used to his advantage.

Maltese Falcon [1941] (24:47) – John Huston

Hitchcock's portrayals of homosexuals usually avoided the stereotypes of the day. He is much kinder and more sensitive than most concurrent filmmakers. For instance, compare the whining, weak, lisping, and perfumed Joel Cairo (Peter Lorre) in the 1941 *Maltese Falcon* (a film full of gay characters) with either Brandon in *Rope* [1948] or now Leonard in *North by Northwest*.

33. VANDAMM IN CONTROL

North by Northwest [1959] (10:07)

Apparently caught looking for a means of escape, Thornhill turns from the window to see Vandamm quietly sweep into the library. Hitchcock holds the camera on Vandamm giving us – and Thornhill – an opportunity to study the man. So ordinary and unprepossessing is Vandamm that Thornhill, after a glance, begins to turn back to the window as if it were more interesting. In Hitchcock's universe, evil always resides in the unremarkable. Only on rare occasions does Hitchcock use a flamboyant villain as with Bruno in *Strangers on a Train* [1951].

Now, the two men – with the help of some very elegant camerawork – seem to dance around each other like two animals sizing each other up before a fight. Vandamm then closes the curtains, plunging the library, a place of illumination through learning, into darkness – the darkness of evil, the darkness of the unconscious. It is as if the outdoor natural world should not see what is taking place inside these rooms.

North by Northwest [1959] (10:12)

Hitchcock uses curtains in two very different symbolic ways. The first, illustrated here by Vandamm, is to control the illumination of a scene. And, in this case, closing them one by one, to demonstrate his power and control over the situation. The second use of curtains, which I will discuss below, is in the sense of theatrical curtains.

The Farmer's Wife [1928] (06:24)

In one of his first films, *The Farmer's Wife* [1928], Hitchcock equates light with life and darkness with death. The death of the eponymous wife is signaled in the background by a shadow hand reaching up and closing a shadow curtain. The presence of death is further symbolized by the snuffed-out candle, a common symbol of death in a genre of classical paintings called "Vanitas," that is, symbols of mortality.

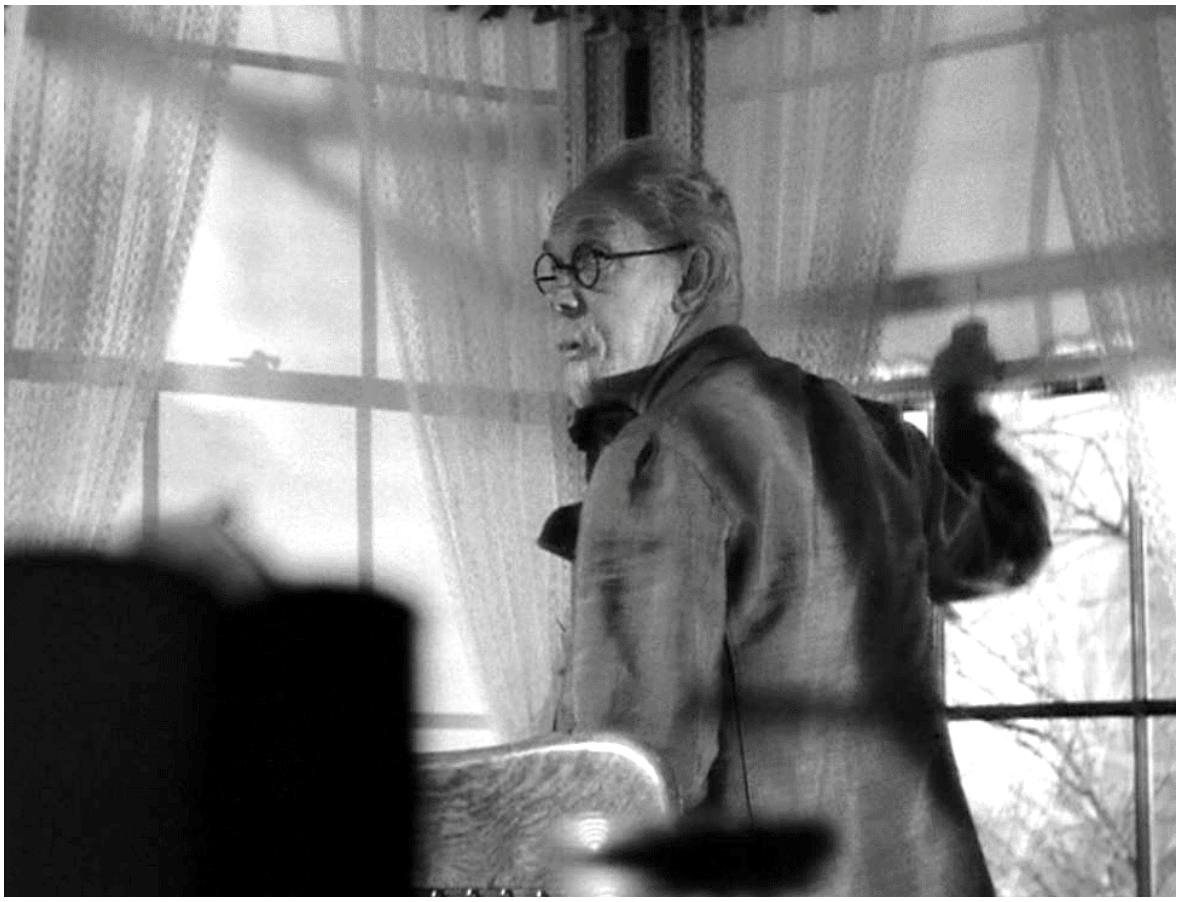
David Bailly (1584-1657), *Self-Portrait with Vanitas Symbols* – 1651

Stage Fright [1950] (02:30)

A similar shadow play takes place in Johnny Cooper's roof-level apartment in *Stage Fright* [1950]. Charlotte, after describing how she killed her husband, tells her lover Johnny to draw the curtains. At the level of text, this makes no sense at all: his apartment is placed high above all the others within sight. However, symbolically it shuts out the sight of nature and at the same time encloses Johnny in his soon-to-come doom. By commanding Johnny to close the curtains, Charlotte is exerting her power over him and her control over the situation.

Spellbound [1945] (55:19)

The idea that physical illumination can symbolize psychological illumination appears in many Hitchcock films. For instance, in *Spellbound* [1945], Constance begins psychoanalyzing the recumbent (and reluctant) John. In the background the curtains are open with the incoming light illuminating her and the wall behind her. But directly over John's head is a lamp that has not yet been turned on – an indication he is in psychological darkness about what is happening to him and she will soon bring him into the light.



Spellbound [1945] (1:22:32)

Later in the same film, the curtain symbol reappears: Professor Brulov, while explaining to Constance (and to us) his multiple observations and conclusions about John's mental state, walks around the room raising the curtains one by one, letting the very symbolic morning light in, and "illuminating" everything.

Rope [1948] (04:11)

In *Rope* [1948], Hitchcock sets up a fascinating variation on this theme: Brandon opens the curtains and lets in the light. Yet, his opening the curtains seems to lighten the room not a whit. Hitchcock cleverly sets up the lighting on the set, so the room stays dark even when the curtains are opened. Brandon may dispel the physical darkness yet is incapable of dispelling the moral and ethical darkness portrayed in the film.

34. CURTAINS AS THEATER

The Pleasure Garden [1925] (01:21)

There are very few Hitchcock films that do not contain some sort of theatrical reference. The opening and closing of curtains are typical. The very first scene of Hitchcock's very first film, *The Pleasure Garden* [1925], takes place on a theatrical stage. The film begins appropriately just after the curtains opened.

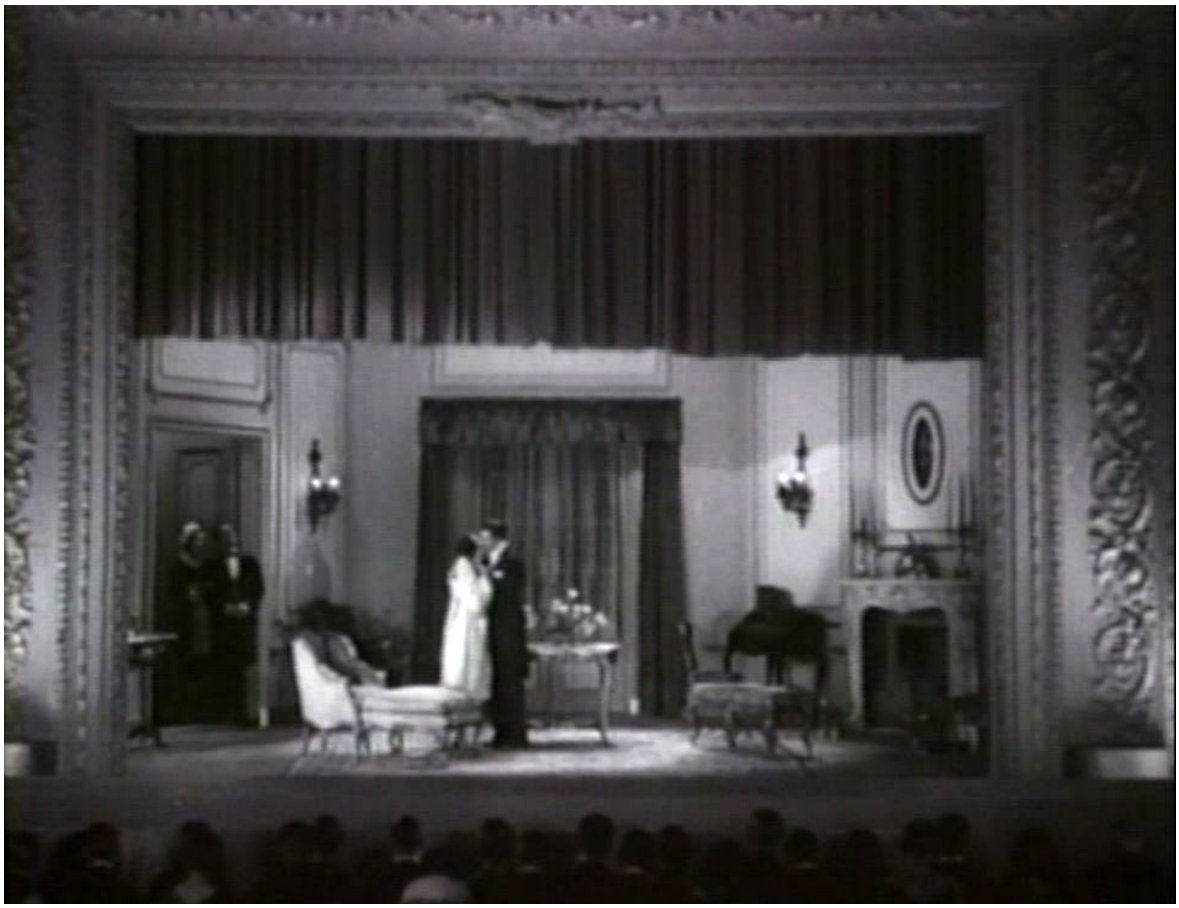
Downhill [1927] (35:13)

In *Downhill* [1927], in an amazing camera movement, Hitchcock shows the young and disgraced Roddy as a well-dressed young man. The camera pulls back to show he is “really” a waiter. The camera continues to pull back to portray him as a thief. And with a further retreat of the camera as an actor on a stage! Again this takes place moments after the curtains open.

The 39 Steps [1935] (01:57)

The 39 Steps [1935] (1:24:14)

The story of *The 39 Steps* [1935] begins in London's Music Hall Theater and ends in the London Palladium. The film's "final performance" is not only Mr. Memory's dying revelation of the nature of the "39 Steps," but also the capture of spymaster Professor Jordan on the same stage.



Murder! [1930] (1:32:04)

Hitchcock's early sound film, *Murder!* [1930] is about a criminal hidden amongst a theatrical troop and ends literally on stage with the curtain descending.

I Confess [1953] (1:29:58)

Similarly, in *I Confess* [1953], Hitchcock ends the film in a theater: the murderer Keller is cornered on the stage of a large, eerily empty ballroom of a major Quebec hotel.

Rear Window [1954] (00:45)

In *Rear Window* [1954], three curtains slowly rise under the titles at the beginning of the film.

Aventure Malagache [1944] (27:51)

Hitchcock also shows us actors playing actors. In his World War II propaganda film, *Aventure Malagache*, the love-struck, trusting, but foolish man who inadvertently betrays the French underground is named Pierrot – a name taken directly from the *Commedia dell'Arte* in which that stock character is known for his naiveté, his foolishness, and his misplaced trust of others. *Aventure Malagache* takes place backstage with actors putting on make-up and discussing their roles, the story itself being told in flashbacks.

Family Plot [1976] (21:37)

In *Family Plot* [1976], in addition to the multiple roles and disguises for everyone, we actually see one of the characters remove a wig and make-up on screen.

Dial M for Murder [1954] (41:27)

Other theatrical references, not inside a theater, are also common. For instance, Swann, the hired murderer in *Dial M for Murder* [1954], hides behind a set of curtains.

The Man Who Knew Too Much [1934] (30:33)

And in 1934, Hitchcock stocked a dentist's office with a kilowatt spotlight lifted from a stage or a movie set and not from a dentist's office in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1934].

Stage Fright [1950] (00:34)

Certainly Hitchcock's most audacious theatrical reference is the title sequence of *Stage Fright* [1950] (whose title itself is a punning theatrical reference). A literal curtain rises! On it are the words "safety curtain," perhaps alerting the viewer to not only the fact we are watching a film, but behind this curtain, is the world of the film where our usual assumptions of storytelling "safety" no longer apply (in fact, the film begins with the infamous "lying" flashback). And as the curtain rises it reveals not a stage, but a film: the city of London where the action is about to take place (and we must ask is Hitchcock here making a theatrical reference within a theatrical reference by literally showing us that "All the world's a stage," from Shakespeare's *As you Like It* – Act II, scene VII?).

Stage Fright [1950] (1:48:56)

And continuing the audacity, the "final curtain" is the "final curtain" as the iron safety curtain that opened the film closes it by crushing the villain to death on stage.

It should come as no surprise, then, that *North by Northwest* is filled with references to theater. We already looked at the references in *North by Northwest* to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Additionally, *North by Northwest* is full of people playing roles and people accusing each other of playing roles: A character within the film writes a script for the other characters to play, a prop gun is central to the plot, and so on.

35. FILM REFERENCES

Sabotage [1936] (57:33)

In addition to theatrical references, Hitchcock's films are full of references directly to films or the film medium itself. Hitchcock takes what is the invisible "grammar" of film and, in addition to using it to construct the film, uses it symbolically. These "cinematic" devices, common to every film, are "unnatural" to everyday human visual and sensual experience. Examples read like an instruction book on filmmaking: cutting abruptly from one locale to another, following two actions at once, hearing people speaking clearly at a far distance, using the limits of the camera frame to deny the audience important information, disordering time by using devices like flashbacks and flash-forwards, and so on. These cinematic tropes have been used so often they have become an invisible part of the medium.

Like his theatrical references, Hitchcock uses camera and film references to make politically and/or morally loaded comments, usually to the negative. For instance, in *Sabotage* [1936], spy Verloc uses the "American Newsreel Company" as a front, owns a movie theater, and loads explosives into film cans (and in a reference within a reference, the film cans contain a film called *Bartholomew the Strangler* in an allusion to the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572). And in what might be a very early self-reference, it is mentioned that film itself (before the invention of safety film) is explosive, clearly a metaphor for any film's political ramifications.

Lifeboat [1944] (02:46)

The opening of *Lifeboat* [1944] is seen through a miniature motion picture camera coldly operated by a self-serving and vain journalist.

Foreign Correspondent [1940] (26:51)

In *Foreign Correspondent* [1940], an assassin's gun is hidden next to a press photographer's Graflex camera. A visual parallel is made between the gun, the camera and the flash "gun" mounted on the camera. In addition, we are reminded that, in the vernacular, when people make pictures, they take a "shot."

I Confess [1953] (1:07:12)

In *I Confess* [1953], as the falsely accused Father Logan is walking to his impending arrest for murder, he passes a theater in which *The Enforcer* [1951] starring Humphrey Bogart is playing. As if seeing his own future, he looks worriedly at the film's advertising poster of a man in handcuffs being led away by detectives.

Notorious [1946] (01:38)

Notorious [1946] begins with a close-up of cameras belonging to a gaggle of vulturous press photographers (before the days when they would be called *paparazzi* but they are portrayed as no less rude), all at angles, none straight up and down.

Rear Window [1954] (05:27)

Hitchcock even makes references to the technical details of the photographic process itself in *Rear Window* [1954] by introducing Lisa in the form of a large-format negative displayed on a light box. However, the reference is more than just technical. At this point in his life, L. B. Jefferies sees his emotional involvement with Lisa as primarily a "negative" influence.

In addition to the visuals, the dialogue of many of his films is rife with film references. In *The 39 Steps* [1935], Annabella's story of espionage, says Hannay, "sounds like a spy story;" later being saved from a bullet by a hymnal never happens "except in the movies;" and Hannay's version of events, according to Pamela, "[is] a petty novelette spy story." In *Rope* [1948], Hitchcock even has the audacity to refer to one of his own films. The flighty Mrs. Atwater can't recall the name of a film she recently saw, but she is certain it starred Cary Grant and Ingrid Bergman: Hitchcock's own *Notorious* [1946].

In *The Birds* [1963], Hitchcock makes still another reference, this time to a television commercial. 'Tippi' Hedren made a diet soda commercial in which a man whistles at her slim figure. She turns to smile at him. Hitchcock repeats the incident at the beginning of *The Birds* on a San Francisco street.

36. LAMPS & ILLUMINATION

North by Northwest [1959] (10:19)

After Vandamm draws the curtains, he turns on the lights. As mentioned above, Hitchcock was always fascinated with light and illumination, both at the directly cinematic level and for its symbolic possibilities. For instance, when Vandamm closes the curtains to darken the room, Hitchcock carefully photographs Thornhill's face to emphasize his plunge into darkness.

Vandamm removes the light from Roger's face: now in control, he turns on a lamp – a source of artificial light, artificial illumination. Vandamm's preference to artificial light over natural light gives him a vampire-like quality.

Rear Window [1954] (21:37)

Compare Vandamm's gesture of turning on the lights in *North by Northwest* to Lisa turning on the lights one by one to illuminate herself so theatrically and elegantly in *Rear Window* [1954].

The Man Who Knew Too Much [1934] (21:33)

In the 1934 version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much,* the man from the Foreign Office, "G," explains the international assassination plot to Bob and Jill. A brightly lit lamp on the wall behind him is photographed so as to appear directly in front of him, almost at his mouth – he is "enlightening" them.

The 39 Steps [1935] (44:05)

Dark, unlit lamps have their meanings, too. The multiple dark lamp shades behind Professor Jordan in *The 39 Steps* [1935] imply he is not the respectable citizen he pretends to be, but a dangerous spy actually living in the darkness of the world of spies and international intrigue. There is something dark behind him.

The Wrong Man [1956] (1:11:59)

In *The Wrong Man* [1956], when Rose's mind starts sinking into depression, there is a darkened lamp just behind her head. To further emphasize this, the lighting on Manny's face shows a distinct shadow on the right side of his face giving it a three-dimensional look while Rose's face is lit with minimal shadows giving it a very flat look.

Easy Virtue [1928] (1:05:22)

Hitchcock combined the symbolism of both dark and light lamps in many of his films. Very early in his career, in the silent *Easy Virtue* [1928], Larita has just accused the old-fashioned and conservative Mrs. Whittaker of not knowing much about the ways of the real world outside her small town. An employee enters bearing two lamps to be hung for the party that evening, a large white one and a small black one. Larita picks the small black lamp which will provide very limited illumination, its inherent smallness and darkness symbolic of Mrs. Whittaker's world view.

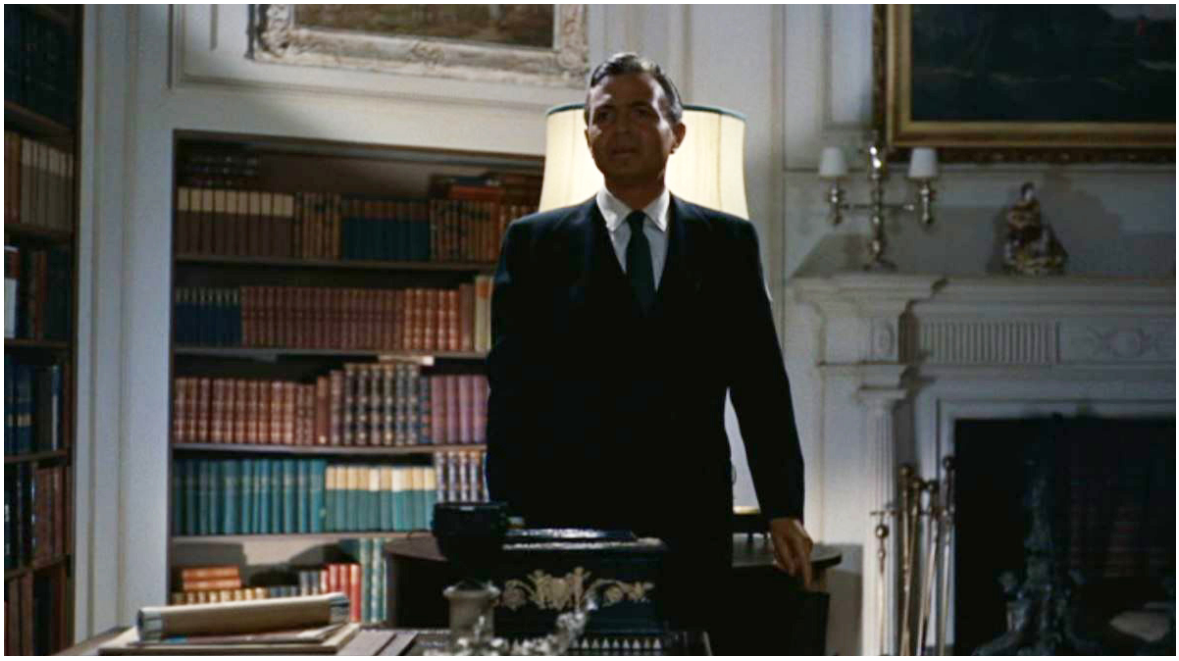
Mr. and Mrs. Smith [1941] (24:04)

In the screwball comedy, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* [1941], Hitchcock uses the same device as a rather gruesome visual joke: At the moment Mrs. Krausheimer sarcastically says, in response to learning that her daughter's marriage has been invalid for several years, "At least your father is dead," we get a view of her bedroom with the lamp on her side of the bed lit and the lamp on the far side of the bed, presumably her ex-husband's, extinguished.

Frenzy [1972] (1:18:09)

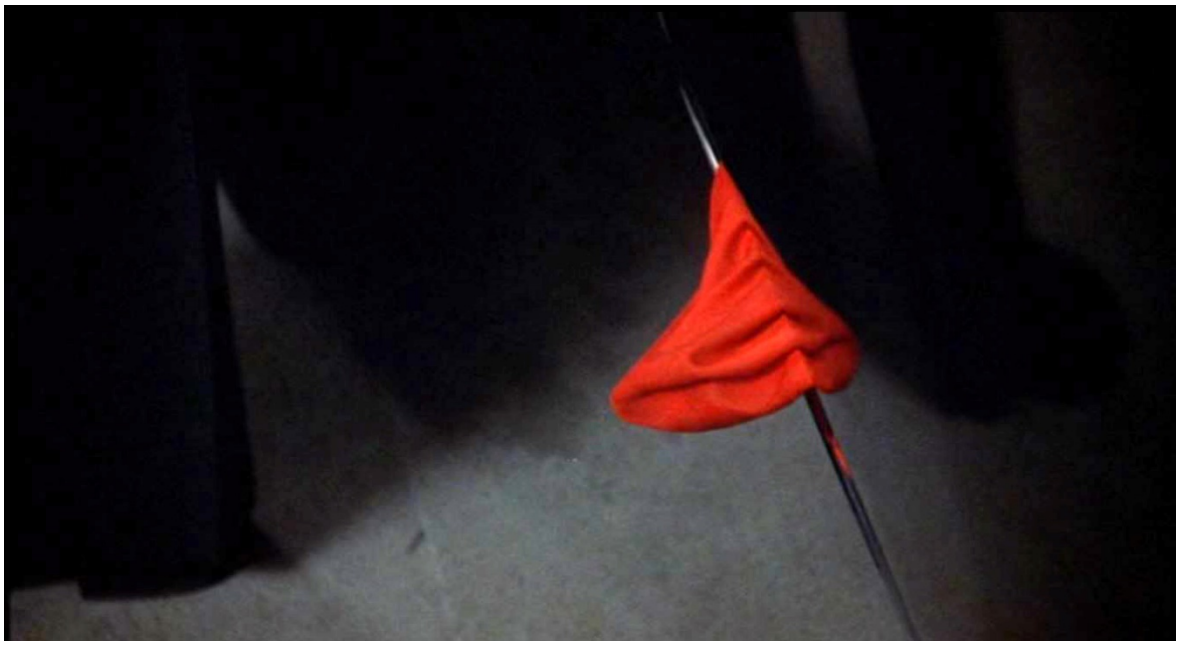
Hitchcock adds another layer to the lamp shade device in *Frenzy* [1972], thirteen years after *North by Northwest*. Here the swirls, spirals and vortexes of the pattern on the lamp shade just behind Bob Rusk, the psychopathic killer and rapist, photographed to look like they are snaking out of his head are clearly symbolic of his mental state.

37. VERBAL/VISUAL PUNS



North by Northwest [1959] (10:23)

Pushing this idea of symbolically commenting on the action taking place in the film even further, Hitchcock will photograph a scene so there is a connection between the verbal and the visual . . . a sort of verbal/visual pun. For instance, in *North by Northwest*, Vandamm now stands before a lampshade, backlighting him. The top rim of the shade forms a dark shape resembling horns coming out of his head. A moment later Thornhill says, "What the devil is going on?" Vandamm is clearly portrayed as satanic.



Family Plot [1976] (1:46:41)

In his last film, *Family Plot* [1976], Blanche says, “You’ve given me the devil’s own time” in complaining how hard Arthur Adamson has been to locate. On the word “devil” the camera cuts to the kidnapped bishop’s red cloak peeking out of the car in which he’s held captive.

Sabotage [1936] (34:44)

In *Sabotage* [1936], Scotland Yard detective Spencer's masquerade as a greengrocer is about to be revealed and his world – and the film's plot – is about to be turned upside down when he is literally turned upside down.

Strangers on a Train [1951] (10:36)

In *Strangers on a Train* [1951], Hitchcock uses almost the same technique but this time in the editing. When Bruno, having hatched his plan of "swapping murders," collapses into a couch on the train, we hear him mumble, "Crisscross." Hitchcock immediately cuts to a scene with a crisscross railroad sign in the very center of the frame.

38. THE INTERVIEW

North by Northwest [1959] (11:54)

When the syrupy-voiced Vandamm begins to question Thornhill about being a spy we have an opportunity to compare the practical American businessman Thornhill with the suave European spy Vandamm. In many ways, Vandamm is far more interesting and attractive than Thornhill. Vandamm has the oiliness of the very wealthy; he always moves slightly slower than we expect. His Dutch name adds to his prestige. The “van” of his name implies high status, perhaps even a past connection to European royalty. The "damn" aspect of Vandamm’s name hardly needs comment as an indicator of evil intent and "dam" as an indicator of emotional blockage. In comparison, Thornhill moves jerkily and with great animation. He represents American values, while Vandamm represents the essence of foreign-ness.

Hitchcock does this often: in *Strangers on a Train* [1951], there are several times Hitchcock makes the villain Bruno more attractive and interesting than hero Guy. And certainly, Uncle Charlie is a far more interesting, charming and attractive man than the police investigator courting young Charlie in *Shadow of a Doubt* [1943].

In another example of a breakdown in communication, now rising to monumental proportions, after reading the mail he found on the library desk, Thornhill incorrectly calls Vandamm, "Mr. Townsend." Here is one of the film's best ironies: Vandamm thinks Thornhill is Kaplan while Thornhill thinks Vandamm is Townsend. Vandamm does nothing to correct Thornhill's error. Throughout the film, Roger makes mistakes about people's identities.

One of the symbols associated with the sophisticated Vandamm is the library full of leather-bound volumes. There is, of course, nothing out of sorts with books being in a library. This is one of the delights of Hitchcock – he introduces the ordinary only to later have it turn into something else (perhaps the most celebrated incident of the ordinary turning into threat is the crop dusting plane we will encounter later in this film). These leather-bound books will appear again, but in a location that will make no sense at all . . . unless we take them to be symbolic.

During the interview, Vandamm reiterates the theme of acting and theater. He comments on "Kaplan's" performance, believing Thornhill's confusion is a simple ruse. Thus, according to Hitchcock, confusion and ignorance can be confused with acting, perhaps for the simple reason that acting requires a director while real life does not. In this context, the drawing of the curtains takes on another meaning: Vandamm is closing the proscenium arch, the theater is now private and the stage is a place of confrontation between the (hopeful) director – Vandamm – and the hapless actor – Thornhill.

Thornhill explains the situation to Vandamm and his cohorts – simply, honestly, logically. He assumes he is dealing with men like himself, practical and reasonable. But this is also a sign of his assumptions about the world: everyone is like him. He displays an egotism that positions him at the center of the universe, an attitude would later evolve into something known as American Exceptionalism.

An addition irony exists here. Roger Thornhill survives only because Vandamm & Co. think that he is George Kaplan. Had they realized they had "picked up the wrong package," and believed that Roger Thornhill is actually who he claims to be, they probably would have killed him straightaway and not bothered with trying to make it look like an accident (which allows Thornhill to survive).

Thornhill is confused and knows nothing about the questions put to him. This is in stark contrast to only a few minutes before, when he was in total control not only of his life, but the lives of many others – remember, he is in advertising. Yet his attitude is still one of the Madison Avenue men who expects to be in control. He has not yet learned the psychological lesson that a man whose ego is in total control is not living life. This will be a major subtext of the adventure to come: losing control and gaining life.

North by Northwest [1959] (11:35)

Now another red-haired woman enters the library, better dressed than the first one. The moment she enters, Thornhill looks up for a very moment with a look of shock on his face. We will later find this woman, Vandamm's associate, strongly resembles Thornhill's mother!

When Thornhill offers to show Vandamm his identification, it is Leonard who comments that his ID is fake. It is striking that this comment is made by Leonard and not Vandamm. Is this comment on the falseness of identity also a comment on Leonard's homosexuality who, in 1959, must disguise who he is? (Leonard's comment on Thornhill's well-tailored clothes can be seen in the same light.)

After the unsuccessful interview, Vandamm blithely leaves to entertain his "guests." We never learn the nature of this dinner party, given that it is in a house temporarily occupied by a nest of spies.

North by Northwest [1959] (13:56)

Vandamm leaves Thornhill in the hands of his henchmen, also to be "entertained." On his way out, Vandamm nods to two more of his thugs who enter the room. The first one is holding a cigarette in a manner typical in Russia and almost nowhere else. In this subtle and almost unnoticeable way, Hitchcock is telling us the spy thriller we are engaged in is, in fact, about the Cold War.

39. CASTING SHADOWS

North by Northwest [1959] (10:27)

Hitchcock commonly uses shadows to deliver symbolic information to the audience, often in very subtle ways. For instance, Vandamm stands in front of a lamp and casts his shadow on Thornhill's chest. Jung identified an archetype he called The Shadow. While it relates to Freud's idea of the Id, all the evil, violence, and negativity we need to repress to function in a civilized society, Jung's interpretation is much broader: It includes all of a person's un-developed and unrecognized potentials, both bad and good.

In myth and fairy tale, it is the role of the villain to play the hero's Shadow. The perfect villain for any hero is the single entity who will cause, often inadvertently, the hero to mature and progress as a human being: the Wicked Witch and Dorothy, the Giant and Jack, Jesus and Judas, etc. Thus, by facing the villain, the hero faces his own Shadow. In this case, Vandamm is Thornhill's Shadow (symbolic) and shadow (literal). Without Vandamm's kidnapping and thinking Thornhill a spy, Thornhill would have continued his ordinary life and not experience any of the psychic growth on which he has unknowingly now embarked.

Like so many of Hitchcock's devices, we can follow his use and development of shadows, both in the ordinary sense and as the psychological archetype, through a number of his films.

Downhill [1927] (10:41)

In *Downhill* [1927], Hitchcock portrays a trysting couple behind a beaded curtain with some very dramatic and stunning shadows on their faces and hands, but with little symbolic values at this early date.

Blackmail [1929] (31:27)

A few years later, in *Blackmail* [1929], Hitchcock uses shadows symbolically, though not yet in the Jungian sense. The "Artist" is about to attempt to rape Alice but pauses in a moment of indecision. At that moment Hitchcock casts a shadow on his face strongly resembling the mustachio of a melodrama villain.

Blackmail [1929] (1:18:13)

Later in the same film, when Alice decides to confess to the murder, she stands up into a shadow that becomes a noose around her neck.

Blackmail [1929] (37:48)

In the same film, Alice leaves her attacker's apartment. Immediately Tracy, her soon-to-be blackmailer, appears in the form of an ominous black shadow slowly rising from the ground as if a figure is climbing out of some hellish underworld.

Foreign Correspondent [1940] (58:54)

Hitchcock uses shadows in a similar way in *Foreign Correspondent* [1940]. Through the first hour of the film, we are told Fisher is a wonderful father, the head of an international peace commission, and an all-around nice guy (and we believe this unless we noticed his original entrance is from the left). The moment he is revealed as a villain, we only see his shadow.

Rebecca [1940] (12:07)

In the same year, 1940, the idea of casting a shadow becomes more complex and closer to Jung's conception. In *Rebecca*, the manic/depressive Maxim de Winter casts his shadow on the timid and unnamed young woman, soon to be the second Mrs. de Winter, and stomps off in a snit leaving her bearing the brunt of his anger – a victim of the expression of his Shadow. However, at the same time a connection of love is made. Jung's idea of the shadow, like Freud's, is that it represents what is repressed, but unlike Freud, Jung believed it contain not only negative feelings and emotions, but also un-developed positive aspects – in this case love.

Rebecca [1940] (24:36)

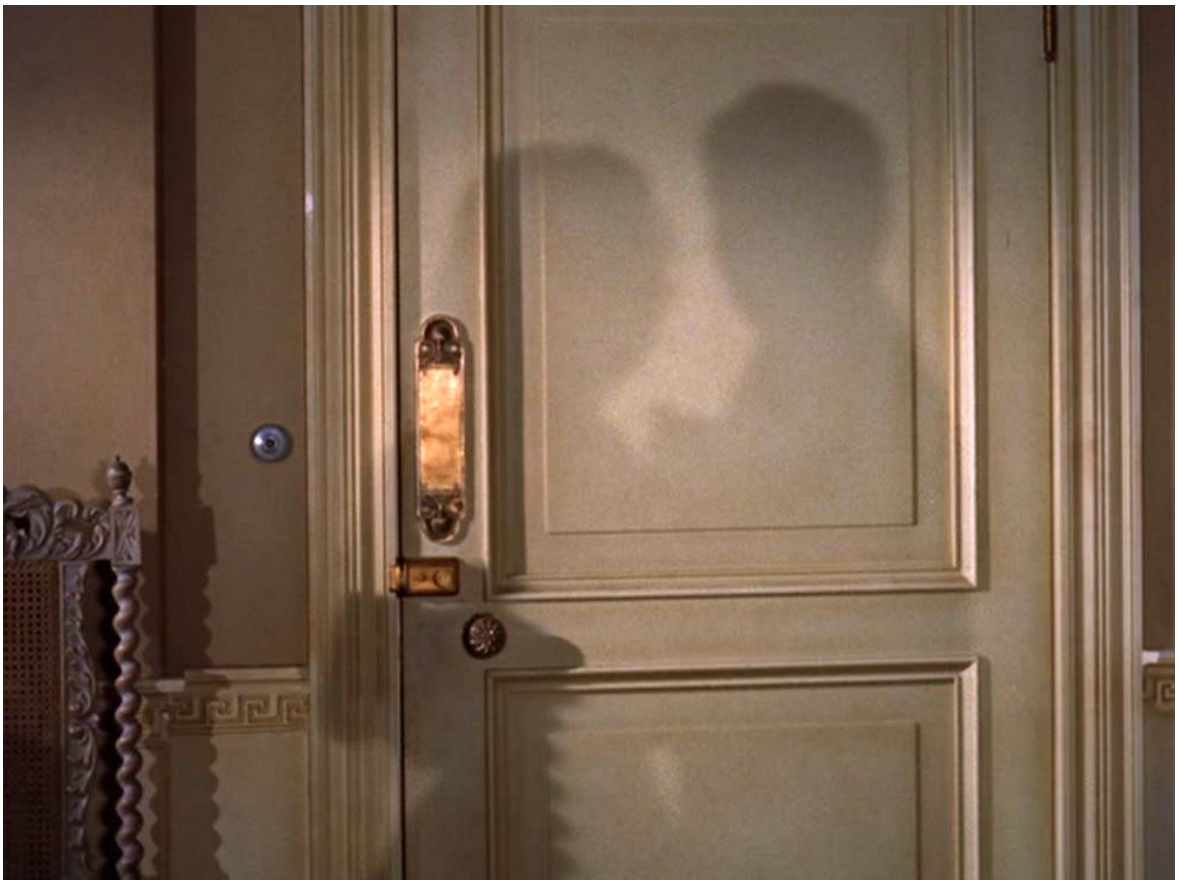
Later in the same film, the shadow falling on the future Mrs. de Winter symbolizes the negative aspects of her employer, Mrs. Hopper: over-bearing, controlling, egotistic, uncouth, and vain. The young woman is literally in Mrs. Hopper's shadow.

Notorious [1946] (14:13)

At the beginning of *Notorious* [1946] it is Devlin's shadow that falls on Alicia, Devlin representing the future possibilities of Alicia's life – patriotism, love, and, most important, self-respect. Her divided nature at this early point in the film is well symbolized by her clothing: alternating layers of black and white. And the primitively of her state of mind represented by the stripes resembling the markings on an animal.

Rear Window [1954] (20:57)

Perhaps Hitchcock's best and visually most frightening use of the shadow in the Jungian sense is in *Rear Window* [1954]. L. B. Jefferies fears relationships. His psychological task is to deal with this portion of his Shadow, his undeveloped potential: a relationship with Lisa. We are introduced to Lisa through her psychological function in the film: she enters by casting her Shadow/shadow over Jefferies.

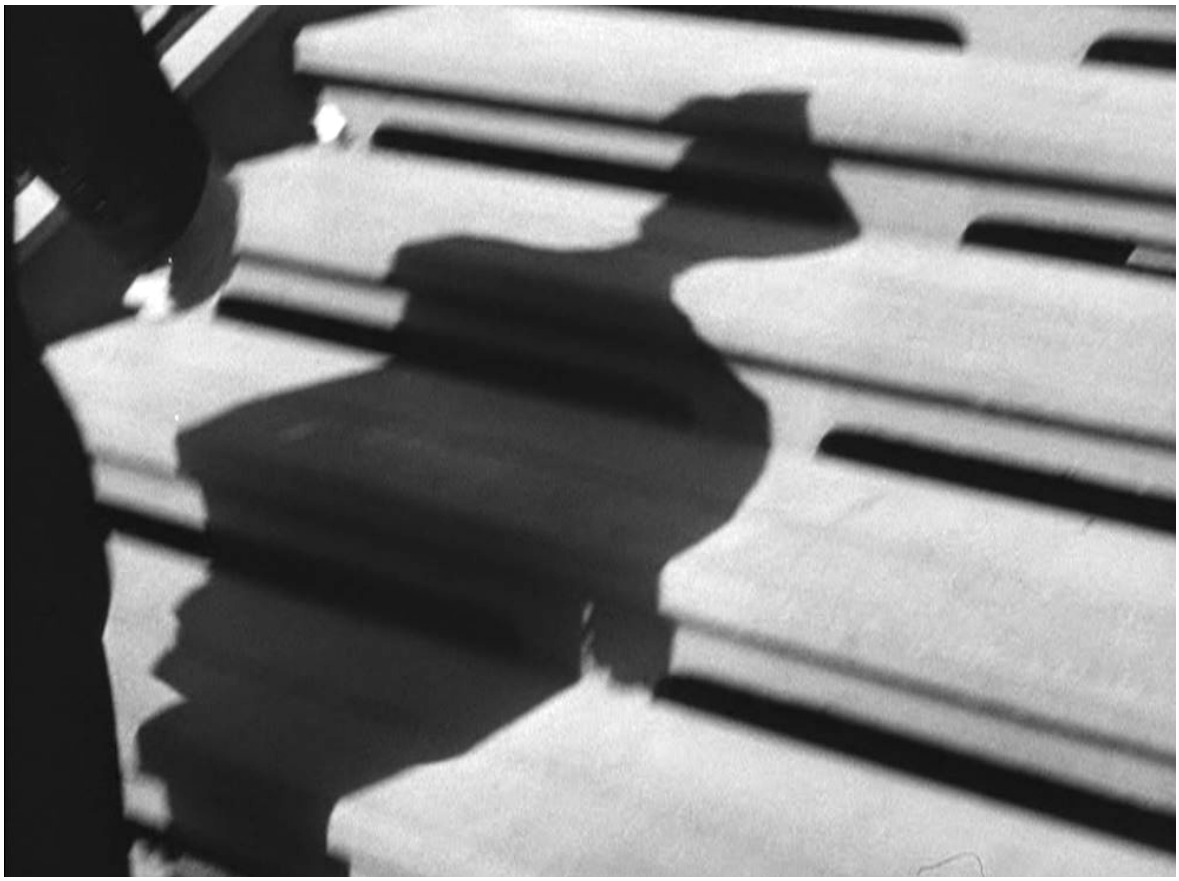


Dial M for Murder [1954] (06:57)

In the same year in *Dial M for Murder* [1954], when the cuckolded husband is heard entering the house, the trysting couple's shadows fall on the very door through which he will enter.

The Man Who Knew Too Much [1956] (11:33)

Hitchcock uses another predictive shadow in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1956]. The British spy Louis Bernard will soon pass his knowledge to Dr. McKenna and plunge him into an adventure in which he will have to deal with his own psychological and sociological weaknesses, just like Thornhill in *North by Northwest*. Unfortunately, Dr. McKenna's healing will not be nearly as successful as Roger's.



I Confess [1953] (16:53)

In *I Confess* [1953], the murderer, Keller, is often preceded by his shadow.

The Wrong Man [1956] (41:59)

In *The Wrong Man* [1956], a film full of dark shadows, we see Manny put behind bars for the first time in his life. In a brilliantly arranged composition a vertical shadow falls on his face to show he is literally behind bars. The shadow of the jail enclosure "hits him right between the eyes." It also divides his face dark and light stripes. The rhythm of the jail bars and shadows continue across the picture for an elegant composition of squares within squares ultimately trapping their innocent victim.

The Lodger [1927] (13:06)

Compare this image to a scene from *The Lodger* [1927] in which the eponymous lodger just learned of another murder of a blonde girl. All The Avenger's victims resemble his murdered sister.

40. BACKGROUND SHADOWS

Number Seventeen [1932] (04:55)

In addition to using shadows cast on people, Hitchcock also imbeds information in the shadows he casts behind people, in and on the backgrounds. Typical is this scene from *Number Seventeen* [1932] predicting by a decade the use of graphic shadows of this sort in *films noir*.

Suspicion [1941] (28:19)

A typical Hitchcock background shadow is seen in *Suspicion* [1941] when Johnnie introduces Lina to their new house. As the broker hesitatingly mentions the bill, something Johnnie knows he cannot pay and will soon drive a wedge into their relationship, Johnnie is visually caught in a gigantic web of shadows cast on the walls and ceiling behind him. If fact, there are shadowy webs almost everywhere in the house.

Suspicion [1941] (1:05:26)

Later in the same film, when Lina suspects Johnnie of plotting murder, she walks, a dark figure, through a web of shadows while Johnnie whistles a very distorted version of the waltz, *Weiner Blut* – literally Viennese Blood. Thus, the visual and aural backgrounds work in parallel.

Suspicion [1941] (49:57)

Later in the same film when Lina learns that six weeks ago her husband was fired for embezzling £2000, a black shadow appears behind her almost resembling black wings, a graphic manifestation of the black thoughts she is having about the situation.

Foreign Correspondent [1940] [1940] (1:25:12)

In 1940, Hitchcock used a similar device to indicate evil. In *Foreign Correspondent*, kidnapper and traitor Fisher is being questioned about his misdeeds. Behind him is a black shadow arranged to look like black, satanic wings.

Family Plot [1976] (38:33)

In his last film, *Family Plot* [1976], Hitchcock reproduces this image almost exactly but without shadows. Slow-witted George Lumley stumbles through a cemetery (literally) and discovers the grave of the man he has been looking for. Hitchcock photographs him from below with the dark branches of a tree behind him forming, again, black wings. Unfortunately, aside from this being a striking image, little is revealed to us we do not already know about the character.

41. THE RISING CAMERA OF DOOM

North by Northwest [1959] (11:43)

For the first time in *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock slowly raises his camera high above his actors to look down on them – a "high-angle shot." The occasion is when Vandamm tells Thornhill he is offering him the opportunity of "surviving the evening." Throughout the rest of the film, the camera rising to a high-angle shot will be associated with the threat of death. Hitchcock makes a hermetic symbol of a camera movement!

Juno and the Paycock [1929] (02:20)

The high-angle shot is one of those Hitchcock devices we can see him develop through a number of films and then seemingly loose interest in in his later films. His first use was in the 1929 in *Juno and the Paycock* [1929]. He opens the film with a high angle shot. Elegant and clever with a street sign pointing directly at the brightly lit central character and the crowd arranged to form a V-shape with his head at the center – certainly worthy of Hitchcock, but with little further meaning.

Murder! [1930] (1:18:43)

In the 1930 *Murder!* we suddenly look down on a number of people in a drawing room. The jump to the ceiling is sudden and pleasantly surprising. The graphics are elegant. But, again at this early date, there is no apparent deeper meaning.

The Man Who Knew Too Much [1934] (43:01)

In 1934 version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, the high-angle shot is still used primarily for information and graphics – from this angle we can appreciate the chaos of the scene – a chair throwing fight in a church.

Rebecca [1940] (2:00:19)

In *Rebecca* in 1940, when the plot finally becomes a "Hitchcockian" murder investigation, the crucial meeting with the doctor who will determine Maxim's fate is introduced with another elegantly composed high-angle shot. The heads arranged in a circle with the well-controlled lighting drive our eye to the all-important doctor. But this is the film's only use of a high angle shot, so further meaning cannot be assigned to it.

Shadow of a Doubt [1943] (1:06:27)

By 1943 in *Shadow of a Doubt* [1943], the same device increases in meaning: when young Charlie suddenly discovers her uncle could be a serial killer, the camera slowly and ominously rises to look down on her walking, stricken, through a maze of shadows. One dark shadow forming an arrow pointing the way to her dark future. However, unlike *North by Northwest*, it lacks reinforcement through repetition.

Strangers on a Train [1951] (19:29)

Following this progression of refining the high-angle shot and its meaning, a breakthrough comes in 1951 with *Strangers on a Train*. Psychotic Bruno just found the address of his victim and now only needs to wait for the right moment to strike. Hitchcock now directly associates death and doom with the high angle shot.

Rear Window [1954] (1:28:15)

In *Rear Window* [1954], when Jefferies writes the note to suspected wife-murderer Thorwald that will ultimately lead to Thorwald attempting to murder Jefferies, Hitchcock photographs the scene from above. Impending doom and death are now associated with the high angle shot, but still no repetition.

Dial M for Murder [1954] (28:54)

In *Dial M for Murder* [1954], five years before *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock uses the same camera angle to photograph the long sequence in which Tony explains to Swann how he wants his wife murdered. While the scene is of a murder in the planning, and the sequence is rather long, it still lacks the sharpness and precision achieved with the same technique in *North by Northwest*.

The Trouble with Harry [1955] (53:43)

In his black comedy, *The Trouble with Harry* [1955] the following year, Hitchcock reverses the meaning of the high-angle shot, appropriate for a comedy. Instead of predicting death, he uses it while Sam and the Captain are digging up Harry's body.

The Man Who Knew Too Much [1956] (57:42)

By 1956, the device starts to take on more psychological baggage. In the 1956 version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, the "looking down" camera angle is used to photograph Dr. Benjamin McKenna and his wife while they receive a phone call threatening the life of their kidnapped son. But, again, it is not repeated.

The Wrong Man [1956] (30:16)

In *The Wrong Man* [1956], the moment Manny protests at being accused of holding up several stores, the camera suddenly looks down on him after a long series of close-ups and medium shots as if suddenly we get the "whole picture."

In *North by Northeast*, Hitchcock repeats the rising camera to a high angle shot several times. Each time it is now associated with the threat of death; each time the meaning becomes slightly more evident. In its last use, in Vandamm's house atop Mt. Rushmore, it becomes rather explicit as they discuss throwing Eve out of an airplane.

Psycho [1960] (1:16:48)

Immediately after *North by Northwest*, in *Psycho* [1960], Hitchcock uses a similar downward camera angle, this time looking straight down from the ceiling at Abrogast's murder. However, there are better explanations for this than hermetic symbolism. By looking down from the ceiling we cannot see who is doing the stabbing and thus the audience continues to believe Norman's mother is the psychotic killer.

Marnie [1964] (28:05)

In *Marnie* [1964], Hitchcock uses the high-angle shot when Marnie rushes into a bathroom to wash the red ink off her sleeve but the camera immediately drops as soon as someone else enters. It is used again when one of the managers reads the safe combination from the inside of a drawer. And later when Mark and Marnie get out of a car. And a kiss. And Mark on the phone. There is no rhyme or reason to its use; Hitchcock is now using this camera angle just to give visual variety to the film.

Torn Curtain [1966] (33:34)

And in *Torn Curtain* [1966], Michael Armstrong walks through a hotel lobby where women are scrubbing the floor while the camera rises ominously. It then descends to focus on the spy assigned to follow him. The high-angle shot is used here, apparently, for budgetary reasons – with this view there is no need to build the rest of the hotel lobby. Armstrong then goes to the Berlin Museum (shades of the British Museum in *Blackmail* [1929]) where he evades the spy. There is tension in this sequence but no real threat as in the previous films that used the rising camera. In fact, at the end of this sequence it is revealed that Armstrong is not a defector but himself a spy.

Topaz [1969] (22:45)

Similarly in *Topaz* [1969] the high-angle shot is used at the mention of "Topaz." Here it is more or less used as a visual exclamation point and not much more.

Topaz [1969] (33:19)

Also in *Topaz* [1969], Hitchcock almost duplicates the shot ending *North by Northwest*'s spy conference with the Professor in Washington, D.C., but with little implication of threat or doom. There is no, "Goodbye, Mr. Thornhill . . ."

Frenzy [1972] (49:51)

And, finally, in his penultimate film, *Frenzy* in 1972, Hitchcock uses the same camera angle with no apparent symbolism – Blaney simply gives his suit to a porter to be cleaned.

After *North by Northwest* Hitchcock seems to have lost interest in the psychological possibilities of the camera rising to a high-angle shot. But like many of Hitchcock's devices, the view from above continues to be used, now usually for its graphic interest.

43. CATCHING UP ON HIS DRINKING

North by Northwest [1959] (14:42)

Vandamm's henchmen now pour Thornhill full of liquor. Their intent is to get him drunk and have him die in a car accident.

Moments before Thornhill complained to his abductors that he left several friends in a bar – implying he missed a drinking opportunity. One of the many ironies of this film is that now he gets just what he wanted – a drink. But in a quantity to make up for all the drinks he missed. (I have never been able to interpret Cary Grant's look as he sees a water glass filling with bourbon – is it a look of horror or is it a look of an alcoholic's dream come true?)

Number Seventeen [1932] (49:03)

Hitchcock uses the idea of drunkenness rarely, but interestingly. His first use was very early in *Number Seventeen* in 1932. A man falls down drunk, literally, and thereby escapes capture by the criminals.

Notorious [1946] (28:11)

The idea that (alcoholic) spirits = (emotional) spirit is one that did not escape Hitchcock. It appears twice in *Notorious* [1946]. When Devlin learns he must ask the woman he loves to sleep with another man, his spirit is broken . . . and he "accidentally" leaves behind the bottle of wine he was bringing her. Just to make sure we get the point of Devlin's debilitation and emasculation, in the very next scene Alicia cuts the leg off a roasted chicken – not only is Devlin "chicken" to speak out to his superiors, but he is also symbolically castrated. And Devlin, like the chicken, will not have a leg to stand on.

In *Notorious* [1946] Alicia is an alcoholic because of the stress she is under: Her father was just sentenced to prison for being a Nazi spy and there committed suicide. And the police are following her suspecting she may be a spy too. Her telephone has been tapped. That was 1946. By 1959 and *North by Northwest*, alcoholism didn't need any specific causes, it was a symptom of just living in a society which demands conformity while deadening individuality.

44. DRUNK DRIVING

North by Northwest [1959] (15:39)

Thornhill is first poured full of liquor and then poured into a stolen Mercedes as part of an assassination attempt. It seems reasonable, at this point, that the means that will lead to his imminent demise are, first, his alcoholism and, second, a stolen car.

Both are symbolic. As pointed out above, spirits represent spirit. The stolen car here functions as a symbol of who Thornhill really is at this point in the film – a borrowed personality (and an echo of the cab he "stole" in New York). The warning is clear: unless Thornhill finds his true, authentic self, his present course of psychic falseness can lead only to his death, both spiritual and physical.

Vandamm's men start the motor and send the car down a winding road toward a high ocean cliff. When the car goes over, it will look like a drunk driving accident because of Thornhill's reputation for public drunkenness. Ironically, it is Thornhill's budding alcoholism that now saves his life. While singing, "I've grown accustomed to your bourbon," he retains enough composure to realize what is going on, primarily because he has grown accustom to his bourbon!

"I've grown accustomed to your Bourbon," sings Thornhill. Perhaps his tickets for that evening's date with his mother at the Winter Garden Theater were for "My Fair Lady." We must ask, why is his mother so much on his mind even in such a drunken state and under such physical duress? Mother, it turns out, plays a very important part in Thornhill's psychological recovery, as we shall see later.

Using what remains of his composure, Thornhill pushes the thug out of the car and takes the wheel beginning his at once a perilous and hilarious drive. Were he not an alcoholic, he would be unconscious or, if conscious, would have been so debilitated that he surely would have driven the car over the cliff as Vandamm's henchmen planned.

This is just one of the moral ambiguities confronting us throughout this film: the hero's flaws are the very characteristics that save his life. However, it works a little differently at a psychological level, for coming to terms with one's flaws and weaknesses (aspects of the Shadow) and ultimately being able to recognize them and put them to constructive use is a sign of psychic growth.

In 1959 with *North by Northwest* it was possible for Hitchcock to admire an alcoholic – especially if he looked like Cary Grant. In 1972, by contrast, *Frenzy*'s [1972] alcoholic Blaney is an ugly, miserable drunk, a seemingly natural part of an immensely ugly physical and psychological landscape Hitchcock presents to us, perhaps angrily, with not a bit of the gloss, humor, or production values of his previous films.

North by Northwest [1959] (15:30)

Let us take a closer look at this heart-pounding lesson in drunk driving. There is, first of all, the wonderful visual pun of using the Mercedes hood ornament as a gun-sight weaving down the road as if looking for a target (it is the only foreign car to appear in the film and, ironically, MGM arranged a national advertising campaign in which ads for the car were linked with the film appearing in national magazines in which Hitchcock and Leo the Lion – MGM's mascot – are sitting in a shiny Mercedes convertible).

Suspicion [1941] (1:25:29)

Hitchcock photographed car chase sequences through a car's front windscreen before. As with many of these tropes, it is fascinating to see how Hitchcock develops an idea in film after film. For instance, in *Suspicion* [1941], Hitchcock photographs the road whizzing by through the front windshield of a car without much elaboration.

Notorious [1946] (08:22)

In *Notorious* [1946], Hitchcock staged a very similar drunk driving scene (with Cary Grant as the passenger and Ingrid Bergman as the well-soused driver). There is a large hood ornament on the car pointing the way down Florida's dark and ominous back roads, but nothing more.

To Catch a Thief [1955] (55:42)

In 1955, four years before *North by Northwest*, there is a similar car chase in *To Catch a Thief*. No hood ornament though the shots through the windshield are similar.

Vertigo [1958] (21:13)

Just before *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock made *Vertigo* [1958], a film that includes an elaborate automobile sequence. Scottie follows Madeline

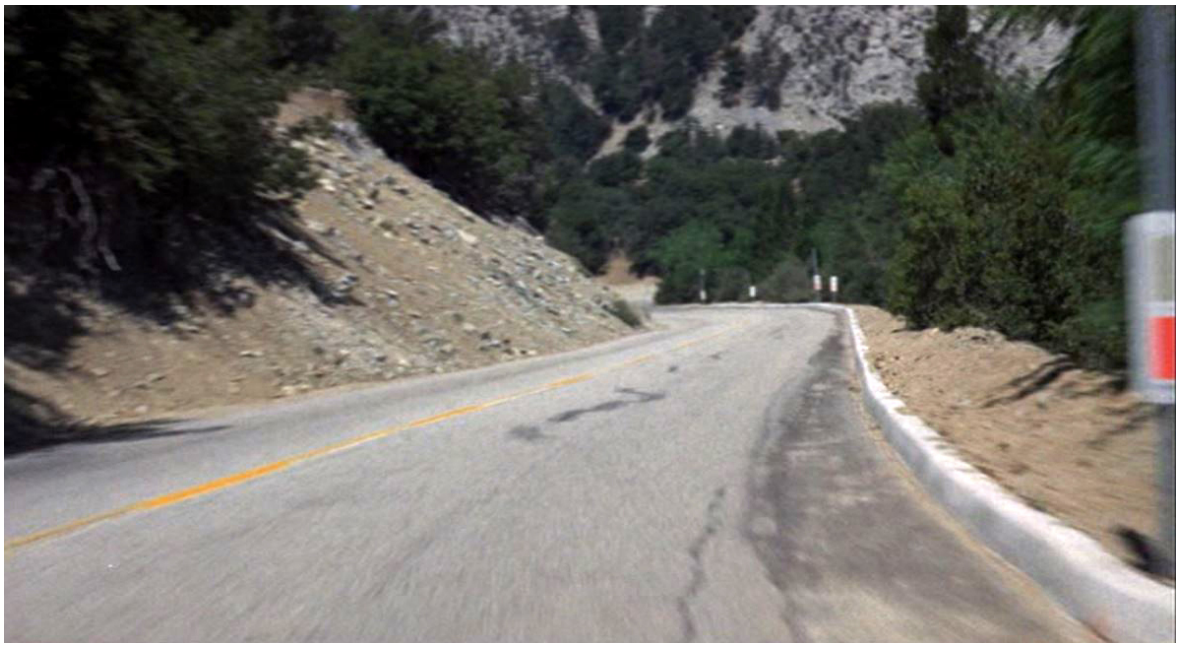
around San Francisco in what can only be called a “low-speed chase.” The activity, boring and mundane, is emphasized by the music and by the very regular rhythm of the editing. The hood ornament of Scottie’s car invariably points to nothing, to the nowhere where he is going. The circular journey symbolizing his mental state.

Psycho [1960] (17:10)

After the brilliant and elaborate driving sequence of *North by Northwest*, in *Psycho* [1960], the hood ornament is gone, just a clear view of the road – again seemingly going nowhere.

Marnie [1964] (41:40)

In *Marnie* [1964], Hitchcock uses the gun sight/hood ornament idea again but minimized. The hood ornament on Mark's Lincoln Continental is not too different from the Mercedes in *North by Northwest*. Mark is questioning Marnie and knows she is lying. He is searching for the truth. As they pull into a parking lot, the gun sight/hood ornament searches right and left before coming to a halt – a visual echo of Mark's search for the truth about Marnie.



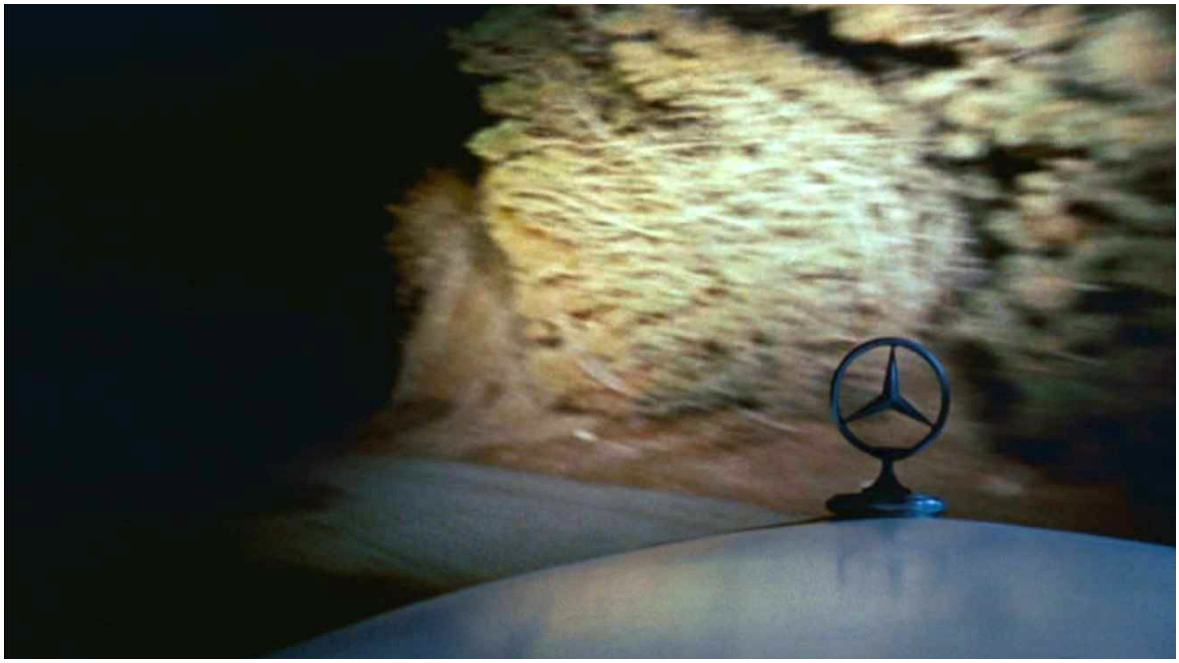
Family Plot [1976] (1:23:42)

By 1976 in Hitchcock's last film, *Family Plot*, he simplifies his car photography considerably. The visual pun of the hood ornament is gone. In fact, the car is gone. All we see is the road whizzing by, presumably through the car's front windshield.

Vertigo [1958] (1:14:45)

As a footnote to Hitchcock's use driving as symbolism, in *Vertigo* [1958] when Scottie drives Madeleine to Mission San Juan Bautista, he is shown driving down the wrong side of the highway! That this is intentional on Hitchcock's part is clear since the views out of both the front *and* back show the car driving on the wrong side of the highway. Clearly: Scottie is going the wrong way. This sort of comment also applies to the obstructionist sheriff in *The Trouble with Harry* [1955] who has an antique right-hand drive car and drives it on the wrong (in America) side of the street. (A note for California residents: I know that the highway is divided and broadly separated by a bank of trees, but few of the millions of viewers of this film would know that. Thus, I believe the above-mentioned symbolic implications are correct.)

45. VISUAL PUNS

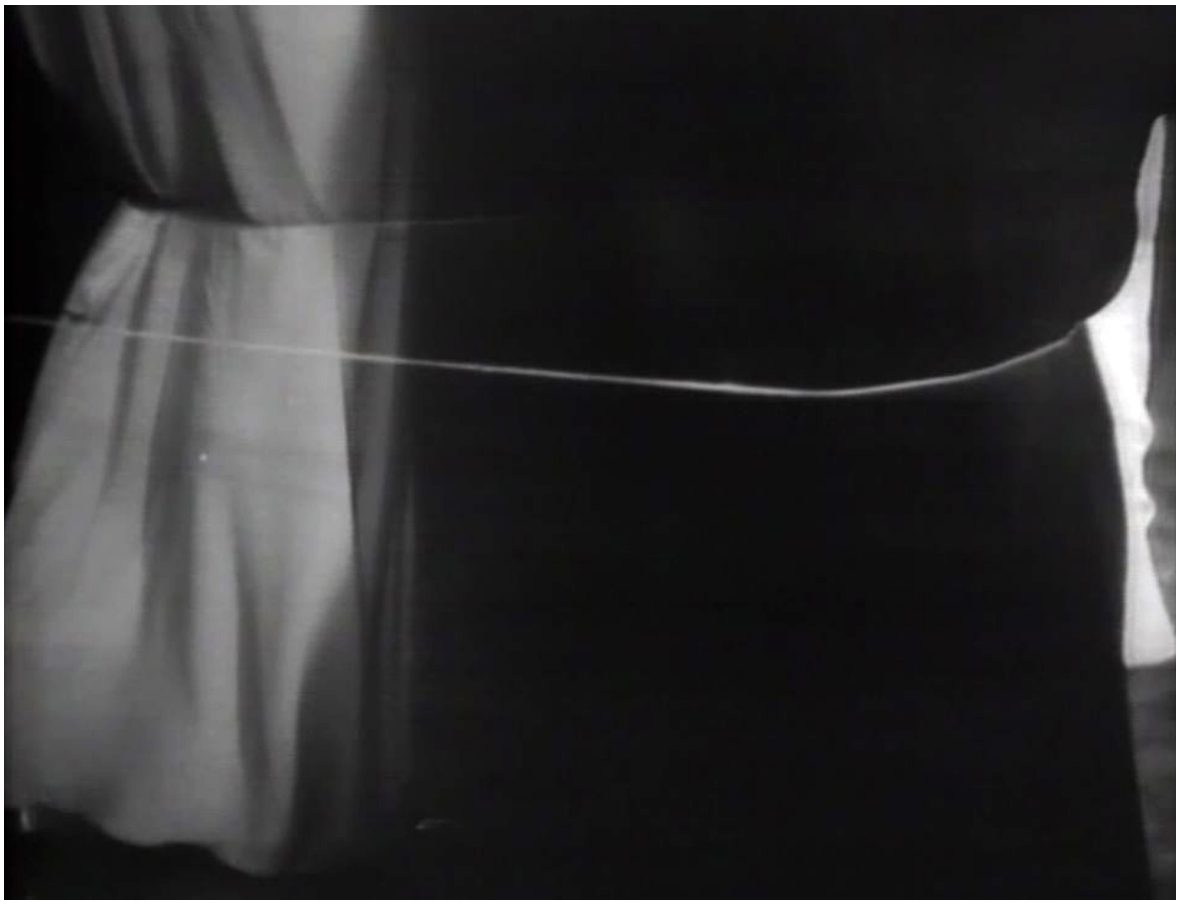


North by Northwest [1959] (16:08)

The idea of equating a hood ornament with a gun sight because of their physical similarity is a visual pun. Visual puns are a purely cinematic way of adding layers of information to the film. Hitchcock delights in these. Here are a few examples.

The Ring [1927] (05:20)

In his early silent *The Ring* [1927], for example, the boxer, "One Round" Jack, whose life is about to be turned upside down by falling in love with the wrong girl is introduced at the carnival where he takes on all comers with his sign being held upside down.

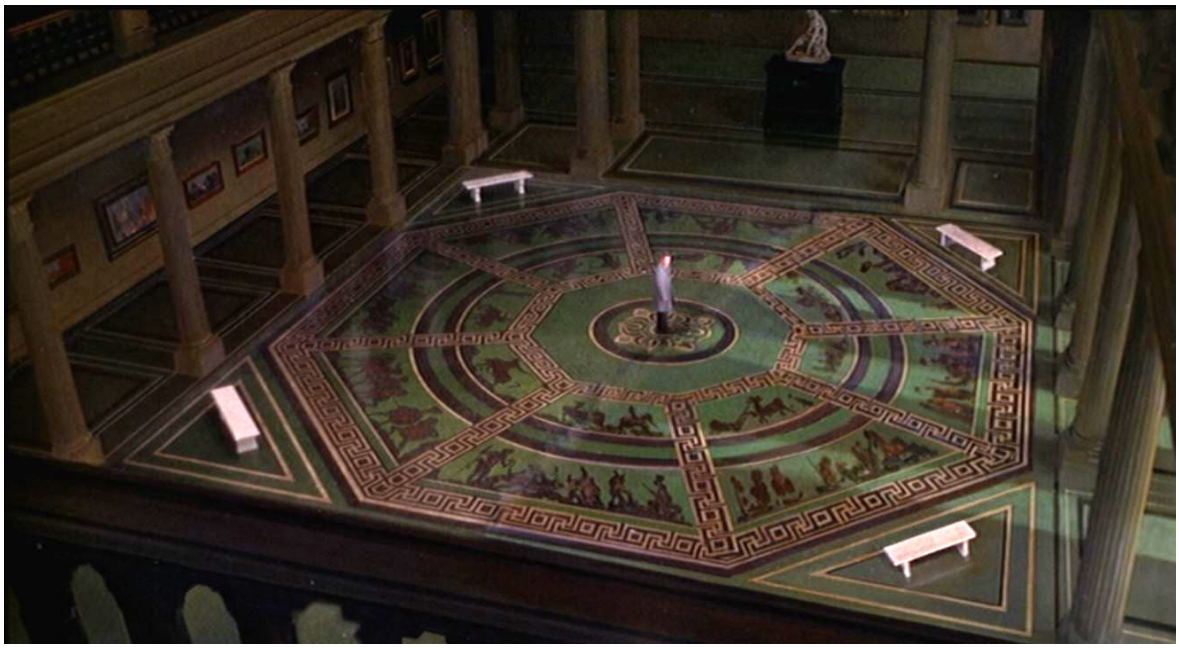


The Man Who Knew Too Much [1934] (08:28)

In *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1934], unsuspecting spy Lawrence and fellow spy Jill, posing as his wife, attend a party. Jill dances with Louis Bernard, not knowing he too is a spy. As a prank, Lawrence arranges that Jill's partially completed knitting slowly unravel while she dances wrapping around her and Louis while they dance. Soon, like her knitting, their whole life will unravel, and like the yarn, they will soon become inextricably entangled in Bernard's plans. Another pun moments later: the dying spy says to the Jill, "Don't breathe a word to anyone," while gasping his last breath.

The Man Who Knew Too Much [1934] (36:45)

In a lighter vein later in the same film, the hero and his friend investigate a church and, expecting trouble, unknowingly sit next to a large heater. Things certainly do "heat up" in a few moments.



Torn Curtain [1966] (35:33)

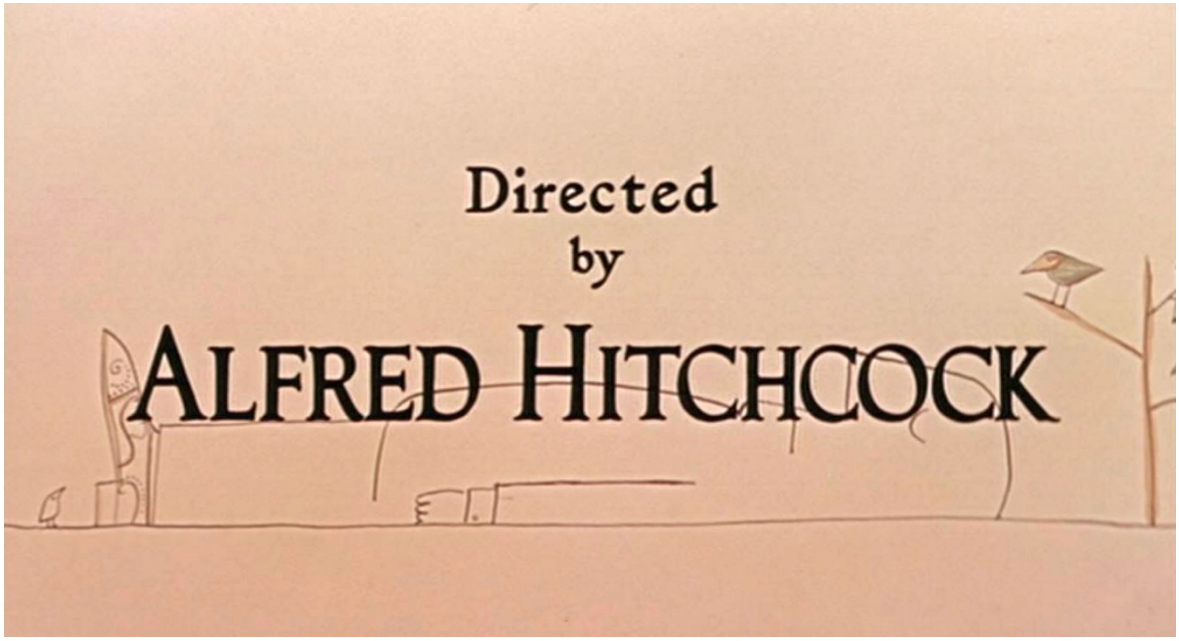
In *Torn Curtain* [1966], Professor Armstrong is trying to dodge his East German police watcher, Gromek, by going to an incongruously empty Berlin Museum. Armstrong walks into the museum and across a magnificent Roman mosaic floor. Illogically, after all he is being chased, he stops in the middle of the mosaic . . . the geometry of the mosaic indicating he is at the center of a very symbolic target.

Frenzy [1972] (1:44:02)

In *Frenzy* [1972], a policeman describes how the killer broke a victim's finger after rigor mortis had set in as his wife nonchalantly snaps a bread stick.

Rear Window [1954] (52:18)

Stella in *Rear Window* [1954] morbidly talks about cutting up a body just as poor Jeff is cutting into his breakfast.



The Trouble with Harry [1955] (01:33)

In the opening credits to *The Trouble with Harry* [1955], Hitchcock places his own name over the Saul Steinberg drawing of a suspiciously pudgy corpse.

In *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1956], a failed villain pleads “just give me a little time” while we hear the loud ticking of a clock.

Continue reading Part III