

HITCHCOCK: THE MIND OF A MASTER

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

PART III, CHAPTERS 46-72

by

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46. THE DOWN-SHOT



North by Northwest [1959] (15:52)

The Mercedes now shoots forward toward a high cliff. Thornhill skids the car. The back wheel goes over the edge and spins in midair. He, and we, look down. This is the first symmetrical composition of the film – the round spinning wheel is directly under Thornhill's face.

In most films, whenever anyone is threatened with a fall from a height, the camera cuts from the person in danger to his or her personal view of the danger – a shot looking down into a precipice, off a building, or over a cliff into the roiling ocean. The down-shot.



Juno and the Paycock [1929] (19:41)

Hitchcock's use of the "down-shot" has a long history. In his second sound film, *Juno and the Paycock* in 1929, Hitchcock uses it in the traditional way: a man looks down out of a window and we see what he sees.



Waltzes from Vienna [1934] (05:50)

Similarly, in the 1934 *Waltzes from Vienna*. Here we see another example of Hitchcock's talent at crowd control. While the down-shot of the crowd below is seemingly random, a closer look shows a very clever triangular composition.



The 39 Steps [1935] (27:04)

And in *The 39 Steps* [1935] we see another elegant composition, this time in relation to the down-shot from a railroad bridge over the Firth of Forth river. The steel girders converging on a central point at a great depth, almost sucking us down. Under the girders is a circular figure that is almost a target where the girder come together. Unlike the triangular composition in *Waltzes from Vienna* [1934], here the composition emphasizes the queasiness possible in an elegant down-shot.



Foreign Correspondent [1940] (39:50)

Five years later, by 1940, in *Foreign Correspondent* [1940], Hitchcock uses a similar shot, but now he includes the person threatened. He makes the image more complex and layered: we get both what the person sees and the person himself. Hitchcock combines a subjective and objective view in one image.



Rebecca [1940] (03:59)

In the same year, the down-shot is used in a similar way in *Rebecca* [1940], when Maxim de Winter stands atop a cliff apparently contemplating suicide the roiling wave seemingly emerging directly from his troubled brain.



Suspicion [1941] (1:04:27)

However, in several other films, he reverts to the simple version of the “down-shot.” The very next year, 1941, in *Suspicion* Hitchcock shows us the churning sea where Lina imagines her husband Johnnie plans to kill Beaky for his money.



To Catch a Thief [1955] (56:17)

And in the 1955 in *To Catch a Thief*.

However, the down-shot in *North by Northwest* has a twist. Our excitement and involvement with the story, the characters, the perils, and the chase have put us in a state of mind commonly called “suspension of disbelief.” Were we not so involved with the film, we would laugh at how impossible and ridiculous this scene is. If a driver leans out of a car and looks straight down, how many cars are built so the driver would see the car’s spinning rear wheel directly beneath him or her? It is a testament to Hitchcock’s skill as a storyteller and filmmaker that this physical impossibility seems perfectly plausible on the screen.

What is also fascinating in *North by Northwest* is what Hitchcock does *not* do: While Thornhill is threatened with falls throughout the film (escaping from the hospital, climbing into Vandamm’s mountain top house, etc.), none of these are accompanied by a down-shot.

The “spinning wheel” is the last time Hitchcock uses a down-shot until the final adventure on the face of Mt. Rushmore. Most other filmmakers would not demonstrate such restraint and would be tempted to alarm the audience at every opportunity. Hitchcock introduces the down-shot as an element

in his visual vocabulary but holds it back to increase its impact when he finally does use it. (I don't consider the view downward from the United Nations building a down shot of this type because no fall is threatened. The intent there is, I believe, to show Thornhill as a minute speck in a great, geometric maze.)



Vertigo [1958] (04:42)

Hitchcock continues to use down-shots after *North by Northwest* but never again with the impact seen here. For instance, the very next year in *Vertigo* [1958] Hitchcock uses a very similar down-shot adding a bit of zoom to it. But without the spinning wheel, we are looking basically at nothing and it has much less visual impact.



Vertigo [1958] (1:19:03)

Later in the same film, we see the famous “rack-and-zoom” down-shot, but, beyond the technical brilliance, with little more than Scottie’s fingertips just barely in the frame (perhaps because it was shot horizontally with a model), we have little to identify with beyond the queasiness of the image manipulation.

47. ACCIDENTAL RESCUE



North by Northwest [1959] (16:40)

While this drunk-driving sequence is technically masterful, what is often overlooked is that this sequence is one of great emotional complexity. The viewer feels such an intricate network of emotions it is difficult even to begin to sort them out. First, we have Thornhill escaping one danger in the Townsend mansion only to find himself threatened by another – the high cliff and the perilous drive trying to escape his would-be assassins following in the ominous dark gray Cadillac. We feel the irony that he is being threatened with death by the very means he complained to his kidnappers he was being deprived of – a drink.

Roger Thornhill does not understand what is happening to him. His sense of reality has been undermined by the kidnapping, the questioning, and the assassination attempt. This is not reality for a Madison Avenue advertising man wearing a gray flannel suit. To make us identify still further with Thornhill, Hitchcock undermines *our* assumptions about what is going on, what is real and what is not. For when we see the road through Thornhill's alcohol-addled eyes, we see a double road, we are sure we know which is the real road and which is the hallucination; we, in our sobriety, feel superior to

Thornhill, we pity him. Yet moments later, the road *we* would have driven down proves to be the false one.



North by Northwest [1959] (17:38)

Throughout this chase, we are rooting for Thornhill to succeed in his drunken escape. Yet we feel fear for the people he might injure or kill in his alcohol-soaked flight: the bicyclist he almost hits and the other cars he forces to swerve. At the same time, we fear with him that the assassins following in the almost black Cadillac might catch him.



North by Northwest [1959] (17:45)

The climax of this three-way chase is superbly economical: being hit by the police car. In one stroke Hitchcock allows Thornhill to escape from the assassins into the safe hands of the police . . . who arrest him for drunk driving. The police car being in turn itself hit is hilarious – demonstrating Hitchcock’s ideas about the Keystone Cop-ish nature of the police. Hitchcock relieves all our worries, gives us comic relief , and simultaneously puts Thornhill into more trouble. And finally, this incident propels the plot quite naturally into the next segment of the adventure – the police station and mother.



Notorious [1946] (08:53)

The drunk driving episode in *Notorious* [1946] also ends with the arrival of the police, but in 1946 there was little irony and no humor.



Frenzy [1972] (1:27:06)

In *Frenzy* [1972], Hitchcock uses a similar idea. This time the near-collision between the pursuing police car and the truck is transformed into the discovery of a nude body just fallen from the potato truck. Again, not much humor, little irony.

48. HITCHCOCK & THE POLICE



North by Northwest [1959] (18:02)

By crashing into the back of his car, the police unknowingly rescue Thornhill from the clutches of Vandamm's assassins. While it is a stroke of luck that the police car crashes into the Mercedes, what is introduced is the idea that governmental organizations can foster rescues – even through ineptness. Several times in *North by Northwest* the police will rescue Thornhill from the villains without the slightest hint that they know what they are doing. In fact, this is the first of three times the police will rescue Thornhill (the second is at the art auction and the third time is on Mt. Rushmore).

Now, in his drunken stupor, Roger does not recognize the police as police. Later, in Chicago, Roger will intentionally call on the police to rescue him from Vandamm's assassins and they will not recognize *him* as a wanted murderer.

One of the things that distinguishes these local policemen from the men (and women) in other, more unfeeling, governmental organizations, is that they have names. Men who are nameless or use false names head the spy and

counter-spy networks. This incident, and its mirror image in Chicago, reiterate one of the basic themes of the film: having a name, and thus an identity, is essential to humanity and feeling.



North by Northwest [1959] (18:16)

Hitchcock rarely portrays a fully trustworthy policeman in his films (the outstanding exceptions being *I Confess* [1953], *Dial M for Murder* [1954], and *Frenzy* [1972] where the police inspectors actually solve the crimes). In Hitchcock's universe, uniformed police vary from ineffectual to buffoonish to downright dangerous (as in *The Wrong Man* [1956]). Occasionally they are corrupt.

One of the detectives the judge sends to investigate Thornhill's outrageous claims of assassination is named, "Captain Junket." In addition to Junket being a custard-like dessert of curdled sweet milk, the term is also used to describe a pleasure trip made by a corrupt politician or other official at public expense. This should give us a good idea of Hitchcock's opinion of the police.

Here are a few examples of Hitchcock's portrayal of law enforcement:



The Ring [1927] (02:57)

Hitchcock's attitude toward the police starts relatively early in his film career. In *The Ring* [1927], when children throw eggs at a hapless black man in the dunking stool game, a policeman laughs at his plight with the rest of the crowd. When the exhibit owner, nudges him, he suddenly turns serious and does his duty by chasing the kids away.



The Lodger [1927] (1:23:19)

The policeman in the 1927 *The Lodger* is a crude plainclothesman who begins the film with heart-smitten mooning over his blond girlfriend. He is portrayed more silly than anything else but soon turns corrupt. When he becomes jealous, he goes through mental gymnastics to fabricate a criminal case against his love rival. Since the lodger is later attacked by a crowd and hung on a fence in a distinctly crucifixion pose and moments later a “Deposition from the Cross” pose, Hitchcock invites us to equate the policeman with Judas.



Murder! [1930] (13:02)

In *Murder!* [1930], the murderer, part of a theatrical troupe, disguises himself as a policeman to escape the scene of the crime. This plants the idea that any policeman could be an imposter.



Blackmail [1929] (32:28)

In a scene in *Blackmail* [1929], Hitchcock cuts to a policeman calmly walking his beat while Alice is being raped in the building behind him. Later policeman Frank Webber helps the woman he loves, Alice White, to literally get away with murder.



Number Seventeen [1932] (1:03:19)

In *Number Seventeen* [1932], the criminal Sheldrake poses as a famous policeman named Barton. Later the real Barton exposes and arrests him. Confusion reigns supreme in this thriller/satire.



The Man Who Knew Too Much [1934] (49:52)

In *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1934] the villains convince a naive policeman the hero's buddy is actually a criminal. The duped cops arrest him. Even in front of a sign for an optician, the police cannot see what they are doing. Later, the police must borrow guns from a local gunsmith in order to do battle with the villains.



Sabotage [1936] (50:34)

As in *The Lodger* [1927] and *Blackmail* [1929], in the 1936 *Sabotage*, the policeman is immoral and corrupt. Policeman Ted is always a step or two behind everyone else. In love with Mrs. Verloc (a married woman), he even offers to help her leave the country after she stabs her husband to death. At the end, he covers up her husband's murder. Earlier, another policeman blindly enforces the traffic regulations and prevents young Stevie from crossing the street, an act ultimately leading to his death.



Young and Innocent [1937] (28:15)

Commandeering a cart in *Young and Innocent* [1937], the police are forced to ride in the back with a load of squealing pigs by a farmer who is not very enamored of officialdom.



Suspicion [1941] (1:13:16)

An abstract still life painting becomes an intelligence test for the police in *Suspicion* [1941] as a young policeman stares at it several times uncomprehendingly.



Spellbound [1945] (53:50)

A hotel detective in *Spellbound* [1945] brags about being a “sort of a psychologist” as part of his job. He tells this to psychiatrist Dr. Peterson who, taking advantage of his overblown macho ego, pretends to be a schoolteacher looking for her husband and manipulates the poor slob mercilessly – though he is clearly deserving of it. He later realizes what a fool he has been when he sees her picture in the paper as an accomplice to Dr. Edwards’ escape.



Spellbound [1945] (1:08:13)

Later in the same film, the completely oblivious police have the very “criminals” they are hunting sitting next to them.



Spellbound [1945] (1:37:03)

Hitchcock takes almost any opportunity to poke fun at the police, even in a fleeting background. In *Spellbound* [1945], there is a shot of the interior of a police station (a constructed studio set, of course) lasting not even a second. Yet in the background behind the clueless police are the words “juvenile bureau.”



I Confess [1953] (1:05:53)

Even in a film like *I Confess* [1953], one that has, for the most part, efficient and responsible police, Hitchcock cannot resist a poke or two. When Father Logan is crossing a street, a traffic cop signals for a car to run him down (the car's driver, not obeying the policeman, stops).



Dial M for Murder [1954] (01:12)

Dial M for Murder [1954] begins with a policeman blithely sauntering before the house where a murder is about to take place (an echo of the opening scene of *Blackmail* [1929] – above). However, it is police inspector Hubbard in the same film who finally figures out the complex crime scenario.



Strangers on a Train [1951] (1:31:47)

In *Strangers on a Train* [1951], the police carelessly shoot the wrong man causing the famous carousel disaster. Earlier as the police enter the carnival, hunting, of course, for the wrong man, a billboard with a gigantic smirking man looks down on them.



To Catch a Thief [1955] (10:12)

In *To Catch a Thief* [1955] the suspected and wanted jewel thief John Robie, having just eluded a gaggle of police, steps out of a bus and passes unrecognized right in front of a policeman.



The Trouble with Harry [1955] (17:16)

“I know the police and their suspicious ways,” says Captain Wilds in *The Trouble with Harry* [1955], “You’re guilty until proven innocent.” Hitchcock further lets us know his opinion of the sheriff in this film by making him drive an antique car with only one functional headlight – clearly symbolic of the inadequate and half-blind ways of the police. This Keystone Kops view of police continues when local law enforcement is sarcastically called “piece work, he [the deputy sheriff] gets paid by the arrest.”



The Wrong Man [1956] (03:42)

Another aspect of Hitchcock’s police is that their very presence can engender a feeling of paranoia and fear in an innocent man. Perhaps the best example of this is in *The Wrong Man* [1956] when Manny leaves his job and walks down the street with two random policemen innocently walking their beat. However, Hitchcock photographs the scene to make these normally blameless and even helpful men look like specters of doom . . . which they will soon be.



Psycho [1960] (15:31)



Orphee [1949] (17:42) – Jean Cocteau

The threatening policeman in *Psycho* [1960] wears black glasses making him look like the clichéd “bug-eyed monster” out of a B-science fiction films of the day (or perhaps a satanic one – for he also reminds us of the assassin biker police from hell in Jean Cocteau’s *Orphee*). In *Psycho*, he turns out to be the source of the worst possible advice: He tells Marion she should have spent the night in a local motel because that way she would be “safer.”



Frenzy [1972] (12:34)

To the end of his career, Hitchcock could not resist portraying the police as ineffectual and blind. In *Frenzy* [1972], a policeman chats amiably with Bob Rusk – the rapist/strangler.

In both *Frenzy* [1972] and *Dial M for Murder* [1954] the police not only arrest the wrong person, but the legal system judges and convicts them. With this attitude, one can understand why, in *Foreign Correspondent* [1940], it is almost with glee the film mentions that reporter Johnny Jones, “in the line of duty” while running down some armed robbers, beat up a policeman.



Easy Virtue [1928] (01:55)

As much as Hitchcock dislikes the police, he has little better to say about the legal system they serve. As early as 1928, in *Easy Virtue*, Hitchcock portrays a judge sleepy, yawning and near-sighted.



Easy Virtue [1928] (01:46)

With a rather adventurous optical trick, we get a glimpse through his monocle and the visual representation of his mental ability – everything is out of focus but through his monocle. He sees only from one point of view (i.e., monocular vision), not a very healthy attitude for a judge.



Murder! [1930] (13:36)

And in *Murder!* [1930], Hitchcock introduces a judge blowing his nose!

Similarly, in *The Manxman* [1929] the judge is part of a love triangle who winds up adjudicating the case when his lover is accused of trying to commit suicide.

In *Jamaica Inn* [1939] it is not the police who are corrupt (in fact, this is one of the few of Hitchcock's films in which a policeman is the hero), the local representative of the legal system, the judge, is not only corrupt, but the head of the murderous criminal gang.



Frenzy [1972] (04:31)



Marnie [1964] (1:21:20)

Politicians fare little better than the judges or police. In *Frenzy* [1972], for instance, as a politician promises the Thames will soon be pollution free, a body is discovered floating in the river. (Hitchcock used an almost identical image earlier in *Marnie* [1964].)

In *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock considers another aspect of police-
dom – the intelligence community. These men are typically cold, heartless,

ruthless, insensitive, though outwardly very mild-mannered, killers. The agents in *Notorious* [1946] who hung Ilsa Huberman out to dry, are little different from The Professor in *North by Northwest*. Had the Professor's machinations gone according to plan, Eve would have taken off with Vandamm for parts unknown and, as Roger puts it, to face death. To the Professor and his kin, we are all nothing more than pawns in their schemes, to be used and thrown away at will.

This is as close as the typically patriotic Hitchcock comes to directly criticizing the government. For the decade around World War II, almost all of Hitchcock's films, both British and American, were patriotic rallying cries to what he felt was an ignorant public and an unresponsive government.

Once we make this connection, we can see how *North by Northwest* links the conservative, conformist ethos of the 1950s with the revolutionary, anti-establishment leanings of the 1960s on the horizon. Roger Thornhill, then, is a man on the cusp between two distinct ethical programs – conformity or independence. *North by Northwest* is one of the few mature Hitchcock films in which he opts for a positive look at the possibilities for human development.

50. CALLING MOTHER



North by Northwest [1959] (18:59)

At the police station, Thornhill's rather comic display of drunkenness continues: he lays down on a wide wooden chair with his feet dangling over the arm rest, getting up he dances/wrestles passively with one of the policemen, and so on.

Then Roger gets his customary phone call. Rather than calling his lawyer, he calls his mother! He finally he completes what he set out to do earlier that day in the Oak Room: to send a message to his mother. However, this phone call has many more implications.



North by Northwest [1959] (19:39)

Thornhill's over-dependence on his mother, which we suspected back in New York City, now becomes fully realized. One of the buzzwords of the 1950's was "Momism," a belief supported by a dozen popular books of the day purporting that men are unsuccessful (or homosexual) because of their overbearing and domineering mothers.

Mother: like most of his adaptations/explorations of various aspects of popular culture, Hitchcock picks and chooses, using some aspects while ignoring or rejecting others. For instance, in *North by Northwest* he rejects that aspect of "Momism" which ascribed homosexuality (officially considered a disease until 1973) to an unusually close relationship with a mother (though he hinted at it earlier in *Strangers on a Train* [1951]).

Most of Hitchcock's mothers are either negative or damaged. The outstanding exception is in *Shadow of a Doubt* [1943]. The family matriarch, Emma, is named after Hitchcock's own mother who was dying during the making of the film (he couldn't visit England in 1943 because of the ongoing war). (He peppered this film with more personal tidbits: his childhood bicycle accident is assigned to Uncle Charlie and the \$40,000 Uncle Charlie deposits in the bank is the exact amount Hitchcock just paid for his Los Angeles home.)



Easy Virtue [1928] (37:14)

However, this is the exception. Mothers of various sorts appear in earlier Hitchcock films, almost always in a debilitating mother/son relationship. This starts very early in his films: in *Easy Virtue* in 1928, John's mother ruins his relationship with Larita – and mother enters from screen left symbolically indicating her negative nature.



Notorious [1946] (54:28)

Notorious [1946], considerably later, is a continuation and intensification of dealing with “mother.” The domineering, murderous mother is not Devlin’s, the central character, but Alex’s, the villain. A very complex character, she is simultaneously good mother and a bad mother. If Alex had followed his mother’s advice, he would have survived at the end of the film. And yet she is a dyed-in-the-wool Nazi. Hitchcock is willing to concede that even a villainess can have deep feelings for her son.



Strangers on a Train [1951] (15:35)

A very different mother is Bruno's in *Strangers on a Train* [1951] who manipulates Bruno through seeming absentmindedness and her complete denial of her son's psychopathology, but when threatened she suddenly becomes very protective (of her presumably unfulfilled incestuous relationship with her son). Indeed, in many ways *Strangers on a Train* [1951] can be seen as a prequel to *Psycho* [1960].

North by Northwest is the first of Hitchcock's "mother" quartet (*North by Northwest* [1959], *Psycho* [1960], *The Birds* [1963], and *Marnie* [1964]). Following *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock will make what might be the ultimate Momism film, *Psycho*. Even though she is not physically present, the mother still dominates her son, taking over his mind and his soul. And we must recall all the other oppressive parental figures involved: Sam's father, Marion's mother, the secretary's mother, and the Texas sugar daddy who buys off unhappiness. *Psycho* is paean to dysfunctional family relationships.

After *Psycho* [1960] comes *The Birds* [1963], another film with a prominent domineering and problematic mother, Lydia (strangely named after an Iron Age kingdom in western Turkey), who manipulates Mitch through weakness and dependence. In response, Mitch calls his mother “darling” and “dear.”



Marnie [1964] (02:06:00)

Marnie [1964] is perhaps the most frightening of the “mother films.” Unlike *North by Northwest* and *The Birds* [1963], here the mother’s debilitating influence is on a daughter, not a son.



Vertigo [1958]

Earlier in *Vertigo* [1958], shades of the controlling mother are building when the desperate Midge says to the catatonic Scottie, “You’re not lost, mother is here,” but he is lost, mother fails.



Frenzy [1972] (17:17)

Later, mothers seem to lose their significance: In *Frenzy* [1972], Bob Rusk, the killer, is a personable young chap who lives with his red-haired mother, but nothing further is made of it.

But in *North by Northwest*, as we shall see, Roger's problems with his mother are far more complex, and far more realistic, than the easy formulation of male weakness called "Momism." With his mother appearing to be about the same age as Thornhill (the actress was only eight years older), we can see him as an eternal adolescent *a la* Peter Pan refusing to age using his overbearing mother as a refuge from normal maturation. Or can we see his mother as the instigator of his infantilization? Their closeness in age also brings up, but very distantly in this film (as compared to *Strangers on a Train* [1951]), the possibility of a suppressed incestuous relationship.

On the telephone, Roger greets his mother with, "Hello, mother? Mother, this is your son, Roger Thornhill." Is he worried she might not recognize him? Does he fear she might have forgotten she has a son? Must he give her his full name in order to identify himself? Add to this the fact he still lives at home, this conversation does not speak well of a secure, adult relationship.



Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs [1937] (15:25) – William Cottrell, et al.

Furthermore, Roger adjusts his suit and tie before talking to his mother on the telephone. Even though she is not there and cannot see him, her influence on him is clear. This scene is reminiscent of Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* [1937], a scene that so exemplifies the roles women of the day were expected to play: Snow White, a Princess (literally), primps her clothes and her hair (in gestures strikingly similar to Thornhill's) before entering a man's house although she knows nobody is at home!

Now Thornhill's mother asks irrelevant questions and makes inane comments. "No, mother, they didn't give me a chaser," is Roger's reply after telling his mother someone tried to murder him. Mother is obviously out of touch with reality in many ways reminiscent of Bruno's mother in *Strangers on a Train* [1951].



North by Northwest [1959] (20:14)

At this point in the film something very strange occurs. An out-of-focus figure walks in front of the camera! Perhaps this little bit of business is Hitchcock trying to give us the feel of a busy police station. But perhaps there is more. When Roger says, "No, mother, they didn't give me a chaser," the audience breaks out in laughter. One of the great challenges for a director of comedies is to judge how long an audience will laugh for the film must pause to accommodate the laughter. Hitchcock's solution is to have someone walk in front of the camera while the audience returns.

The topper on Thornhill's relationship with his mother is when he announces at the conclusion of his call, "That was mother," where one might expect, "That was my mother." His statement implies that there is only a single mother in the world, he is the son of *the* mother, and she belongs to him – or perhaps more accurately, he belongs to her. This statement reveals the power his mother holds over him.

51. THE SOBRIETY TEST



North by Northwest [1959] (20:58)

Roger's sobriety test is an opportunity for Cary Grant to show off his comedic skills. Drunk, Roger does not conform to society's rules in the very place most recognized as enforcing them – the police station. The person so well hidden under the conformism that has so enveloped Thornhill in his normal life is given a chance to peek out, but only under the “unnatural” influence of alcohol. What Roger must learn, and what he will accomplish, is to reject conformism without external help, using only his up-till-now undiscovered internal powers.

Thornhill is asked to walk a line chalked on the floor to prove his sobriety. Walking the line is symbolic of conformity: up till now, that is exactly what Roger has done . . . walk the line. Now, as far as the authorities, the enforcers of conformity are concerned, he fails the test miserably. Actually, he never even tries it. Thornhill is not yet ready to travel his road to psychological development. For that we must wait about another 15 minutes for one of Hitchcock's favorite symbols of the inexorability of fate – trains and railroad tracks.

52. THE COURT & MOTHER'S HELP



North by Northwest [1959] (21:50)

In the courtroom the following morning we see Roger's mother for the first time. We know immediately who she is because of her bright, red hair surrounded by an exaggerated white fur collar. She also stands out in Hitchcock's composition as the brightest lit figure, the only one whose eyes are wide open, and the tallest person in the frame (clearly most of the other actors/extras have been told to slouch and look away from the place where the trial is taking place, at screen right).



To Catch a Thief [1955] (32:33)

Hitchcock introduced the red-haired mother a few years previously in *To Catch a Thief* [1955] (played by the same actress). Then it was the heroine's mother, not the hero's. It feels as if Hitchcock was testing this idea, not fully fleshed out in this early film. In *North by Northwest*, by contrast, the red-haired mother is fully developed, an unmistakable icon.



The Man Who Knew Too Much [1956] (1:56:05)

Another warmup of the red-haired mother is in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1956] with Mrs. Drayton's red hair. While the real mother, Jo McKenna is blonde, Drayton, the woman who first helped kidnap Jo's son but has come to care for him during the course of the film, has become a caring mother figure and perhaps, in Hitchcock's eyes, earned her "mother icon" red hair.



Frenzy [1972] (17:17)

As with so many of Hitchcock's devices that he develops over a number of films, after *North by Northwest* they become perfunctory. For instance, in *Frenzy* [1972] serial rapist/murder Bob Rusk introduces his mother – bright red hair, surrounded by red flowers. But in this late Hitchcock film, we see her once and nothing further is made of Rusk's relation with her.

Roger's mother's first action in the film is to snicker as Roger's lawyer says, "... as best as he could under the circumstances." Her loud snort of disbelief shows she doesn't believe her own son – apparently she believes he is a hopeless alcoholic with regular hallucinations – and is perfectly willing to prejudice the judge against him. The judge is less skeptical of Roger's outrageous alibi than is his own mother!

Hitchcock's view of women may be partially influenced by ageism. Younger women seem capable of change while older women are not. For ex-

ample, young Caroline in the 1935 *The 39 Steps* is totally convinced of Hannay's guilt and young Pat in *Saboteur* in 1942 is also convinced of Barry's guilt. Eventually they not only realize the heroes' innocence, but also fall in love with them.

By 1959, Hitchcock's worldview of women apparently became more hardened: now there is no cure for mother's opinions and actions. Thornhill's mother's belief in the police and disbelief in her own son seem unalterable. Like many of the characters surrounding Roger and Eve, and unlike them, mother seems mired too deeply in her view of the world to ever change. She is simply bound to disappear from the scene to be replaced by a more appropriate, younger female presence.

The judge – unlike some of Hitchcock's previous judges – is willing to at least entertain Roger's story and investigate. Throughout the film, the masculine power establishment – the Professor, Vandamm, the judge, the police – while more vicious and uncaring about individual life, are still more even-handed in their wielding of that power than the representatives of feminine power – Roger's mother, Eve, the false Mrs. Townsend and others. Significantly, it is only Eve, both Roger's future love and a reflection of his own inner potential feminine psychology, who, like Roger, changes through contact with deep, internal psychological powers.

53. BACK TO THE SCENE



North by Northwest [1959] (22:49)

The court generously gives Roger a chance to prove his story. So Roger, his mother, his lawyer, and the police return (on a junket?) to the Townsend mansion where, of course, all is now normal.

Hitchcock now photographs the mansion quite differently from the first time we saw it. Rather than the stately mansion atop a low hill, the camera is placed moderately low, looking up at the structure. This, in addition to the wide-angle lens Hitchcock uses, distorts the building slightly and makes it look like it is falling over backwards.



The Third Man [1949] (22:59) – Carol Reed

While this type of distortion is relatively common in many films, especially in the *films noir* of the 1940s and '50s, Hitchcock uses the concept with considerable restraint (as opposed to films like Carol Reed's brilliant *The Third Man* [1949] or Orson Welles' masterpiece *Touch of Evil* [1958] in which almost every scene is tilted).



Marnie [1964] (1:27:43)

Hitchcock uses image tilting for very specific comments. Typical is the radically tilted mansion in *Marnie* [1964] with two women looking out of two windows: one sexually frigid (perhaps lesbian), suicidal, and a pathologically lying thief; the other jealous, conniving, unscrupulous, and incestuous. An off-balance place indeed.



The Wrong Man [1956] (00:48)

Occasionally Hitchcock uses this device to play against our expectations by assigning the foreboding feelings this technique provides to a building we expect to be a “happy” place. Perhaps the best example is the opening shot of the Stork Club in *The Wrong Man* [1956].



The Man Who Knew Too Much [1956] (1:04:59)

In the same year when Ben McKenna approaches the taxidermist's shop hoping to find his kidnapped son in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1956], the tilted camera gives a feeling of ominous dread even though what is about to ensue is one of the funniest sequences in the film – Hitchcock's joke on us.

Inside the Townsend Mansion, all Roger's claims seem to be figments of an alcoholic stupor. Again, his own mother sounds the most vocal disbeliefs. Roger, according to the false “Mrs. Townsend,” was a drunken dinner guest the previous evening and “borrowed” the Mercedes to drive home in. Everyone believes her because of Roger's “alcoholic” reputation and because she has the backing of the upper class – the Townsend Mansion.



North by Northwest [1959] (25:18)

As “Mrs. Townsend” recites her fable of the previous evening, Thornhill steps away from the other people and Hitchcock photographs him alone. In this way he seems isolated from the others; he is on one side of the equation of truth and they are all on the other. The camerawork reflects Roger’s isolation.

Roger’s response to the false Mrs. Townend’s fantastic story is, “What a performance.” In addition to this being another of Hitchcock’s theatrical references, it is an ironic reversal of what was said the previous evening. Then it was Vandamm accusing Thornhill of performing.



North by Northwest [1959] (24:32)

The false Mrs. Townsend, we find out much later, is Vandamm's sister. In addition to the complex family relationships echoing *Hamlet*, we have another implication of incest. When Vandamm masquerades as Townsend, to what extent does his sister play the role of his wife? Certainly, nothing happens on screen to imply any physical playing out of these roles, but the various couplings between the characters are so complex that the psychological implications cannot be ignored.

Hitchcock's fascination with doubled characters is well known, from the two Charlies, one male and one female, in *Shadow of a Doubt* [1943] to, most blatantly, Kim Novak's double role in *Vertigo* [1958]. Here, in *North by Northwest*, he builds a map of blood relations – mothers and sisters – forcing us to look for other similarities between the villain's sister and the hero's mother.

Both the false Mrs. Townsend and Roger's mother have red hair, the same slight build, and are about the same age. They both exhibit an overbearing, solicitous and smothering attitude toward grown men, an attitude appropriate for small children and large pets, but when applied to grown men, it robs them of all their power. Helpless, these men are instantly cut off from any possibility of independent growth, maturity, and personal power (notice this applies to Vandamm as well as Thornhill – another doubling). Perhaps if

it were not for these two women and their over-mothering (one naively, the other viciously), Roger would not have had the opportunity to go on this harrowing adventure of self-discovery.

All Roger's hopes of vindication come crashing down when the sham Mrs. Townsend says her "husband" is addressing the United Nations. This reference to a large international governmental organization with lofty goals completely destroys any shred of credibility Roger might still have had. The police immediately and unquestioningly accept this as authority and beat a hasty, if polite, retreat.



North by Northwest [1959] (25:39)

To stress Roger's isolation, at the words, "United Nations," Hitchcock cuts from a crowded frame with five people stuffed into it, to an image of Roger alone – symbolic of his now-growing isolation from those around him, a physical isolation that parallels his psychic one. What chance does a single man have against an organization whose scope is global, both physical and ideological?



North by Northwest [1959] (25:41)

Other respected organizations are similarly deflated throughout the film: the police, our governmental counter-spies, and even the institution of the American presidency (as portrayed on Mt. Rushmore). Contrary to what we see here, the rest of the film clearly demonstrates that, in Hitchcock's surprisingly optimistic vision of the universe, a single man does indeed have a chance against these massive organizations.



North by Northwest [1959] (26:01)

When everyone is thoroughly convinced the false Mrs. Townsend is telling the truth and Thornhill is lying or hallucinating, all the detectives leave the library. Roger remains, wanting to continue to fight for his version of the truth. His mother takes him by the arm and leads him out like a little boy. At his mother's touch, Roger collapses into a pliable, infantilized heap.

Roger's mother's comment to him to "pay the two dollars" may seem obscure to contemporary viewers but was probably well known to Hitchcock who had been making films since the 1920's. The line is a reference to a Depression-era Willie Howard vaudeville sketch written by Billy K. Wells in which a man spits on the subway and the judge fines him \$2, but his ambitious attorney insists on escalating the case. As the man incurs greater and greater sentences, finally appearing on death row about to be executed, the poor man keeps pleading, "Pay the two dollars!" One can see this sketch performed in film in *Ziegfeld Follies* [1945] with Edward Arnold portraying the attorney.



North by Northwest [1959] (26:47)

All this is accompanied by Bernard Herrmann's brilliant waltz theme that changes so easily from frivolous to menacing, as it will again on Mt. Rushmore. On leaving the Townsend mansion, unknown to Thornhill, the facade of domestic tranquility is broken for the audience. We hear the ominous

sound of snipping as one of the gardeners turns his face toward us, and there is one of Vandamm's henchmen! Again, people are not who they seem.

54. BRIBING MOTHER



North by Northwest [1959] (28:05)

Intent on proving his innocence, Thornhill returns to the site where his identity began to crumble, the Plaza Hotel. This time his entrance is again accompanied by a string quartet, but now playing Cole Porter's *Rosalie*,

“ . . . Won't you make my life thrilling, And tell me you're willing . . . ”

Roger's previous visit was on the ground floor. His attempt to contact his mother led to kidnap and isolation from her. His social drinking was replaced with murderous drinking. Thornhill now skips drinking at the Oak Room – named after the tree we most associate with stability, something that is lacking in his life right now. Instead he pursues the answer to his current problem by moving upward, into the upper area of the hotel. But first, he must again deal with his mother.

His intention is to confront Kaplan and find out what is going on. Thornhill is very sharp: despite the drunken interlude, he remembers the hotel and room number from the long list of the places Kaplan stayed that was recited by Vandamm during the interview the previous evening.

In order to get into Kaplan's room, Roger needs the key. He offers his mother ten dollars to sweet-talk the hotel officials (accompanied on the sound-track by *In the Still of the Night*). We assume the money is for bribing the desk clerk into giving up the key. But no, the bribe is for mother!

She adamantly refuses ten . . . only to accept fifty. An interesting relationship, where a son must bribe his mother to help him prove his own innocence. His mother's role throughout the film is to keep him unconscious of his true self; were he to act autonomously, her spell over him would be broken. If he could prove his innocence of the crimes of the previous evening, it would force her to reconsider all her previous, presumably projected, ideas of who he is. Perhaps she does not want her son to prove himself innocent. This mother wants to control her son through his guilt.



Stage Fright [1950] (37:05)

Hitchcock uses this theme of bribery quite often, but never with such venom. In *Stage Fright* [1950], for instance, a maid must be bribed into helping prove the hero, Jonathan, innocent. But the bribing of a working-class maid and one's own mother are ethical worlds apart.

A mother accepting money to help her son is a very strange image, difficult to comprehend. Mother as prostitute (non-sexual in this case) echoes *Marnie* [1964] (sexual). Perhaps if we turn to dream analysis we can get some insight. Money in dreams, according to many writers, represents energy or power (dream analysts do not seem to distinguish between these physical properties in the same way physicists do). Nevertheless, if this symbolism is valid, we can see that Roger's mother is willing, vampire-like, to drain him of his energy or power. This makes sense, for her behavior obviously keeps him in a powerless and infantile state.

Once we recognize that money is used symbolically in *North by Northwest*, it is worthwhile to take a minute to trace its progress. At the beginning of the film, Roger pays for a newspaper that leads to the revelation that rather than act, he would prefer to "think thin." Moments later he pays for a cab ride. Here the revelation is about his regressive ideas about the role of women, "Take this woman back to where she belongs." But these are minor revelations.

This incident, the bribery of Roger's mother, is the first *major* appearance of money – and, like the others, a strikingly negative one. The next time we see bribery is on the train, when Eve bribes the waiter to seat Roger at her table. Then she bribes the train porter to "loan" his uniform so Thornhill can escape from the police-infested Chicago train station. Notice that in Chicago money is being doled out by a woman rather than being received by one. Energy is beginning to flow in the opposite direction. And feminine energy, as represented by Eve, rather than Mother, helps empower Roger rather than robbing him of his power. Thus, feminine power is vampiric only when misused (by Mother).

Another time we see money is at the art auction when Vandamm purchases both an art object and (symbolically) Eve. But at the auction, it is Roger's turn to wield it. He will use it in an illogical, almost hallucinatory way, to gain freedom from the clutches of Vandamm and his henchmen. At the auction, he will use money with a vengeance, but not in the typically masculine, logical way – as demonstrated and demanded by everyone else in the auction gallery – but in a random and logic-destroying way, a way that leads

to freedom and liberation. We have here an interesting combination of masculine and feminine approaches to power and energy: a consciously controlled element (money) will be at the beck and call of the unconscious.



The Skin Game [1931] (10:44)

The use of money has concerned Hitchcock several times in the past, almost always in a negative light. In 1931, Charles Hornblower, a wealthy manufacturer of pottery in *The Skin Game*, threatens the social establishment and the ecology of rural England while tossing coins in his hand. This gesture precedes by a year the most famous of coin-flipping gangsters: Rinaldo (played to the menacing psychotic hilt by George Raft) in Howard Hawks' *Scarface* [1932].



Scarface [1932] – Howard Hawks

In *Marnie* [1964], mother complains Marnie is spending too much money on her. Marnie justifies this by quoting the Bible, for which she is summarily chastised by her mother. Of course, the money is stolen, and it is the depth of hypocrisy to use the Bible as justification.

55. MEETING THE HOTEL STAFF



North by Northwest [1959] (28:29)

But back to the Plaza Hotel. Once upstairs, Thornhill questions the staff only to find that *he* is George Kaplan. Everyone recognizes Roger by his room number, not by his name or his person. This is another reflection of the role of anonymity in society as portrayed in the film. This fancy hotel, representative of society as a whole, provides “good” service, service based on your room number, not on you as a person.

Thornhill’s comments on the maid thinking he is Kaplan, “Maybe I look like Kaplan.” We later learn Kaplan does not exist. Thus, Thornhill is unwittingly saying that he looks like a man who does not exist. Thornhill’s issue of non-existence rises to the surface once again when he will show Eve his monogrammed matches, “R.O.T.” and she asks what the “O” stands for. His reply, “nothing.”



North by Northwest [1959] (29:08)

Roger now picks up a photograph of Vandamm and several other men standing in front of a building emblazoned with the words, “University of M ...” This adds further to the image of sophistication Vandamm wears like a halo. And it also casts doubt on another beloved American institution: the world of academe is now a place of spies and traitors. This is clearly an echo of Cold War paranoia about intellectuals and academe. This photograph was planted by the Professor to convince Vandamm he is the subject of Kaplan’s investigation.



North by Northwest [1959] (29:59)



North by Northwest [1959] (30:02)

Thornhill rings for the maid. When she arrives, she calls him, “Mr. Kaplan.” To emphasize Thornhill’s shock and disorientation at hearing himself called “Kaplan,” Hitchcock cuts from a balanced composition to an unbalanced one. He abruptly cuts from Thornhill and Elsie balanced on the screen, both at equal distances from the camera, to a shot of them in the identical positions, but Thornhill further from the camera (“taken aback?”) and

facing it and Elsie closer with her back to us. It is as if the world had suddenly twisted. The usually glib Thornhill's confusion is further emphasized by his stuttering, "When did, when did you see me?"

Roger quickly recovers his aplomb and dismisses the maid. However, once he accepts the role of Kaplan, Thornhill quickly loses control not only of who he is, but of the physical world around him. With the maid about to leave, the room bell rings giving Thornhill a start. He worriedly and guiltily looks around and then reluctantly answers the door.

Much to Thornhill's relief, a valet appears returning Kaplan's suit from the cleaners. The young man addresses Thornhill as "Mr. Kaplan" without hesitation. Roger seems to accept this mistake without comment or shock. He is becoming accustomed to being called Kaplan, accepting as fact that people think he is Kaplan.

56. KAPLAN'S CLOTHES



North by Northwest [1959] (31:50)

Thornhill tries on Kaplan's clothes. While his effort at the level of the text is to see if there is a physical resemblance between the two men, there is also a search for a psychological resemblance. Roger, investigating Kaplan's effects, makes psychological symbolic discoveries.

The arms of Kaplan's coat are too short, and the body appears too long. Kaplan must be built just the opposite of an ape. His short arms may indicate his inability to reach out. This is paralleled by Thornhill's similar inability to emotionally touch anyone. Building on this, later in the film, when Roger willingly assumes Kaplan's persona (even more strongly than he is doing now in the hotel room), he will recognize this inability and begin working to change himself. Kaplan, Thornhill notes, also has dandruff – that is, his head is disintegrating. Again, this is what is happening to Roger at a psychological level. One of the most delicious ironies in the film is when Thornhill says, "They must have mistaken me for a much shorter man." Indeed, so short he does not even exist.



Strangers on a Train [1951] (16:43)

Hitchcock had always paid special attention to the clothing his characters wear, very often imbuing it with symbolic meaning. A good example is the psychotic Bruno's psychedelic dressing gown in *Strangers on a Train* [1951] where the pattern clearly symbolizes his mental state. Later, on the carousel, riding with Miriam and her two beaux, Bruno even sings, "But his brain was so loaded it nearly exploded, the poor girl would shake with alarm." And the song continues on the soundtrack as he strangles Miriam a few minutes later.

Immediately after trying on Kaplan's clothes, we see a change in Roger's attitude toward his mother. She advises him not to answer the phone, which he unhesitatingly does. While this scene is played as comedy, it has a serious side to it. Is this Roger's first rebellion against mother?

It is interesting to note that "mother" has no name (even though several sources state her name as "Clara," that name is never used in the film). This makes her a relative of "The Professor" who is likewise nameless. Both are

related by being parental figures to Thornhill and, more important, by their habit of ruthlessly manipulating people. In the past, nameless characters were often villains as with the unnamed drummer/murderer in *Young and Innocent* [1937].

57. KILLERS CALLING



North by Northwest [1959] (32:26)

Answering the phone, Thornhill learns Vandamm's henchmen are close by, below in the hotel's lobby and on their way up. While Roger talks on the phone to the thugs, Hitchcock brings his camera closer to Roger and raises it in an echo of the camera movement that concluded the interview at the Townsend mansion. Again, the rising camera indicates a threat of death.

At the point we can only assume that Vandamm's men have been following Thornhill from the time he left the Glen Cove courtroom. And we can assume that they will continue following him to the United Nations and to Grand Central Station where he will board his train for Chicago. This is a very paranoid film. And since Eve appears seemingly out of nowhere on the train, we can also assume that the Professor's men have also been following. Again, this is a very paranoid film.

When the thugs hang up, Roger calls the operator to find out where they are calling from. He uses his real name, but quickly says he is Kaplan. Thornhill is slowly slipping into the Kaplan persona; Thornhill is slowly dissolving into an identity that does not exist.

Much of the punishment and abused heaped on Thornhill from now on is at least partially the result of Roger consciously assuming the Kaplan persona. This is necessary at the psychological level, for he must become nobody before he can become somebody; he must fall before he can rise.

As a symbolic psychological journey, it is necessary for Thornhill to become Kaplan. By calling himself “Kaplan,” Thornhill begins the journey to meet the Shadow/villain on his way to health and victory. As mentioned above, in stories of psychological healing, the villain is instrumental in the healing process. The most difficult part for the “traveler” is to recognize that the villain’s point of view as valid, but not to accept and adopt it and become a villain. By absorbing the villain’s ideology, understanding it, and using it in a positive way, the hero becomes a larger and healthier person. For this reason, the path to health always involves an encounter with the Shadow/villain. It is also the reason films with complex villains are far more engaging than films with a series of straw men for the hero to simply knock down and claim victory. Hitchcock, like Shakespeare, certainly understood this.

58. LAUGHTER IN THE ELEVATOR



North by Northwest [1959] (33:34)

With the perfect timing reserved only for villains, the two henchmen arrive on an ascending elevator the very moment Thornhill's descending elevator doors open. Vandamm's thugs get on the elevator with Thornhill and his mother. The threat is heightened with the musical score gradually building in peril and the tension. In a mirror image of Roger's attempt to approach and understand his "Kaplan" personality by *ascending* in the hotel and questioning the staff, we now see Roger's panicked *descent* in the elevator trying to escape "Kaplan."



North by Northwest [1959] (33:54)

What is most frightening is when Roger points out his would-be killers (one even politely removes his hat) to his mother, she scoffs. And for good reason: they are totally indistinguishable from any other males on the elevator. Or in most of New York City for that matter. In this way, Thornhill's elevator ride reminds us of all the anonymous people rushing about New York in the film's opening sequence. Thornhill was introduced to us leaving an elevator with a crowd of men and women – how many of them were foreign spies or killers?



North by Northwest [1959] (34:03)

In perhaps her greatest detachment from reality, Roger's mother turns to the killers and confronts them with, "You aren't really trying to kill my son, are you?" While she puts on a face of self-satisfied smugness, confident she will deflate all of poor Roger's alcohol-driven hallucinations, Thornhill stiffens and turns to look straight into the camera in desperation and helplessness. In a brilliant move, the thugs begin to laugh.



North by Northwest [1959] (34:20)

The laughter is infectious. First the people around Thornhill begin laughing, and then his mother joins in. This is the perfect image of Roger's isolation. Till now he assumed he knew what was going on and was in charge of his own life. We now see him losing that control.



Blackmail [1929] (38:49)

Hitchcock uses the motif of a frightened central character surrounded by laughing people in *Blackmail* [1929]. Alice, after having killed the man who tried to rape her, walks down the street in a trance of terror and guilt only to pass in front of a theater where “The New Comedy” is playing. People are streaming out the theater and milling about, all laughing. The contrast and the irony are stunning. Hitchcock pushes this further in *North by Northwest*, now the would-be murders are laughing at the intended victim. In addition, the elevator adds a touch of claustrophobia.



The Manxman [1929] (1:10:54)

In the silent *The Manxman* [1929], Hitchcock uses a similar device in reverse: Pete learns he is about to be a father and we see him celebrating just behind his wife, Kate, and his best friend, Philip. However, Kate and Philip face us so Pete cannot see them. They are dour and disheartened because they are in love and the child is Philip's, but they cannot let Pete know – but the audience knows all from the contrast on their expressions. Hitchcock has such confidence in the image that he feels it unnecessary to provide the audience with a title card.



The 39 Steps [1935] (1:21:03)

Five years later, Hitchcock uses a similar situation in *The 39 Steps* [1935]. Hannay, suspected of murder, hunted by both the police and the spies, attends “Crazy Night” at the Palladium. Everyone in the audience is laughing but him.



Strangers on a Train [1951] (48:42)

Hitchcock also uses large groups of people to contrast a single, isolated individual in other ways. In *Strangers on a Train* [1951], Guy plays a tennis match while the crowd follows the ball with their heads swiveling right, left, right, left. The exception is the psychotic murderer, Bruno, who stares straight ahead, his head unmoving.



Murder! [1930] (16:00)

However, this brilliant and frightening scene is a development of an earlier motif. In *Murder!* [1930], twelve people in the jury box swivel their heads right to left and back again following the arguments of the prosecution and the defense. This is another example of Hitchcock returning to a previous idea, honing, and improving it through a series of films.

The Plaza Hotel elevator stops, the doors open, and Roger makes his move. “Ladies first,” he says while pushing the thugs back into the elevator while he himself makes a run for the hotel’s front door.

This is the second time we see Thornhill leave an elevator. The first time was in his own office building where he spilled out as part of the anonymous crowd, with little purpose beyond dictating to his secretary and going to a business meeting. Now his exit is organized around survival, a topic that currently takes precedence over business. No longer passive, he orchestrates the scene: women first, and then a run for the exit.

The contrast between the two scenes is significant: he is no longer a part of the crowd; he is controlling it. Through his aegis the crowd is separated into two groups, men and women – he himself fitting into neither. He goes from being totally immersed in the crowd to being totally excluded from it. Thornhill is rapidly being separated from his gray flannel suit, organization man environment.



North by Northwest [1959] (34:31)

The first time he left an elevator, he was a man confident of his identity and in search of a drink. Now he leaves doubting his identity and in search of himself. Before he believed in society's easy sexism – “send this woman back where she belongs” he says about his secretary – and now he uses these same, familiar sexist elements consciously. To escape the killers, he insists, “Ladies first, ladies first” to exit the elevator. This is an example of integrating aspects of the Shadow, as described above, and using what is normally evil for a good purpose.

Mother, of course, is no “lady” and is left behind. Let us look at her final actions toward Roger. When she pointedly and disbelievingly asks the men if they are trying to kill her son, she demonstrates her attitude toward the world – and him. Anything nefarious – and thus real – is excluded from her world. In this way, the overprotective mother keeps her adult son eternally young, innocent, and child-like and therefore eternally dependent on her. Her domination has kept her son from a balanced experience of the world's good

and evil, a knowledge necessary for psychological maturity. Mother, however, never changes. As her son is running for his life, she chimes, “Roger, will you be home for dinner?” This is the last time we will see Mother.

Roger is escaping from his mother, a psychological spirit killer, as much as he is escaping from the physical killers. This is another example of Hitchcock using a bit of comic relief containing psychological insights. Of course, Roger, running for his life, will not be home for dinner. She will no longer have any opportunity to nourish him – and therefore control him. He will henceforth be on his own, taking care of his own nourishment, physical and psychological.

59. WON'T BE HOME FOR DINNER



North by Northwest [1959] (34:36)

Hitchcock loves things in pairs. Thornhill just completed the film's second elevator descent, and now, for the second time, he steals a cab. Again, we are invited to compare the two incidents. What was once frivolous and mean-spirited is now necessary for survival.

What is happening is that all of Roger's previous "bad habits," those acquired to mindlessly and (perhaps) unethically survive in the New York world of advertising, are now ironically morphing: Thornhill survives a murder attempt because of his alcoholism, he escapes two killer because of his sexism, he gets away because he knows how to steal a cab. All examples of integrating the Shadow.

Thornhill fights the spies with the skills of the ordinary, available to anyone. He doesn't rely on special training or the gadgets of secret agent films to come like *I Spy* [1965] and James Bond. In this way, Hitchcock fervently believes in the power of the common American man (and woman, as we shall see later).

However, like most of the ethical ideas in Hitchcock's film, his belief in the common man is neither simple-minded nor monolithic. Thinking he is escaping his pursuers, Thornhill heads for the United Nations to find Mr. Townsend and demand an explanation. He climbs into a cab and tells the driver he is being followed and asks if the driver can do anything about it. The cabby replies in the affirmative.

Hitchcock's ideas about the working class extend beyond the central characters. This cabby, for instance, belies the American myth of the working class as competent and honorable. In most detective films, in the same circumstances, the cabby would have successfully eluded the hero's pursuers, yet here he fails. And his failure is responsible for a murder for which Thornhill is falsely accused.

This is similar to the penultimate scene in *Strangers on a Train* [1951] when the police mistakenly shoot the operator of a carousel causing it to speed out of control. A working-class man, with admirable poise and dignity, bravely volunteers to crawl beneath the dangerously spinning machine to right the situation. However, rather than simply slowing it down, he pulls the lever abruptly causing the carousel to upend and collapse killing, in addition to the villain, an unknown number of people.

Again, Hitchcock throws our cultural assumptions into our faces and forces us to question them.



Saboteur [1942] (02:46)

In Hitchcock's films social classes have certain associations. The rich, it is clear, function as villains (Bruno Anthony of *Strangers on a Train* [1959]) or heroes (Sir John in *Murder!* [1930]). The same is true of the middle class. The working class, however, in Hitchcock's oeuvre is rarely heroic. Working-class, poorly educated heroes are very rare in Hitchcock's films. *Saboteur* [1942] is the one that comes to mind – a factory worker who has never before seen a hundred-dollar bill. And these were the days when high denomination bills (\$500 and up) were still available (being taken out of circulation in 1969).

Hitchcock goes to great lengths to inform us that what might appear to be a working-class hero is, in fact, not. Scottie in *Vertigo* [1958] is a good example. As a policeman and later a detective we might expect him to have come up from the streets. But, no, it is made quite clear Scottie was educated to be a lawyer (not that his education or experience made him any wiser).

The cab now takes Thornhill to the United Nations building.

60. THE FADE/DISSOLVE



North by Northwest [1959] (35:10)

At the end of his cab ride, Thornhill turns to look out of the cab's back window to see if he is being followed (which he is). At that very moment, Hitchcock does the film's first slow fade/dissolve combining Thornhill looking backwards and the image of the United Nations building in front. For a moment we have two images: Thornhill's back superimposed over the United Nations building. This Janus-like image is far more than just an "establishing shot," indicating a new location. It is as if Thornhill was looking back to find the UN which is actually in front of him. And indeed, the following adventure at the UN is a step backward for him: He will find he was mistaken about his assumption that Townsend was involved in his kidnapping and will get even deeper into trouble.



The Manxman [1929] (50:08)

Hitchcock used the fade/dissolve device from the beginning of his career, many times assigning it symbolic meaning. In the silent *The Manxman* [1929], for instance, Kate married Pete, but is really in love with Phil. During the wedding Hitchcock arranges a fade/dissolve from the happy couple to Phil so that the dour Phil is filmically (and emotionally) placed between them while physically across the room.



Downhill [1927] (22:41)

One of Hitchcock's cleverest uses of a fade/dissolve is in *Downhill* [1927]. As Mable recites her false story about Toddy getting her pregnant, we see the apocryphal flashback superimposed over her face. This is the first example of a "lying flashback" used by Hitchcock.



Under Capricorn [1949] (1:42:15)

Perhaps one of Hitchcock's most effective fade/dissolves is in the melodrama *Under Capricorn* [1949]. Lady Henrietta, drugged and persecuted, faints. The storm outside her bedroom reflects her internal storm. In a brilliant connection between the two, Hitchcock dissolves from the rain dripping down the window to a tear moving in the same direction down Hattie's face.



Psycho [1960] (1:48:05)

Perhaps Hitchcock's most elusive and complex fade/dissolve is at the end of *Psycho* [1960]. Norman Bates has completely become "mother." In his mind, mother is a functioning human being and, according to the psychiatrist, responsible for a number of murders. However, "mother" in physical reality is a mummified corpse. In this fade/dissolve Hitchcock blends two pictures – the real Norman and the real mother. But the result is far more complex, demonstrating far more than two psychological levels: the real Norman, Norman as mother, Norman as he sees his mother, and as we see his mother. To make things still more complicated, while this is going on, another fade/dissolve is taking place to show Marion's car being pulled from the swamp – the result is almost unfathomable psychological complexity portrayed in the physical world. In the second fade/dissolve, the chain used to pull the car from the quagmire passes through Norman/Mother's heart, perhaps symbolizing that they are tied together forever.

61. THE UNITED NATIONS



North by Northwest [1959] (35:24)

Thornhill alights from the cab onto the steps leading to the United Nations building where the theme of “follow the red” continues. On the stairs above him, almost inviting him on, is a perfectly placed woman in a red dress. While everyone else in the scene is walking about, she is standing still, swinging her arms back and forth in almost a beckoning gesture. Once inside the building (a carefully built set) another woman in a red dress appears in the exact middle of the frame.



North by Northwest [1959] (35:34)

Roger strides into the United Nations and pages Lester Townsend hoping to get to the bottom of his mistaken-identity/kidnapping. At this point, he still clings to the idea that the world he occupies is a rational place and that other people are, like him, rational beings. By paging Townsend, he expects to see Vandamm. Presumably, he will explain the situation again and try to straighten things out. However, in Hitchcock's view of the world, rationality is rarely a solution to one's problems.

Thornhill now lies twice. (In the hotel he lied only once, claiming he was Kaplan.) Here he says he has an appointment with Townsend, which he does not, and then, after a slight hesitation, he claims to be Kaplan. The page announcement goes out for Townsend in exactly the same way that Thornhill answered the page for Kaplan in the Plaza Hotel. Wrong men with two names seem to be getting into serious trouble in this film.

A recurring trope in Hitchcock's films is characters with two names. For instance, in *Foreign Correspondent* [1940] the proletarian Johnny Jones becomes the absurd but aristocratic Huntley Haverstock. In *To Catch a Thief* [1955], John Robie hides as Conrad Burns. In *North by Northwest* we have Thornhill/Kaplan and Townsend/Vandamm.

Meanwhile, one of Vandamm's thugs arrives at the United Nations. Clearly Roger's cab driver failed in his promise to ditch him (or was the cabbie on Vandamm's payroll?). He unerringly goes to the very room where Thornhill just paged Townsend. It is clear that the criminal elements are more familiar with the halls of the UN than are honest citizens.



North by Northwest [1959] (36:59)

In a beautiful movement, the camera pans from Thornhill to the thug, lit and framed by a doorway in a stunning arrangement. The camera movement is an echo of the pan that introduced the thugs in the Oak Room bar in the Plaza Hotel. The rhythm of the composition is carefully done – reading from left to right we have three men in the foreground, three men in the background, then two men in the foreground, all in dark suits, then a dark statue, all leading the eye unerringly to Vandamm's assassin framed in the doorway against a light background.

62. STATUES



North by Northwest [1959] (37:07)

Next to the thug is a statue that we will see several times. It is a modernist rendering of the female form in bronze, headless, armless, and inordinately thick around the hips: a symbol of the feminine (perhaps a modernist interpretation of the Venus of Willendorf).



Venus of Willendorf – 25,000 BCE

It may also be an abstract representation of the biblical Eve and, by implication, the Eve Kendall who will be Roger's feminine guide in the near future. Another interpretation is that the feminine is powerless (armless, headless) to stop the violence that is about to take place and powerless to help Roger. We must wait for the physical encounter between Eve and Roger for healing to begin.

Whenever you see a statue in the background of a Hitchcock film, the chances are pretty good it is there to add subliminal commentary to what is going on in the foreground, thus adding another layer to his already complex filmmaking. In Hitchcock's films statues continually appear like a visual Greek chorus, commenting on the unfolding story and characters. A few examples follow.



Easy Virtue [1928] (26:58)

He began exploring this idea very early in his career. In *Easy Virtue* [1928], the innocent Larita receives flowers from admirer John. Behind her is a tall, white statue, almost saintly as if reinforcing her innocence, soon to be sullied.



The 39 Steps [1935] (15:35)

In his first thriller-comedy film, *The 39 Steps* [1935], Hitchcock uses a statue to literally point to where the killers of Annabella Smith entered and left Hannay's apartment. The shadows formed by the curtains highlighting it as the center of focus. It may also be saying to Hannay something like, "Get the hell out of here."



Jamaica Inn [1939] (12:59)

While many consider it his worst film, even *Jamaica Inn* [1939] is loaded with subtle Hitchcockian touches. However, a very unsubtle one is a statue staring disapprovingly at Sir Humphrey's lusting after young Mary. Hitchcock was usually a little less droll in the use of this device.



Foreign Correspondent [1940] (03:45)

The following year, 1940, Hitchcock uses the statue idea but now with a slightly humorous gloss. In *Foreign Correspondent*, Mr. Powers is looking for an ordinary “crime reporter” to send to Europe. While he is requesting the presence of Johnny Jones, there is a statue just behind him shading its eyes with its hand obviously looking for something, or, in this case, someone.



Foreign Correspondent [1940] (1:56:32)

Toward the end of the same film, Hitchcock uses a very imaginative variation on this idea. Jones, by order of the ship's captain who rescued his party from the sea, is prohibited reporting the story. Jones hides a telephone handset behind a statue. Hitchcock slowly dollies in until it looks like the statue itself is speaking into the telephone.



Spellbound [1945] (38:29)

In *Spellbound* [1945], both we and John Ballantyne must pay very careful attention to what psychiatrist Constance is saying. Between them is a statue looking directly at her. Notice the three heads form an almost straight line.



Spellbound [1945] (1:42:47)

And later in the same film when John is overwhelmed by the return of the memory of him accidentally killing his younger brother, the similarity of the pose of the statue in the foreground and Constance leaning against the fireplace is unmistakable. Hitchcock will use a device remarkably similar to this toward the end of *North by Northwest*.



Notorious [1946] (27:29)

Hitchcock uses a simpler version of this device in *Notorious* [1946]. When Devlin's boss tells him he must get going and explain their spy mission to Alicia, there is a statue of the Greco-Roman god Mercury in the background – Mercury being the god of communication.



Notorious [1946] (51:59)

Later in the same film, one of the spymasters deprecates Alicia calling her, “That kind of woman.” When Devlin, now in love with Alicia, objects but is helpless to interfere, Hitchcock gives us a view of two men looking at Devlin and a very dark statue of a man with no arms – a good symbol of the darkness Devlin feels and the helplessness of his position.



Strangers on a Train [1951] (46:34)

Hitchcock uses Mercury again as a symbol of communication in a slightly more obvious way in *Strangers on a Train* [1951] when the statue appears between Guy and Ann as he is trying to explain his situation to her.



Dressed to Kill [1980] (11:22) – Brian de Palma

Brian dePalma quotes the scene in his *Dressed to Kill* [1980].



The Wrong Man [1956] (10:15)

In a working-class home we would not expect to see sculptures in the background. In *The Wrong Man* [1956], Hitchcock cleverly solves this problem by taking a pair of children's toys and overlapping them from the point of view of the camera. Manny is burdened by his current and future debts. In the foreground is a toy horseman with a globe behind him positioned as if to sit on his shoulder, reminding us of a mounted Atlas (or, *The Wrong Man* being one of Hitchcock's most religious films, this can refer to St. Christopher's burden since Manny's middle name is Christopher).



Psycho [1960] (1:35:35)

In *Psycho* [1960], the statue of a black putto (the likes of which I have seen nowhere else) seems to warn Lila Crane against exploring the Bates house further. It is posed as if almost talking to her.

63. THORNHILL MEETS TOWNSEND



North by Northwest [1959] (37:51)

Responding to his page at the United Nations, Lester Townsend arrives, but it is not who Thornhill expects. In a typical Hitchcockian reverse irony, while Roger is trying to deny the Kaplan persona, he is trying to fit the Vandamm persona onto Townsend.

Roger asks Townsend a series of questions – the house, the driveway, the wife. When Roger asks about “all those people” living at his mansion, Townsend replies that only the gardener and his wife are there. Apparently as part of Vandamm’s spy apparatus, two of his agents infiltrated the house of a United Nations official by posing as a gardener and a maid. Once again Cold War paranoia rears its ugly head.

Thornhill pulls the photograph he picked up in Kaplan’s hotel room out of his pocket and shows it to Townsend. At this point the film gets extraordinarily complex and we will have to look at several events at the same time.

Let us first look at what is happening *behind* Thornhill and Townsend. A photographer in a tan suit is using a flash to make pictures of some dignitaries. Under ordinary circumstances this would simply be some meaningless

activity in the background, visual noise to fill the frame. However, Hitchcock rarely puts “just noise” in the background.

Several times in *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock reverses the normal figure-ground, foreground-background relationship in terms of activity. Normally we pay little attention to the background; the activity we notice is in the foreground. Hitchcock did this before in the Plaza Hotel Oak Room when we (and Thornhill) didn't notice the bellboy trying to deliver a telegram in the background. Here again, that United Nations photographer in the background will soon become a pivotal figure in the story.



North by Northwest [1959] (38:16)

In the foreground, Townsend looks at Thornhill's photograph and his face fills with what seems to be surprise. We are fooled into thinking his surprised look is the result of seeing the photograph Roger has just shown him. A moment or two later, we find the real source of the grotesque surprise painting his face is a knife in his back. The idea of seeing something change its meaning from moment to moment is an idea Hitchcock played with before, but never with such sophistication.

The change of meaning of Townsend's expression is a manifestation of Hitchcock's belief in the instability and ultimate unknowability of anything human, whether a sound or a facial expression. In his world, we are warned to

accept nothing at face value, never to jump to conclusions, and, never to trust certainty in any guise.

In the past, Hitchcock usually presented these transitions of meaning with sound – a far simpler task. In the 1937 *Young and Innocent*, for instance, two girls discover a body on the beach and their screams blend into the cries of seagulls. Three years later, in *The 39 Steps* [1935] a charwoman discovers a body in an apartment and her scream blends into the shriek of a train whistle as we visually cut from one scene to the other. In both cases, the visual transition is abrupt, but the two scenes blend into one continuum through the use of sound. In *The 39 Steps*, we do not know if we hear the train whistle early, while the woman is screaming or whether the scream extends into the image of the train. By the time of *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock gives us a more complex realization of this idea: he takes a sound device and turns it into a purely visual one.



To Catch a Thief [1955] (10:46)

Hitchcock often uses visual/aural relationships. For instance, in *To Catch a Thief* [1955], John Robie surprises an old friend from the French resistance, now working as a waiter. The bottle of champagne he is holding opens with a loud pop aurally reinforcing the man's surprise.

A more serious version is found in *Strangers on a Train* [1951]. Just as the deranged Bruno says to innocent Guy, "I'd do anything for you," the train

they are riding on blows its horn – an obvious warning to Guy to be careful of Bruno. In a matter of minutes Bruno is off killing Guy’s wife for which Guy is blamed.

As might be expected, Hitchcock’s tropes have been picked up by other filmmakers (but never the visual version). For instance, horror schlockmeister William Castle begins his 1944 *film noir Betrayed (When Strangers Marry)* with nod to *The 39 Steps* [1935]: when a hotel cleaning woman discovers a body, her scream blends into a train whistle. And in Kurt Neumann’s *The Fly* [1958], when a watchman discovers the scientist’s head crushed in a hydraulic press, his scream turns into a telephone call to Vincent Price. By 1969, this device began popping up everywhere: in *The Thomas Crown Affair* of 1968, a laugh blends into the roar of a dune buggy. In 1970, Chuck Jones of Looney Tunes fame snatched this idea for comic effect. In the pun-filled *The Phantom Tollbooth* [1970], the sad and imprisoned “witch” blows her nose as we hear the trumpets of a royal feast.

This device also shows up in the most unexpected places. Perhaps the strangest is *Pan-Americana* [1945], a film intended as part of our war effort to establish good will in South and Central America so the Nazis (and later the Communists) couldn’t establish a foothold. In this film, we follow a love triangle that tours twenty countries, each with their songs, music, and dancing. At one point, the woman writer slaps a fresh photographer and a train whistle turns into a wolf whistle.

Now back to the United Nations, where everything now moves very quickly. We see the thug run. Townsend pitches forward into Thornhill’s arms. The camera pulls back from an intimate close-up of the two men to include the rest of the room and the people reacting to what they see. And what they see is Thornhill with his hand on a knife in Townsend’s back! A man shouts, “Look!” and there follows a series of short shots of people rising or leaning to see what has happened, each carefully photographed and composed. Placing a capstone on Thornhill’s guilt, the background photographer turns and takes a picture of Roger holding the bloody knife.



North by Northwest [1959] (38:30)

What is further interesting in the background activity is that the photographer is white and the diplomats he is photographing are Oriental and Black. In 1959, a filmic representation of a white man showing deference to (presumably) Africans, even though they are diplomats associated with the United Nations, would be very unusual.

Again, Hitchcock's fascination with doubles comes to the fore – this time through two photographs. The first is the photograph Thornhill shows Townsend containing some sort of truth Townsend seems to recognize. His expression of recognition turns to surprise before it turns to shock at being knifed in the back. Immediately, however, this truth-containing photograph is transformed into a (second) photograph that lies – Thornhill is photographed holding the knife over Townsend's body.

Realizing that the circumstantial evidence against him is overwhelming, Roger runs for his life.

With the photographing of Roger, knife in hand and undeniably guilty of a crime he did not commit, Hitchcock introduces one of his favorite themes: the “double chase.” The man who is doing the *chasing* is, at the same time, *being* chased. We have seen this previously in *The Lodger* [1927], *The*

39 Steps [1935], *Young and Innocent* [1937], *Saboteur* [1942], and in the last part of *Frenzy* [1972] (and in reverse in *Jamaica Inn* [1939]).

The United Nations is (or was in 1959) the ultimate symbol of authority, justice, stability, and peaceful world concourse. Yet even here in Hitchcock's vision of the world we find spies and murderers. Remember that while Thornhill had to go to the front desk to ask directions, Vandamm's agent knew exactly where to go. Worse still, it is the site of a horribly ironic injustice: an innocent man is accused of murder. The media, there to report perhaps on a peace conference, ironically turn their cameras on what appears at first glance to be a murder and thus pillory the wrong man. To Hitchcock, the very name, "United Nations," is an irony. What we have seen happen in the lobby is probably, according to the film, going on in almost every other room in the building – backstabbing, assassination, false documentation, etc. – a dis-United Nations.



Saboteur [1942] (1:46:06)

Hitchcock's distrust of the institutions in which we as a culture have so heavily invested ourselves is just beginning: in addition to a murder at the

United Nations, we have a nest of spies sitting atop George Washington's head, and so on. We have seen this before – the Statue of Liberty in *Saboteur* [1942]; the British Museum in *Blackmail* [1929], the Royal Albert Hall in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1934]; and we will see it again in the Golden Gate Bridge and the Mission San Juan Batista in *Vertigo* [1958].

However, Hitchcock's distrust extends much further. He distrusts not only the extraordinary, but also the ordinary: A middle-class house in the middle of the city is the place of kidnapping and torture in *Family Plot* [1976], the symphony orchestra in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1956], a vaudeville in *The 39 Steps* [1935], a bland motel in *Psycho* [1960], a carnival in *Strangers on a Train*, [1951] a sleepy middle-class town in *Shadow of a Doubt* [1943], a dance orchestra merrily playing for its patrons in *Young and Innocent* [1937], a peaceful sea-side community in *The Birds* [1963]. Now we must prepare ourselves for a middle-American cornfield that will be the locus of a murderous attack. And, if one cannot make an innocent gesture in a hotel bar without becoming the victim of a murderous plot, what kind of a world do we live in?



North by Northwest [1959] (38:51)

The final shot of this sequence is from atop the United Nations building downward. Roger runs to a waiting cab from the United Nations building – an ant scurrying to avoid a predator.



Vertigo [1958] (1:20:34)

This image of the hero as a speck escaping the scene of a crime is repeated in *Vertigo* [1958] when Scottie runs away from the Mission San Juan Batista church after “Madeleine’s” death.

64. WASHINGTON, D.C.



North by Northwest [1959] (38:57)

Hitchcock begins the third act of *North by Northwest* with a visual parallel to the way the film began. The concluding down-shot of the glass-and-steel architecture of the United Nations building echoes the grid work of windows in the glass-and-steel office building that opened the film. And just as we saw traffic reflected in that Manhattan office building, so now we see traffic and the capitol dome reflected in a polished metal sign in Washington, D.C. (a beautiful view from an impossible camera position).

The difference in symbolism between the glass and steel in which Thornhill's office is housed and the shiny metal behind which the paternalistic and manipulative Professor is housed is the difference between transparency and opacity, for we now find ourselves at the home of *our* spies, the "United States Intelligence Agency." The relation between the two is that they both call a lie, "an expedient exaggeration."

In 1959, in the midst of the Cold War, Hitchcock apparently did not think "United States Intelligence Agency" was an oxymoron. However, he did use the left edge of the frame to crop the words "United" and "Intelligence" as if to imply both disunity and incomplete intelligence.



Blackmail [1929] (05:34)

Hitchcock uses an almost identical image in his first sound film in 1930, *Blackmail* [1929] where “New Scotland Yard” is introduced with a shiny metal plate reflecting, like a fun house mirror, distorted reflections of passing pedestrians.



Spellbound [1945] (49:28)

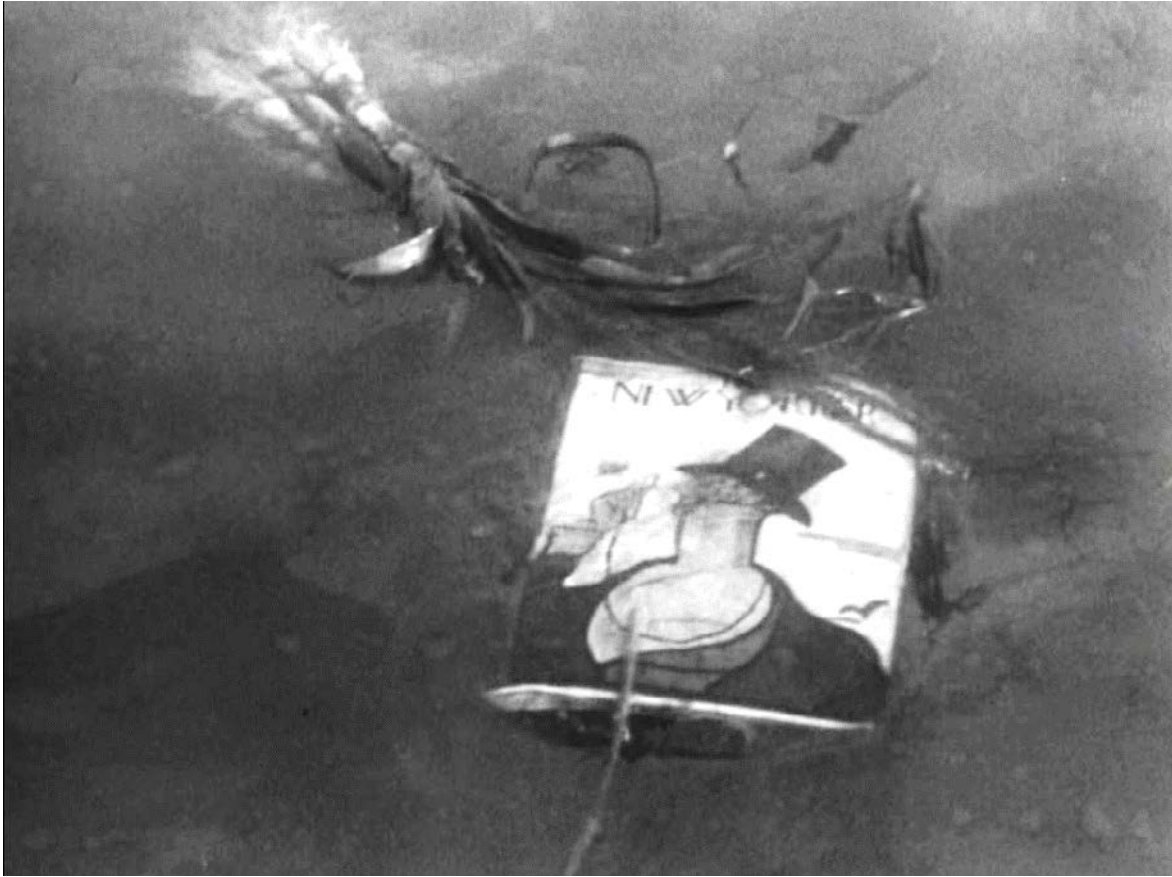
And again, in *Spellbound* [1945] with a sign for the “Empire State Hotel” reflecting traffic and pedestrians.



North by Northwest [1959] (38:59)

Like the Madison Avenue office building at the beginning of the film that slowly fades to reveal traffic, now the Washington, D.C. polished brass sign fades into a newspaper with Thornhill's United Nations picture large beneath a threatening headline, "Diplomat Slain at U. N. – Assassin Eludes Police Efforts."

As one of the spies reads the newspaper article summarizing what happened in the UN building, we realize that newspapers, in Hitchcock's world, are not the best sources of the truth. Indeed, newspapers seem to collude with the dark forces persecuting the innocent Thornhill.



Lifeboat [1944] (01:53)

This distrust of publishing extends to magazines (newspapers were discussed above). Hitchcock makes a very pointed and very funny visual pun in *Lifeboat* [1944] where, at the beginning of the film, we see the various detritus of the ship's sinking float by . . . including a New Yorker magazine topped with several onions. The cover, with a drawing of dandy Eustace Tilley peering at a butterfly through a monocle, created by Rea Irvin which appeared on the first cover of the magazine and in every anniversary issue, that closest to February 21. Clearly, the film is saying that the world of war has no place for dandies or the literary concerns of a New Yorker-type magazine.



North by Northwest [1959] (39:27)

Inside the spy agency, a meeting is taking place. Hitchcock uses an interesting trick to draw us into participating in the meeting that, essentially, signs Thornhill's death warrant. There are five people attending the meeting – three men, a woman, and their leader, The Professor – but six places have been set around the table. As the meeting begins, the camera slowly moves from a close-up of the newspaper, around the table to settle just behind the sixth and empty seat. This now becomes our seat. And, since we are sitting there, we are as guilty of the inhumanity and cruelty taking place as are these government agents. At the end of the sequence, the camera rises and reveals that a writing pad and some papers were prepared for us. Our natural identification with Thornhill as the long-suffering hero does not satisfy Hitchcock; he also wants us to become one of the heartless government agents who will shortly abandon Thornhill to his fate.



Notorious [1946] (22:13)

Hitchcock uses an almost identical device in *Notorious* [1946], but with a significant difference. At the end of the conference table, where the camera settles after retreating down the table to the empty spot, there is no chair waiting for us as there is in *North by Northwest*. Again, we see Hitchcock repeating a device while improving on it.

As the men around the table mutter in amazement at Thornhill's fate, the only woman in the group, Mrs. Finley, asks if anyone knows Thornhill. She is the only sympathetic and caring character at the meeting and, interestingly, the only one who has a name. In this person, Hitchcock introduces the idea of the caring feminine and, while this woman physically resembles Thornhill's mother, her attitude is radically different. The introduction of the symbolic "caring woman," prepares us for the introduction of Eve Kendall in a few minutes.

As the discussion continues, we are shocked to learn the George Kaplan does not exist! In *Vertigo* [1958], Scottie searches for a woman who not only does not exist, but never existed. So, Hitchcock has misdirected all

along in *North by Northwest* with incomplete or incorrect information (this is an improvement on the critically reviled “lying flashback” in *Stage Fright* [1950]). This forces us to rethink and reevaluate what we have just seen, perhaps looking for flaws or hints as to the truth. At the same time, we must begin to assemble a new story, or at least the old story with a new twist. In this way, Hitchcock keeps the story fresh and prevents our participation in it from flagging.

The Professor’s revelation about Kaplan’s non-existence is the first time the audience is in possession of knowledge greater than Thornhill’s. We now realize Roger’s search must eventually be futile. This gives us an opportunity to watch Roger from two points of view. First, from our position of superior knowledge we can watch Roger flail around looking for Kaplan. Second, knowing that finding Kaplan is clearly not what the film is about, we can watch for the real core of the film: the psychological subtext.

The major psychological implication of the film is that Thornhill is searching for a man who does not exist. Furthermore, as the film progressed, Thornhill slowly took over the George Kaplan persona, answering his phone in the hotel, trying on his clothes, paging Townsend at the United Nations using Kaplan’s name, and so on. This is the heart of the film: Thornhill is becoming a man who does not exist. Thornhill does not exist! Thornhill’s real project is not to find Kaplan, but to find himself. (George Kaplan is an interesting name; George is almost an anagram of Roger further tying the two together.)

The hunted spy, Kaplan, is a figment of the government’s imagination. We see here the ultimate irony of lost identity: a nameless Professor invents a name for someone who does not exist.

“The Professor” is the head of this governmental cabal of coldness (given the Cold War Era of the film, he may have been modeled after Allen Dulles, the head of the CIA or his brother, the Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles). In parallel to Kaplan, the spy who does not exist, we have the Professor who is not a professor. Association with this despicable man would give any academic a bad name. Hitchcock used the title twice before. In *The 39 Steps* [1935] “The Professor” was the leader of the spy ring bent on getting stolen military secrets out of England. Further, in *Sabotage* [1936], the maker of the bombs intended to cause terror London is also named “The Professor.”

Thus, Hitchcock's negative view of authority figures is not restricted to the police and judges but extends into the academic world as well.

During the Washington, D.C. conference, we soon discover Thornhill himself may not exist for very much longer because of the coldness of the Professor and his cohorts. Rather than being morally responsible for the consequence of their actions, they are shockingly callous: they will do nothing to help Thornhill. At the end of this conference, Mrs. Finley expresses some concern when she says, "Good-bye, Mr. Thornhill – wherever you are."



Secret Agent [1936] (30:47)

The sentiment that, in the pursuit of spies, the government is more than willing to sacrifice the innocent, appears earlier in the 1936 *Secret Agent*. Caypor, an innocent and charming man, is mistaken for a spy and assassinated. In typical Hitchcockian fashion, he is brought to the attention of his killers while playing a game of chance – it is this chance encounter that seals his doom. In a further irony, it is lost button that is the evidence against him; a button that usually holds things together now proves his undoing.



North by Northwest [1959] (40:24)

During the Washington, D.C. meeting, we see the Capitol building outside and old books lining the shelves inside. It is absurd to have antique, leather-bound volumes in the conference room of a Washington D.C. spymaster. Perhaps this is to justify their leader's name, "Professor." On the other hand, we saw similar books in Vandamm's library. These books visually connect two men, each at opposite poles of the political spectrum, but both equally cavalier in their unfeeling manipulation and attempted murder of an innocent man – one by intent, one by neglect. Seemingly the only difference between the two is that one is a handsome slime ball while the other is a fussy old man.



The Shining [1980] (05:11) – Stanley Kubrick



The Shining [1980] (1:33:23) – Stanley Kubrick

Stanley Kubrick may have borrowed the idea of symbolic books in his 1980 horror masterpiece, *The Shining*. At the beginning of the film, we see Wendy in her dumpy apartment in Boulder. Behind her is a bookshelf, the volumes lay slanting, like so many fallen dominoes. Since Jack is a writer, what better symbol to represent a writer than books? The disarray telegraphs well in advance his mental state. Later, when the family moves into the Outlook Hotel, there is a bookcase with three shelves of similarly slanting books – and on each shelf the books slant in different directions, again symbolic of Jack's upcoming mental breakdown. Kubrick, like Hitchcock, connects not only physical locations but psychological states by repeating a metaphor, in this case, books.



North by Northwest [1959] (40:46)

In a now not unexpected comment on the nature of government, Hitchcock gives us a truly grisly scene. While one of the Professor's underlings says, "We can't sit back calmly and see who kills him first," when indeed that is exactly what they intend to do. We see the Capitol Dome in the background, representing the government, while the Professor turns his back on us . . . and on Thornhill. And since we haven't been symbolically reminded of Roger's quest for a while, there is a red car in the rear-projected background.



Strangers on a Train [1951] (44:23)

Hitchcock uses this connection between the government and evil in *Strangers on a Train* [1951]. Bruno's threatening phone call to Guy is visually almost identical to the image in *North by Northwest*.



North by Northwest [1959] (41:48)

Once again, Hitchcock ends this sequence with a rising camera movement to a high angle shot. We have seen this before and associated it with impending death. Death is implied again as Mrs. Finley says, “Goodbye, Mr. Thornhill . . . wherever you are.”

65. GRAND CENTRAL STATION



North by Northwest [1959] (41:55)

After this grisly conference where Thornhill's possible death is dubbed "good fortune," we return to Roger's escape from New York City. The scene at the Washington spy headquarters ended with a camera that slowly rose to look down on the conference room table with the people around it. Hitchcock now makes an almost mirror image camera movement in cavernous Grand Central Station by slowly lowering the camera into the crowd.

What is remarkable in this scene is that directly under a gigantic American flag is a porter with a red cap. It is here, almost halfway through the film, that Hitchcock finally gives some indication of the meaning of the way he is using the color red elaborating the idea of psychological healing: Thornhill's quest, among other things, is an American venture. And just in case we've forgotten Roger is following red objects, these actors costumed as red caps will appear several times in Grand Central Station, each time leading Roger on.

In the midst of the milling throng on the vast floor of Grand Central Station, two uniformed police are conferring – obviously hunting for the

now-famous murderer Thornhill. Two plainclothes police join them. After some gesticulating, they go off in four different directions pursuing their search. To demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the police, Hitchcock simply pans the camera to the right to show us Roger calmly sitting in the phone booth making a call.

Still suffering from a bad case of apron strings, Roger calls his mother. He now begins to realize her advice is ludicrous. Perhaps because she is so out of touch with reality, so much an air-head, she suggests he escape New York by airplane . . . and, if cornered, jump off! (The airplane reference and the danger Thornhill associates with it presage the later encounter with the crop-dusting plane and still later the threat to Eve.) He sensibly prefers the groundedness of the train.



North by Northwest [1959] (42:13)

Here Roger seems imprisoned in the phone booth in the frustration of not being able to communicate with his mother. He hangs up in disgust and that, mercifully, is the last we hear of mother!



Blackmail [1929] (52:01)

Hitchcock uses phone booths symbolically, more for miscommunication than communication. This starts surprisingly early. In *Blackmail* [1929], when Alice and her policeman boyfriend duck into a telephone booth, not to make a phone call, but to have a “conversation” about her killing her attacker. In his typical telephone = miscommunication manner, Hitchcock has Alice speak not a word to the accusations.



Number Seventeen [1932] (48:59)

A more successful call is made in 1932, in *Number Seventeen*. Hero Ben discovers the plot but misses the train carrying the criminals to their escape and calls for help. However, we hear nothing of his call. We see only his animated gestures.



The Man Who Knew Too Much [1956] (54:43)

Hitchcock uses a strikingly similar image in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1956]. At the airport, a villain calls her boss announcing that Dr. & Mrs. McKenna have arrived. And, in a device Hitchcock will later use in *North by Northwest*, because of the airport noise, we cannot hear what she is saying.



The Birds [1963] (1:26:38)

Hitchcock combines breakdown in communication and the claustrophobia of phone booths even more powerfully in *The Birds* [1963] when Melanie runs into a phone booth to call for help and for protection from the attacking birds only to find herself trapped.

Thornhill's phone call completed, he leaves the phone booth and walks to the ticket window. In a fit of paranoia, he puts on dark glasses . . . drawing more attention to him.



North by Northwest [1959] (43:15)

Just to remind us of the color symbolism Hitchcock established previously, an out-of-focus red cap moves across the screen in the same direction as Thornhill.

Then Hitchcock reiterates another favorite theme: two uniformed police look around dumbly not suspecting the man they hunt is only a yard or two away. A variation of this scene will be repeated in Chicago when Roger, dressed as a red cap, will make his way through a phalanx of police.

Hitchcock's attention to detail is demonstrated by an incident that occurred during the filming of this scene. This sequence is filmed with the camera mounted on a moveable crane to give a sense of motion through and above the crowd. These crane shots in Grand Central Station demonstrate

Hitchcock detailed technical knowledge. For the shot, he requested a Chapman crane. MGM, not owning a Chapman, offered him an “equivalent” device. At the mention of the other manufacturer, Hitchcock pointed out to the thrifty studio executive that the substitute crane would not perform properly to get the exact effect Hitchcock required. Impressed, MGM rented a Chapman from competitor Paramount with full confidence that Hitchcock knew *exactly* what he was doing even down to the specifications of a piece of equipment.



North by Northwest [1959] (44:31)

After dealing with a ticket seller who alerts the police to his presence, Thornhill heads for the train without a ticket . . . and encounters another red hat.



Number Seventeen [1932] 46:35

Trains, perhaps because of his English background, have always fascinated Hitchcock. His first use of a train as a symbol of moving inexorably into one's destiny is in the satirical thriller *Number Seventeen* in 1932.



Strangers on a Train [1951] (01:58)

The most obvious example of Hitchcock's interest in trains as symbols is *Strangers on a Train* [1951] where trains and cars are contrasted throughout. Trains represent movement restricted to a single track or, at best, a limited number of choices. Trains are stand-ins for the hand of fate that severely restricts a man's destiny. Cars, by contrast, are free to move wherever they wish.

In *North by Northwest*, the contrast between trains and airplanes is still stronger. Planes have even more freedom than cars, being able to move in three rather than two dimensions. In *Strangers on a Train* [1951] the destiny of the train tracks lead the hero to meet his Shadow figure who will commit the murder he secretly desires. The train in *Strangers on a Train* leaves the station and takes several turns through a maze of tracks. In *North by Northwest* there are no turns, no choices. Here the train tracks of destiny will lead Roger Thornhill directly to meet his feminine rescuing figure, the one who can activate his internal feminine, and the one who will lead him to a more complete and whole self.

The train also represents and reflects Roger's constant motion. In airplanes we are isolated, we sit, and we do not really feel like we are moving; trains, by contrast, are full of constant visual, aural, and visceral reminders of motion. When Roger sits down to eat a meal in seeming peace, outside the countryside whizzes by. When he necks with Eve standing up, the rocking of the train as it rushes to Chicago and Prairie Stop causes Eve and Roger to roll around, reversing positions and perhaps roles.

66. MEETING ON THE TRAIN



North by Northwest [1959] (45:08)

With the police alerted by the ticket seller, Thornhill heads for the Twentieth Century Limited to Chicago without a ticket. He runs down the red carpet and gets on the train, much like stealing the cabs, but now with the police and the trainman in pursuit. This carpet was part of the famous treatment New York Central Railroad offered its upper class and business travelers. This is the origin of the term, “getting the red-carpet treatment.”

Roger seemingly gets on a random train car. Eve gets on the right behind him. What remains unexplained is how and why she is there. We can only conclude he has been followed! The Professor didn’t send her, for the Professor explains to Thornhill later in Chicago he only interferes when it becomes necessary and we just saw Thornhill abandoned to his fate in the Washington D.C. meeting. Thus, it could only be Vandamm. Has Vandamm been following Thornhill all along? After all, his henchmen did follow him to the United Nations. Perhaps they have been following him ever since.



North by Northwest [1959] (45:12)

In a train hallway so narrow two people can barely pass (surely Hitchcock had it specially built), Thornhill literally bumps into the enticing and mysterious Eve Kendall. They do a little dance, he trying to get past her and she trying to delay him. Seeing the police, he ducks into a compartment. She kindly sends the police in the wrong direction – her first act of protection.



North by Northwest [1959] (45:26)

Yet there is a bit of subterfuge here. Her attempts to delay him bring him closer to capture by the police. Moments later, she misdirects the police to protect him. She cleverly sets up a situation, so he becomes indebted to her making later contact with him easier. Clever spy craft.

It is apt to introduce Eve at the end of the long, narrow tunnel-like passage of the railroad car – another birth image. Roger has difficulty in getting around her is symbolic of Roger's upcoming relation with Eve – she will be someone he cannot easily bypass.

At this point, Eve replaces mother in the role of the feminine in Roger's life – physically and psychologically. And she certainly is a more appropriate feminine figure than that provided by Roger's mother. With the absolute disappearance of mother and the almost simultaneous appearance of Eve, there seems to be a relation between the two, as if one directly replaced the other, as if mother is replaced (more appropriately) by lover. Even though, at this point, Eve is manipulating Roger no less than did his mother.

In his later films Hitchcock made the association between lover and mother more obvious. In *Vertigo* [1958], Midge, desperately and hopelessly in love with Scottie, visits him in a mental hospital where he suffers from depression. She says, "You're not lost; mother is here." This burgeoning incestuous interaction is quickly broken up when a nurse enters the room to announce that the visit is over. Apparently, Roger's ability to substitute a lover for a mother will lead to his healing, while Scottie's inability leads to his downfall.

Eve is by far the most unexpectedly complex character in the film. She never seems to be the same person in two consecutive scenes. With Eve, we must penetrate multiple layers of deceit and falseness to understand who she really is both at the level of the story and at the level of symbology.

It is much later that we discover Eve's core, as surprising as it is positive. In this aspect, as we shall be shown later, Eve Kendall is Roger Thornhill's future. All the decisions he must make – between cynicism and authenticity, between an easy life as one of the crowd and an active life caring about others, whether to serve society or serve one's self – she has already made. She is spy and counterspy, she is good, and she is evil, but most important of all, she is authentic and aware of her own identity.

Hitchcock introduces the second thread of the story at the beginning of Roger's physical journey. At the symbolic story-telling level, the beginning of a journey is the appropriate place for the mythological hero to gather about him those who will help him on his journey. Hitchcock introduces Eve, the helper, the lover, the accomplice, the traitor, the spy . . . and the shapeshifter. This is a common device in myth telling – Jason gathering the Argonauts, Robin Hood gathering the Merry Men, Snow White gathering the Seven Dwarfs, and so on.

Roger thanks Eve. This is the first time in the film he thanks anyone! He tries to explain the situation, to convince her all is well – seven parking tickets. Later he will learn that Eve, both at the mundane level and the symbolic level, can see through his lies.

Hitchcock often has his protagonist try to convince a woman of his innocence. From the mid-1930s, in *The 39 Steps* [1935], Hannay must convince Caroline of his innocence all the way to the 1970s in a replay of the situation in *Frenzy* [1972] where Bob must convince Babs of his. Thornhill's inability to convince his mother is significant – it delays his moral redemption until he meets a woman who will believe him and believe in him.

With the introduction of Eve, Hitchcock now proceeds in his customary manner to tell us two stories at the same time: the adventure and the love affair. Unlike most filmmakers, Hitchcock integrates the two stories, the solution to one leads to the solution to the other. Specifically, Roger finding his true identity leads to the successful relationship with Eve and vice versa. (Vandamm's stolen secrets, which Hitchcock lovingly calls a "McGuffin," have nothing to do with either story and are simply an armature about which Hitchcock sculpts his tale.)



The 39 Steps [1935] (57:59)

The tightness of the integration of the two plot lines in *North by Northwest* is unusual even for Hitchcock. In *The 39 Steps* [1935], for example, the relationship between Hannay and Caroline has little or nothing to do with the uncovering of the network of spies. Their relationship, charming as it might be, grows from the relatively clumsy and obvious device of having them handcuffed together for the better part of the film. (And the McGuffin, what Mr. Memory remembers, has, of course, nothing to do with anything.)



Dial M for Murder [1954] (04:05)

From the first moment we see her, Eve's sophistication contrasts sharply the Roger's boyish impulsiveness. This is common for Hitchcock's couples. We see the sophisticated, mature, and intelligent woman linked with a brash, immature, and impulsive man many times: *The 39 Steps* [1935], *Sabotage* [1936], *Notorious* [1946], *Dial M for Murder* [1954], and *Foreign Correspondent* [1940].



Foreign Correspondent [1940] (48:16)

67. HITCHCOCK & BLONDES



North by Northwest [1959] (45:20)

Eva Marie Saint is one of a long series of icy blondes Hitchcock seems to have been fascinated with – slightly over 50% of his female central characters are blonde. Many writers have commented on this. Grace Kelly seems to have been Hitchcock's ideal for he used her in three films: *To Catch a Thief* [1955], *Rear Window* [1954], and *Dial M for Murder* [1954].



The Birds [1963] (14:50)

Having lost her to Prince Rainier, Hitchcock, according to theory, then proceeded to manufacture replacements in Kim Novak in *Vertigo* [1958] and ‘Tippi’ Hedren in *The Birds* [1963] and *Marnie* [1964]. (No blondes in *The Trouble with Harry* [1955]).



On the Waterfront [1954] (16:08) – Elia Kazan

Eva Marie Saint fits nicely into this scheme. Hitchcock's power as a Svengali can be sensed in her transformation from her previous film and persona: she played Marlon Brando's mousy girlfriend in *On the Waterfront* [1954]. (Similarly, Hitchcock "discovered" Shirley MacLaine giving her her first film role in *The Trouble with Harry* [1955].)



The Pleasure Garden [1925] (03:26)

What most writers on Hitchcock seem to have missed is that Hitchcock's fascination with blondes goes back much further than Grace Kelly. In fact, his first film as director in 1925, *The Pleasure Garden*, features a very blonde wigged Virginia Valli.



The Lodger [1927] (05:55)

In the 1927 silent, *The Lodger*, Hitchcock's first thriller, the serial killer is obsessed with blondes and, needless to say, the heroine (June Tripp) is blonde. The film begins with a blonde screaming to the title card, "To Night Golden Curls." To get the "halo" effect of the blonde hair, Hitchcock had the actress recline on a sheet of glass that was then lit from underneath and photographed from above.



The Manxman [1929] (13:30)

In *The Manxman* [1929], blonde Anny Ondra plays heroine Kate. In 1931, he cast blonde Joan Barry as the female lead in *Rich and Strange*; in 1934 he cast blonde Edna Best in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*.

However, Hitchcock was not alone in his interest in blonde heroines: the 1931 German film, *Mädchen in Uniform* has a blonde heroine, Manuela, prominently featured. There is no proof Hitchcock saw this film, but it seems likely as he was a member of a London film study group that watched many foreign films and apparently met several times a week. And, perhaps more importantly, Hitchcock started his film career in Germany.



The Lodger [1927] (53:03)

His German Expressionist training can be seen, not only in the *Lodger*'s [1927] compositions and heavy shadows (ignoring, for the moment, the thematic aspects of this art movement), but also in the title cards. His directorial debut, *The Pleasure Garden* [1925], was filmed almost entirely in Munich. His German experiences, beginning in the 1920s, appear again in *The Birds* [1963] where, for the sound track, he uses a traultonium which he first heard on the radio while living in Berlin. In an interview, Hitchcock states he was in Germany in 1924 during the making of F. W. Murnau's *The Last Laugh* that, famously, employs a subjective camera – something that later became a Hitchcock trademark. Perhaps his exposure to German Expressionism (he served as art director to Murnau) is where his fascination with abnormal psychology, damaged relations, and perhaps blondes began.



Rich and Strange [1931] (54:36)

It is feasible that part of Hitchcock's fascination with blondes can be traced to the idea that the struggle between good and evil can be symbolized by light versus dark. In the domestic comedy/drama *Rich and Strange* [1931], the good woman is blonde while the bad woman is brunette. However, it must also be entertained that Hitchcock's choice of hair color may have been strictly practical: blondes stand out nicely against dark backgrounds.



Marnie [1964] (30:58)

The symbolic use of hair color continues in *Marnie* [1964]. Marnie begins with dark hair, then dyes it blonde, and then several other colors. On their first meeting, Mark mentions his rare and strange pet, a jaguarundi – he keeps a formal portrait of the snarling beast next to his desk. The jaguarundi is known for its changes in hair color, changing from brownish-gray to red to chestnut – clearly a reference to Marnie. That Mark says he trained her “to trust me . . . that’s a lot for a jaguarundi,” makes the reference to Marnie’s future psychological journey clear.



The Lodger [1927] (20:01)

While many of Hitchcock's heroines are blondes, very few are "dumb blondes." In *The Lodger* [1927], for instance, Daisy beats the lodger at a game of chess. Hitchcock positions the camera so the chess board is symmetrically placed between them. Behind them, equally symmetrical, is a fireplace with a roaring fire. Reading the symbolism, we learn there is not only a respect of intellect (the chess game) between them, but also a lot of passion (the fire). In a later shot, the curved rim of the fireplace makes a graphical connection between their hearts.

Another interesting aspect of "Hitchcock's blondes" is many of them are left-handed: Eva Marie Saint, Kim Novak, Barbara Harris, and Shirley MacLaine.

68. THE DINING CAR



North by Northwest [1959] (45:54)

With Thornhill ensconced in a bathroom, the train begins to move. Hitchcock pans his camera from a slightly tilted exterior view in which we see the train moving down the tracks next to the Hudson riverbank to an interior view. This exterior view from the train is repeated several times and is used for specific symbolic meanings.

The train rides north along the berm of the Hudson River. Just as Thornhill is riding on a knife-edge between life and death, between identity and anonymity, so the train materializes these in its symbolic journey on a boundary between land and water, between masculine and feminine values, between the conscious and the unconscious.

Note that this is the second time in the film Hitchcock tilts his camera (the first was at the return to the Townsend mansion) indicating something or someone is “not on the level.” Furthermore, we see a sunset, the end of the day; the period of consciousness is waning. What is coming is night, the period of dreams and thus the unconscious. And of course, it is within the world of the unconscious that all psychic work is done.

As the conductor and his assistant collect the passengers' tickets, Thornhill hides in a toilet. Another absurdity occurs here: Roger comes out of the toilet just as the two silent men pass. How did he know when they were gone, and it was safe to come out? Again, these absurdities are forgiven because they have little or nothing to do with the story the film is telling. Hitchcock seems to pay great attention to the things that matter to him and summarily ignores the rest.

Sauntering through the train, Roger buries a newspaper in hopes that no one aboard will recognize him from the false "news" it contains.



North by Northwest [1959] (46:55)

Absurdly wearing his dark glasses indoors, Thornhill enters the dining car. He glances at a party of three, two women and a man, eating their meal. And there, almost as the last reminder of his mother, is a red-haired woman.

The maître quickly guides him to the alluring Eve's table. While Eve sips her coffee, Roger orders a drink – a Gibson cocktail. Like almost everything Hitchcock touches, it has symbolic value. A pattern is forming in the various liquors mentioned in the film and how they are used. We began with a martini in the Oak Room bar in New York – gin, a little vermouth, and an olive. At the Townsend mansion, Roger was forced to drink bourbon – a brown drink, dark compared to the clearness of a martini. Bourbon will be associated with evil again in the Rapid City hospital.

Now, on the train to Chicago, he orders a Gibson. A Gibson is identical to a martini except an onion is substituted for an olive (vodka may also be substituted for the gin). I am sure Hitchcock is playing a little game here. Why would Thornhill order a martini in one bar and a Gibson in another unless there is some significance?



North by Northwest [1959] (47:48)

The difference between the drinks is the difference between an olive and an onion. An olive has only one or two thick layers (when it is stuffed), while an onion has multiple thin layers. Roger's personality in New York was fairly simple, composed of only a few thick layers. Now, because of his experiences, and perhaps in his meeting Eve, he is more complex, multi-layered. Furthermore, we are asked to compare the two drinks because the placement of the glass over Roger's center is the same on the train as it was in the Oak Room.

"Well, here we are again," says Roger, to which Eve replies in a seductive and sexy slur, "Yessss." (One can easily imagine that "Yesss" coming from the mouth of a Disneyfied snake in an animated Garden of Eden.) Roger next asks her for advice with the menu. In this very light and seemingly insignificant way, Thornhill puts himself in Eve's hands. (The last time he asked advice of anyone was in the Plaza Hotel asking his mother whether he should answer the phone . . . advice he immediately rejected.) She recommends trout

– a food that comes from under the surface. Water is often a symbol of the unconscious and what Eve is recommending in symbolic language is that he nourish himself with what is available in his unconscious. Accepting her advice, he orders.

During the conversation, we begin to see Thornhill's problems with women. While he is a charmer and a ladies' man, he can achieve no depth of feeling. Even Eve notes this in her comment on his inability to stay married. Perhaps Thornhill only *thinks* he likes women and unconsciously hates them – this would explain his multiple divorces. Perhaps he redirects the animosity he unconsciously feels toward his mother, who kept him in an infantile thrall for all his adult life, toward any convenient female rather than in the very dangerous direction it should really be directed – toward his over-possessive and over-controlling mother.

His relationship with Eve seems curative. With her he faces, perhaps for the first time in his life, a woman who is not virginal, air-headed, subservient, or aloof (like Mother). He can no longer project his mother's image on the woman he falls in lust with – a clear sign of maturation. Withdrawing projections, in this case a negative mother complex, is a very important first step toward psychological adulthood.

Here the step is very tentative. Eve (his current substitute for mother) suggests what he is to eat – trout. Even though she says, disparagingly, it is "trouty," he orders it anyway. Only much later in the film will he be able to nourish himself without the aid of a mother or a mother substitute. (By the way, the fish reference is repeated later when he refers to himself as a sardine when locked in the upper berth of Eve's train compartment.)

69. FOOD & SEX



North by Northwest [1959] (47:26)

In this film Hitchcock seems to “push the envelope” in the representation of sexuality on screen to new heights (or depths). The dinner table conversation drips with sexual innuendo. And some of it passes beyond innuendo as when Eve says, “I never make love on an empty stomach.” To satisfy the censors of the late 1950s, this was over-dubbed to “I never *talk* about love on an empty stomach.”



The Big Sleep [1946] (1:06:30) – Howard Hawks

Eve's aggressively sexual banter is something of a shock, something we do not expect from a film made in 1959. It even elicits a titter or two even from contemporary audiences. The only similar conversation of this ilk in this era is the double entendre laden discussion of "horse racing" (i.e. who's in the saddle and who's coming up from behind, etc.) between Philip Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart) and Vivian Rutledge (Lauren Bacall) in the 1946 *The Big Sleep*.



To Catch a Thief [1955] (33:36)

Before *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock's most outrageous bit of blatant sexuality is in *To Catch a Thief* [1955] when John Robie (also played by Cary Grant) looks down a woman dress and then drops a casino chip into her cleavage. Later, when Frances offer Robie roast chicken during a picnic on a high, romantic cliff overlooking the blue Mediterranean, "Would you like a leg or a breast," she asks in mock innocence.

Hitchcock's filmic connection between sex and food built up slowly. In 1946, the sexual innuendo of food was relatively subtle. In *Notorious* [1946], Devlin is treated to a roast chicken dinner that is an on-screen symbolic substitute to his and Alicia's first overtly sexual encounter. Conversation about cooking occasionally interrupts an epically extended kiss. Food becomes foreplay – "I have a chicken in the icebox and you're eating it."



Rear Window [1954] (30:30)

In 1954, the seductively dressed Lisa in *Rear Window* [1954] shows up with a sumptuous lobster dinner for Jefferies from Club 21 as a prelude to spending the night. Take out has never been the same.



Psycho [1960] (04:04)

The relation between food and sex is developed further in Hitchcock's film after *North by Northwest*, *Psycho* [1960]. Marion and Sam tryst in a "cheap" hotel with a half-eaten sandwich prominent – symbolic of their half-fulfilled relationship. Later, just before the obviously sexually motivated murder, Norman offers Marion a sandwich.



M [1931] (09:00) – Fritz Lang

While in 1959 sexuality was limited to risqué dinner talk, by 1972 and the demise of censorship, Hitchcock felt he could show bare breasts and portray, in a shockingly realistic manner, a rape and murder in *Frenzy* [1972]. Though later in the same film he shows another murder completely symbolically by simply having the camera back down a flight of stairs and onto the street – in many ways reminiscent of the 1931 murder of the little girl symbolized by the simple stopping of a rolling ball in Fritz Lang's brilliant *M*.

Still later, in the 1976 *Family Plot* is similar conversation compares sexual performance to theatrical performance, “this very evening, you’re going to see a standing ovation.”

And, as would a good Freudian, Hitchcock not only relates food and sex but also food and death. Here are a few examples:



Downhill [1927] (10:38)

In *Downhill* [1927], Hitchcock show the silhouette of a couple in a highly erotic dance in the back room of a bakery called the “Ye Olde Bunne Shoppe.” One is not sure if they are dancing, making love, or strangling each other.

In *Blackmail* [1929], Alice uses a bread knife to kill her would-be attacker and during the next morning’s breakfast has sonic hallucinations while trying to use a similar knife to cut the morning’s loaf.

In *Sabotage* [1936], Mrs. Verloc uses a carving knife to serve dinner and later uses the same knife to kill her husband.

Murder by strangulation and poisoning are dinner table conversation in *Shadow of a Doubt* [1943].

In *Notorious* [1946], Alicia's afternoon tea is laced with poison.

The gristliest of all the associations between food and death occurs in *Rope* [1948] where a buffet is served to the parents of a murdered boy now in the chest serving as a dinner table.

Psychotic Bruno in *Strangers on a Train* [1951] asks a judge how it feels to eat his dinner after passing a death sentence on someone.

In a comedic turn in *Rear Window* [1954], Stella discusses the dismemberment of a body while Jefferies is trying to eat his breakfast.

In *To Catch a Thief* [1955], the luncheon conversation between policeman Hughson and suspected thief Robie includes the ethics of murder and the death penalty.

In *Torn Curtain* [1966], a murder takes place in a country kitchen using whatever is handy, including a butcher knife and a gas stove.

The fruit and vegetable merchant who is the central character in *Frenzy* [1972], appropriately for his profession hides the body of his victim in a potato truck. He also finishes a victim's lunch after strangling her.

70. A FAMILIAR FACE & DARK GLASSES



North by Northwest [1959] (48:27)

Eve mentions Roger's face is familiar. Certainly, she has seen it in the newspaper, but Hitchcock may again be playing with his audience. After all, Cary Grant in 1959 was one of the most famous stars in Hollywood. His face would be familiar to almost everyone. Hitchcock plays with this idea again in the scene in which Thornhill escapes from the hospital in Rapid City and a woman recognizes not Roger Thornhill, but handsome Cary Grant.

There follows a conversation full of double entendres, multiple layers, and circuitous meanings. For instance, Thornhill accuses Eve of being honest. She replies, "Not really." Only much later in the film do we understand the significance of that off-hand remark – we realize she is being totally honest by disclosing her dishonesty.

Hitchcock seems to take pleasure in these verbal ironies when a character innocently (or in Eve's case, not so innocently) makes an offhand remark predicting the future. In *The 39 Steps* [1935], when spy Isabella asks to go to his apartment, Hannay replies, "Well, it's your funeral." Moments later she is dead with a knife in her back. In *Spellbound* [1945]**Error! Bookmark not defined.**, Dr. Fleurot offhandedly says to Constance at the beginning of the

film, “Dr. Murchison must be really out of his mind to assign Carmichael to you.” So, at eight minutes into the film, Hitchcock reveals the film’s greatest secret: Murchison is indeed out of his mind. To further the point of the mental problems of almost everyone in the film, moments later Constance says, “I’m in a mad hurry . . .”

Then Roger admits to being frightened by honest women because he is not honest with them. He feels he must hide his desire to make love to an attractive woman. Eve says she might not find it objectionable. And this is just the beginning of a shocking (for 1959) sexual repartee between Roger and Eve.

During his opening conversation with Eve, Thornhill does something rather strange. He removes his dark glasses – presumably the better to see this beautiful woman sitting opposite him. He then cleans them with his handkerchief – again presumably to better see her. But then, rather than putting them back on again, he puts them away! All this cleansing goes to naught. What Hitchcock is telling us is that Thornhill, no matter how hard he tries to see clearly cannot really see the woman sitting in front of him because he sees her only as a sex object. Those glasses will return to become even more symbolic as a measure of Roger’s growth.



Spellbound [1945] (17:07)

In a similar scene in *Spellbound* [1945], Constance cleans her glasses but again not to see better, but to reject, i.e., not to see, an explanation of her feelings offered by a colleague.

Eve quickly demonstrates her power over Thornhill. She is totally in charge of the situation – a powerful manipulator. She bribed the waiter to seat him at her table for dinner. (At the end of their train trip, she will again use bribery, this time to help Thornhill escape the police by using a "borrowed" porter's uniform.) She knows he is lying about the parking tickets, about his name, about almost everything. She is sexually aggressive; even more aggressive than he is. And, most important of all, she knows who Thornhill really is (just like in *To Catch a Thief* [1955] when Francie *knows* Conrad Burns is really John Robie the cat burglar.) And, as we will later discover, she also knows who George Kaplan really is.

Believing he just seduced Eve, or perhaps has been willingly seduced by her, Thornhill calls for introductions. Eve gives her name and age and,

continuing the sexual repartee, says she is unmarried. In another bit of prescient dialogue, Thornhill asks, “What do you do aside from luring men to their doom on the 20th Century Limited?” And indeed, this is exactly what she is doing – luring Thornhill to his doom. She lies in her reply, claiming to be an industrial designer. And he believes her.

Eve lies. But liar Roger is taken in – his critical functions having been dulled by his weakness for beautiful women. It is typical of Hitchcock to see women as powerful enough to wipe out a man’s mind like a magnet erasing a computer disk – in this case the magnet being one of sexual attraction.



Downhill [1927] (11:55)

A man’s weakness before a woman’s power is something that runs through Hitchcock’s oeuvre. His films are full of weak men and powerful women. For instance, as early as the 1927 *Downhill*, Hitchcock subtly shows a woman in charge: while dancing, Mable is in the position of the leader and Ben the follower.

By 1930 in *Murder!*, it is clear that the most intelligent person on the jury deciding the fate of Diana Baring is a woman, very knowledgeable about contemporary psychology. And the stupidest person is a man.



Rich and Strange [1931] (1:13:45)

In *Rich and Strange* [1931] during a ship disaster, Emily Hill is dressed in pants making Fred Hill's coat look very skirt-like. But to make sure we know who is who, and add a little ambiguity, he grabs a symbolically male bottle of brandy while she grabs an equally symbolic cat.



Waltzes from Vienna [1934] (08:09)

The following year in his musical comedy, *Waltzes from Vienna* [1934], Hitchcock packs the film with weak men and powerful women. In keeping with the comedy, he clearly feminizes the hero Schani Strauss by having him hold a woman's skirt as if he is wearing it in the midst of women wearing no skirts but whose underwear looks like they are wearing pants.



Shadow of a Doubt [1943] (1:46:33)

Another good example is *Shadow of a Doubt* [1943], in which an ineffective boyfriend/policeman, when needed, is nowhere to be found leaving the female hero to face and conquer the serial murderer herself. In the final scene, Hitchcock poses the pair so she symbolically towers over him.

Hitchcock's ideas about women changed over the course of his career. One can readily see this in the two versions of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. In the 1934 version, the hero does all the detecting and has a goofy sidekick. In the 1956 version, the ostensible hero's attempts at detecting are futile. He essentially becomes the goofy sidekick to his wife who does the real detecting and, by the way, makes all the tough moral decisions.



The Man Who Knew Too Much [1956] (21:38)

Perhaps the weakest of Hitchcock's weak men is Dr. Ben McKenna in 1956 version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*: totally incompetent, he does nothing right and even abuses his wife. His efforts to investigate the kidnapping of their son lead to nothing while his wife not only almost single-handedly solves the crime, but also prevents an international incident. Every one of his observations is incorrect while every one of hers is correct. This portrayal is perhaps Hitchcock's strongest critique (and deconstruction) of 1950s American culture: strict gender roles assumed by all (he carries both their passports), seeing all other cultures as inferior and trivial, and instantly trusting anyone who looks like you. Even Ben's incompetence as a physician is clearly symbolized by the surgeon's inability to eat chicken with one hand.

In the picture before *North by Northwest*, *Vertigo* [1958], Hitchcock presents another terribly weak man. Scottie, a Stanford-educated lawyer who had hoped to become the chief of police, is so taken by beautiful Madeline that he ignores all the nefarious goings on around him. He is reduced to falling in love with the working-class, sexually loose Judy. Quite a descent in the social consciousness of 1958.



Rebecca [1940] (30:48)

Rebecca [1940] is one of the few films in which Hitchcock presents us with a weak heroine. Throughout the film, Mrs. de Winter's body language implies she is about to cave in, collapse. In her first meeting with the fiendish Mrs. Danvers, she is shown cowering in gray and lit to appear very flat and without modulation. In contrast, Mrs. Danvers is dressed in deep black with bits of brilliant white; somehow Hitchcock manages to light her, next to the flat lighting on Mrs. de Winter, in high contrast.

So, when it comes time for Roger to introduce himself, he lies about everything and Eve immediately calls him on it. "No you're not," she purrs, "You're Roger Thornhill of Madison Avenue and you're wanted for murder on every front page in America." As we have seen, newspapers are not to be trusted in Hitchcock's universe.

"Don't worry. I won't say a word." is what Eve replies to Thornhill's, "Oops" at being found out. Her justification at obstructing justice is his "nice face" and that "it will be a long night." Suddenly we are invited to form a

very negative opinion of Eve. Seducing Thornhill is seducing Cary Grant – acceptable, even laudatory in 1959. But now Eve reveals she wants to spend the night with a hunted murderer! What does this woman do? Run around the country seducing murderers for the thrill of it?

71. ROGER'S MATCHBOOK



North by Northwest [1959] (50:59)

In film, a man lighting a woman's cigarette has always had sexual implications. The man, literally inflamed, puts fire to a woman with a phallic symbol in her mouth, reducing it to ash and, presumably, along with it reducing her resistance to his advances. The physical contact of Eve holding Roger's hand to steady the match is significant. Even more is her blowing out the match with so much sex that we are surprised the match does not immediately relight itself. During this ritual, Eve mentions the monogram on his matchbook.



North by Northwest [1959] (50:46)

The true progress of Thornhill’s psychological journey from anonymity to selfhood is summarized beautifully by Thornhill’s personalized matchbook – a revealing, miniaturized, and ironic summary of his life up to this point. The typography is pretentious; the initials spell “R.O.T.” As an advertising man, this is what he produces, rot. But “rot” also summarizes the condition of his soul.

The central letter, “O,” looms largest. When asked what it stands for, he responds, “Nothing.” He added the letter to his name because it sounded prestigious. But like many acts that seem so thoroughly planned, calculated, and under strict supervision of the conscious ego, it contains elements that reveal an unconscious truth. Unconsciously, Thornhill is admitting by putting a large zero in the middle of his name, that there is nothing at the center of his life, his core is hollow, and emptiness looms large in his future. And, ironically, all this is written on a matchbook, the source of warmth and fire, and by implication, civilization. (Ironically, the very matchbook he will later use to save Eve’s life.)

On the other hand, it is appropriate for the man in the gray flannel suit to emphasize the zero within himself in order to remain comfortably anonymous in the society of 1959, one that demanded conformity. What a depressing but wonderfully complex and revealing symbol that monogrammed matchbook is.



Rear Window [1954] (1:24:14)



David O. Selznick

An additional significance of the “O” signifying nothing” is that it is a reference to producer David O. Selznick with whom Hitchcock had a long-standing feud. The “O” in Selznick’s middle name, like Thornhill’s, does not stand for anything. Selznick added it because he felt it gave class to his name (just like Thornhill). In *Rear Window* [1954], Hitchcock went to great lengths

– steel-rim glasses, hair dye, and perm – to make murderer/butcher Thorwald (played by Raymond Burr) look like Selznick.



Rebecca [1940] (01:09)

Hitchcock certainly expressed his feelings about Selznick in the title sequence to *Rebecca* in 1940. As the parade of titles go by, the lush forest in the background gets progressively more distorted. However, the greatest distortion is reserved for the title: “Produced by David O. Selznick.” The distortion makes it look like the name is about to be sucked back into infinity. It is the only title background that is either out-of-focus or double exposed. All the following titles, including Hitchcock’s own, have no distortion.



Stage Fright [1950] (34:39)

Compare Thornhill's matchbook to the business card of Detective Inspector Wilfred O. Smith in *Stage Fright* [1950] done nine years earlier. Here the "O" turns out to mean "ordinary." Another famous "hollow" man who has an "O" assigned to him is Scottie in *Vertigo* [1958] when Midge refers him as "Johnny-O." Again Hitchcock had an idea that he developed and improved over a number of films.

72. HITCHCOCK'S NUMEROLOGY



North by Northwest [1959] (1:18:37)

Hitchcock was fascinated by certain numbers. They appear in film after film over his whole career, sometimes obvious, sometimes very obscure, but nonetheless there.

In *North by Northwest* Eve invites Roger to her compartment on the 20th century clearly giving him – and us – the car number: 3901. While this may seem both trivial and absurdly convoluted, $3+9+0+1=13$. Later, Eve Kendall's room number at the Ambassador East Hotel in Chicago is 463. Coincidence?



North by Northwest [1959] (1:34:43)

Later when escaping from the auction house in the hands of the police, they are followed (on a rear-projected, carefully selected film on screen set up in the studio behind several pieces of a car assembled to look like the real thing) bus clearly numbered 1183.

Considering the number of Hitchcock's films in which "13" appears, directly or indirectly, I think not. I believe he was fascinated with numerology and his fascination appears throughout his films in many forms, some noticeable and some, much like his other uses of symbology, very deeply hidden.



The Lodger [1927] (14:41)

The shadowy lodger of *The Lodger* [1927] stays in a house with the number 13 on the front door.



Shadow of a Doubt [1943] (05:37)

Uncle Charlie's New Jersey hideout in *Shadow of a Doubt* [1943] is in a rooming house with 13 as the address.



Murder! [1930] (54:49)

In *Murder!* [1930] the eponymous murder takes place at house with number 13 on the front door.



Foreign Correspondent [1940] (30:18)

Some of the “13s” are less obvious, but no less consistently there. The villain’s getaway car license plate number in *Foreign Correspondent* [1940], is 1057, which adds up to 13. In addition, it is announced that Johnny Jones passes thirteen notes to Carol during Peace Society luncheon.



Mr. and Mrs. Smith [1941] (33:59)

The very next year in *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* [1941], Ann Smith goes to work at a department store with the address of 526.



Strangers on a Train [1951] (40:07)

The policeman who “welcomes” Guy to the police station where any hope of an alibi is about to collapse in *Strangers on a Train* [1951] wears badge number 76.



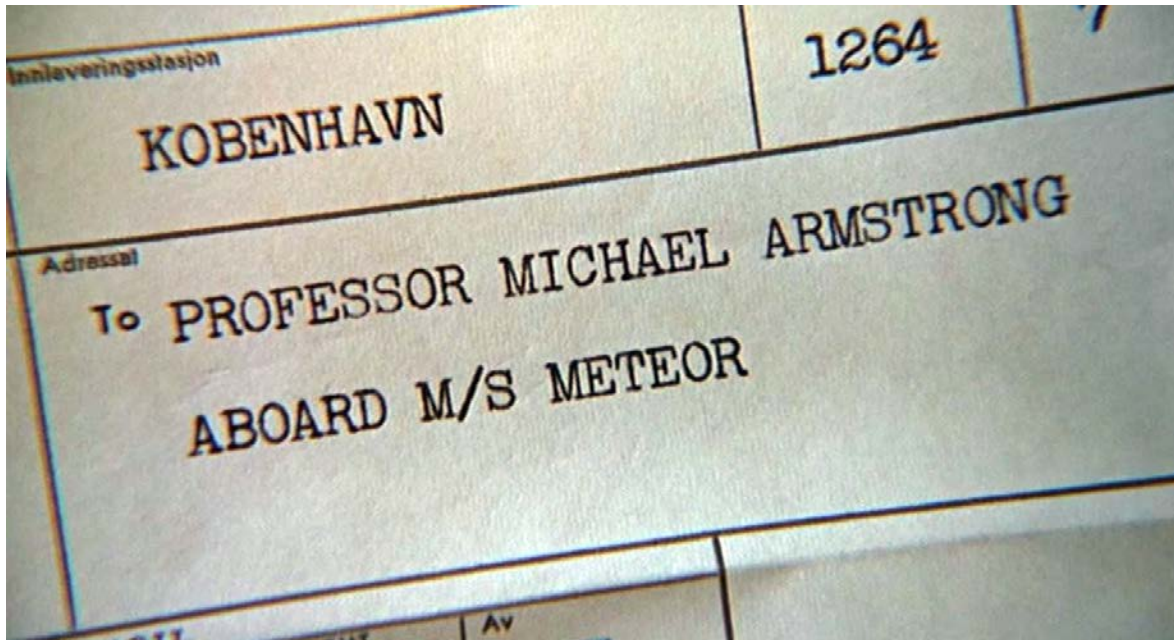
Psycho [1960] (22:08)

In *Psycho* [1960], the address of the used car lot where Marion buys her new car is 4720.



Psycho [1960] (59:22)

Again, in *Psycho* [1960], Hitchcock gives Marion Crane's car the following license plate: NFB 418. Does "NFB" stand for Norman F. Bates?



Torn Curtain [1966] (05:50)

In *Torn Curtain* [1966], Professor Armstrong receives a telegram from Copenhagen “1264.”

In *To Catch a Thief* [1955], robbery victim Jessie Stevens stays in room 625.

(David Mamet in his 1987 *House of Games* has a trysting couple stay in room 1138, but whether that is a conscious homage to Hitchcock, I do not know.)

Even more obscure (or more over-the-top, depending on whether you believe any of this): In *North by Northwest* at the Park Plaza in New York, George Kaplan stayed in room 796, the first two numbers add to 16 ($7+9=16$), adding this result to the remaining 6 yields 13 ($1+6+6=13$). At the police station, Roger calls his mother at Bonneville 8-1098; this adds up to 26 or twice 13. The amount of money stolen in *Marnie* [1964] is \$9967 which adds up to 31, the reverse of 13.

I believe all this reflects Hitchcock’s private fetish with the number thirteen which might goes back to the beginning of his film career. He began by illustrating title cards for silent films at Paramount’s London studio in 1919. Learning writing, editing, and directing, he rose to assistant director in 1922. That year he directed his first film titled *Peabody* or *Number 13*. After

only a few scenes were shot, the budget fell apart and it was never completed. Perhaps he has been trying to finish it ever since. Perhaps an even more prosaic explanation is possible: Hitchcock's birthday is August 13th.

Another recurring number in *North by Northwest* is five: Roger's hospital room is 23; Eve and Leonard are separated by 5 telephone booths when she is supposed to be calling Kaplan, Roger is to meet Kaplan on Highway 41, and so on.



Murder! [1930] (1:06:14)

In 1930, in *Murder!* Diana's prison number is 23.



I Confess [1953] (25:25)

Inspector Larrue's office in *I Confess* [1953] is room #1103.



The 39 Steps [1935] (01:57)

Mr. Memory, the theatrical act that gets Richard Hannay into trouble in the first place in *The 39 Steps* [1935], is act #5.



The 39 Steps [1935] (06:54)

And Hannay lives at 122 Portland Place.



Family Plot [1976] (1:02:52)

In *Family Plot* of 1976, George Lumley cab is #5.



The Wrong Man [1956] (03:49)

Manny, in *The Wrong Man* [1956], descends into the ominous underworld of the New York subway, symbolic of the dark maze he will soon find himself lost in, at the Fifth Avenue station.



Torn Curtain [1966] (1:49:32)

Michael Armstrong in *Torn Curtain* [1966] waits in an East German post office next to a very large number 5.

It, too, can be traced through a number of his films. Seventeen is another number that seems to recur in the Hitchcock oeuvre. In *North by Northwest*, Kaplan checks out of the Ambassador East Hotel in Chicago at 7:10 in the morning.



Number Seventeen [1932] (02:33)

It is to be expected that a film titled *Number Seventeen* [1932] takes place in a house at number 17. Other appearances of the number are more obscure.



Notorious [1946] (1:08:21)

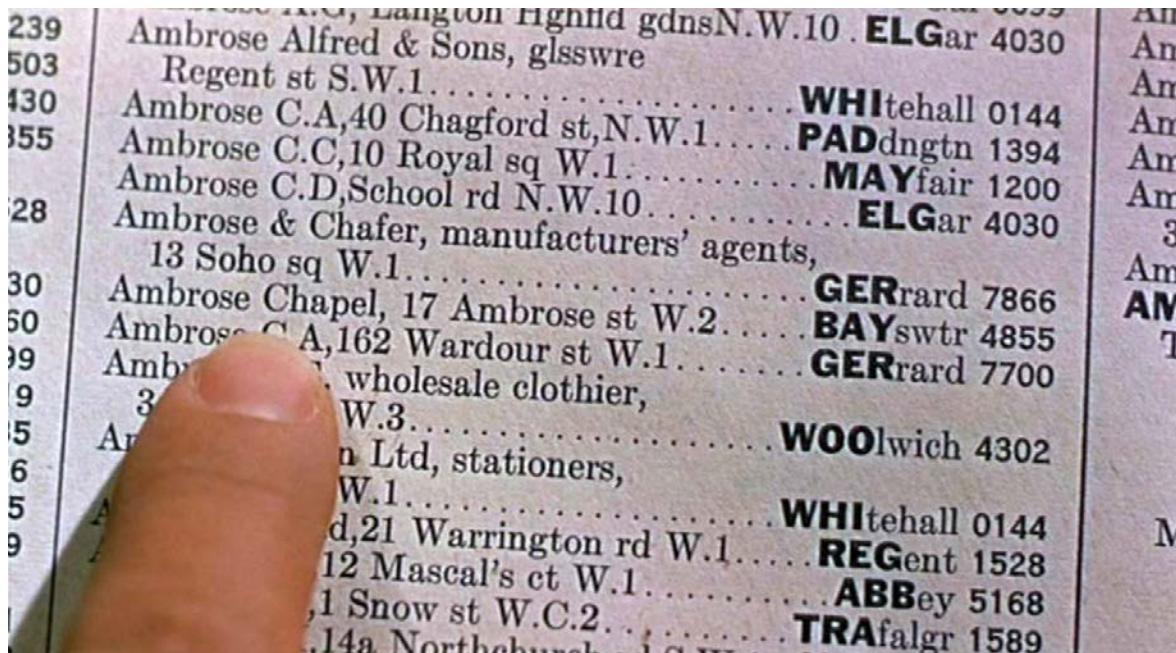
In 1946 in *Notorious*, the mysterious bottles containing the uranium sand are vintage 1934.



Stage Fright [1950] (01:10)

In 1950, the numbers of the license plate in *Stage Fright*, 971, add up to 17.

In 1954, in *Rear Window*, wife-killer Lars Thorwald's apartment, the scene of the crime, is located at 125 W 9th Street.



The Man Who Knew Too Much [1956] (1:09:45)

In *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1956], Ambrose Chapel is located at 17 Ambrose Street. This is a completely fictitious address. The real Ambrose Chapel in London is located in a cemetery. The filmed exteriors are of St. Savior's Church on Vicary Street in Clapham, Brixton.

In *North by Northwest* in Chicago, Kaplan checked out at 7:10 am.



Psycho [1960] (1:43:10)

Psycho [1960]'s psychiatrist's over-long and lame explanation of Norman Bates' mental diseases is delivered on the 17th day of the month.

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