HITCHCOCK: THE MIND OF A MASTER

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

PART IV, CHAPTERS 73-96

by

H. Arthur Taussig, Ph.D.

Version 1.05

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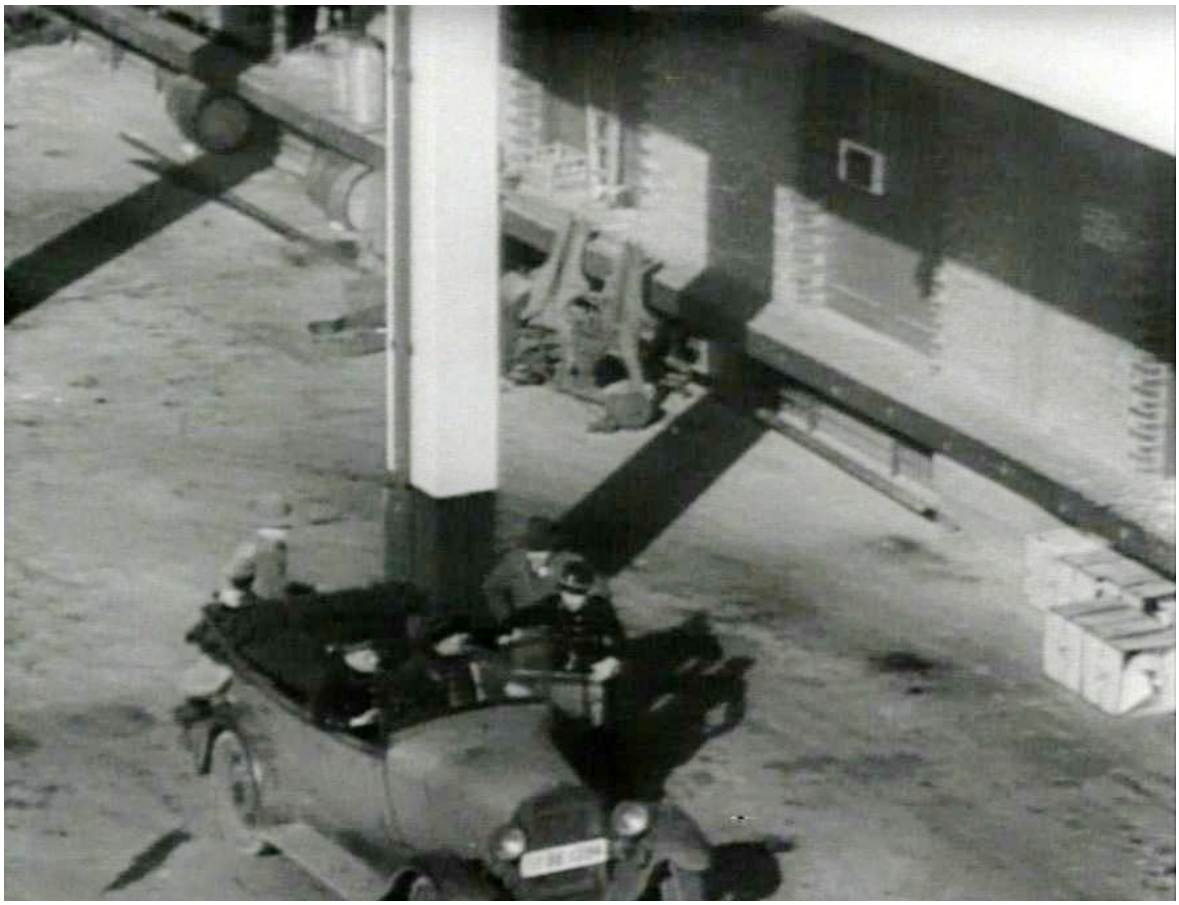
73. AN UNSCHEDULED STOP

North by Northwest [1959] (52:06)

The conversation between Eve and Roger is interrupted by an unscheduled train stop during which two plainclothes policemen get on board. Notice that throughout this film threat comes in pairs: the two kidnappers, two policemen in Glen Cove, these two policemen, there will be two policemen in Chicago. The camera again reminds us of the water next to the train; we are still riding on the edge.



Secret Agent [1936] (1:05:31)

A similar arrival of unwanted police to hound the innocent occurs in *Secret Agent* [1936]. Here our two spies are hunting for clues to the villain's identity in a chocolate factory when the police arrive and disrupt their investigation. This is another example of how Hitchcock refined and improved on his techniques. In 1936, he basically stopped the action of the film to show the police getting out of their car. In 1959 by showing the police over Roger's shoulder he does not interrupt the carefully established rhythm of the conversation between Roger and Eve. In addition, the suspense of the scene increases over the *Secret Agent* version by the audience knowing about the police but their intended victim, Roger, is left momentarily unaware.

74. EVE'S COMPARTMENT

North by Northwest [1959] (52:52)

One of Hitchcock's favorite devices is fooling us about who people really are. Eve's multiple roles peeled back for the audience one at a time like the layers of an onion (in the Gibson cocktail?), misdirect and redirect the audience's beliefs about her character.

Hitchcock uses this device often. In *Number Seventeen*, for instance, a woman who is described by everyone as deaf and dumb suddenly speaks. We are led to believe that a detective in the same film is posing as a jewel thief; he actually is a thief! In *The Lodger* [1927], we are led to believe a man is Jack the Ripper when he is in truth trying to catch the Ripper. In *Rear Window* [1954], the shrewish and whining Mrs. Thorwald changes from villain to victim. In *Suspicion* [1941], Johnny suddenly transforms from murderer to innocent lover. Decades later Hitchcock does the same thing to poor Dick Blaney in *Frenzy* [1972], giving us every indication that he is a mass murder and, of course, he is innocent.

Eve – photographed in a composition taking full advantage of the wide-screen format – now becomes a liar extraordinaire. She locked Thornhill in the upper berth (itself an act rife with sexual implications), and is resting in the lower berth, relaxed and with her shoes off, reading a magazine. Even trapped and hunted, Roger can still make smart comments about being a sardine (an echo of the trout dinner?) and needing olive (an echo of the martini?) oil.

Eve's interview with the state police is an exercise in slickness. When the police ask if Roger was a friend, like a politician being interviewed by the press, she truthfully answers a completely different question, "I've never seen him before."

When Eve tells the police her dinnertime conversation with Thornhill consisted of talk about "different kinds of foods and the difference between train and airplane travel," it becomes a reference to the last conversation Roger had with his mother about train versus plane travel (did she know about that?). And this further reinforces the idea Eve is replacing Mother in Roger's life.

In another Hitchcockian jab at the efficiency of the police, they tell Eve they will be in "the observation car, at the rear of the train." Clearly, going to the rear, they will observe nothing.

The police leave, Roger is released from his womb. He discovers the physical manifestation of being so enclosed is that he broke his dark glasses. And the couple continues the verbal love-sparing. Eve makes a pun about using a "can opener" to open the upper berth after he commented that he feels like a sardine – she is symbolically opening his can (of worms?) that will release Thornhill's previously hidden personality and lead to him becoming a whole person and not just a Madison Avenue drone.

Eve hid Roger by closing him into the upper sleeping berth of her compartment. She protects him from the police by placing him in a tight, closed, enveloping space – a womb-like, comforting and restricting maternally-controlled space. Reentries into womb-like places, literal or metaphoric, are often symbolic of regression and, if the metamorphosis within the womb is successful, this will hopefully lead to a positive rebirth.

If the person is properly prepared, regression can be curative and psychic growth can take place. If not, disaster often results. The ultimate regression, actually becoming one's own mother, is explored in *Psycho* [1960]. Whereas in Thornhill's case, while we detect little at the surface level, there have been strong symbolic indicators that a major change is about to take place in his personality.

Thus, Roger O. Thornhill, tightly wedged in the closed upper berth of a railroad sleeper, holding his breath and hiding from the police, is locked into this pseudo-womb. Exiting, he experiences a rebirth, but not an immediate revelation or conversion. That would be too easy for the likes of Alfred Hitchcock. Here is something much more realistic and prosaic: a slight change in direction signaled by a seemingly trivial incident – in this case a pair of broken dark glasses – sends the traveler on a new road.

North by Northwest [1959] (55:01)

His dark glasses keep Thornhill from being recognized, they keep him anonymous. Anonymity is appropriate to his previous life on Madison Avenue. Now, all that is coming to an end. Additionally, dark glasses prevent others from seeing Thornhill's eyes. According to Plato, the eyes are often the windows to the soul. Thus, Thornhill's soul will soon be revealed for us to see.

Still further, glasses either correct or distort vision. Dark glasses distort vision – they remove a portion of the light that would normally enter the eye, they prevent complete vision. Soon, bereft of his dark glasses, Thornhill's vision of both the world and himself will no longer be distorted, perhaps for the first time in his life. Dark glasses also make looking at bright lights more comfortable. True vision, especially when that vision requires a painful self-realization, a difficult growth, is never comfortable, often painful. Thus, without the dark glasses, Roger can face his future directly and truthfully.

The Trouble with Harry [1955] (03:24)

Andrea Mantegna *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (1490)

Perhaps Hitchcock's most hopeful image of psychological growth and psychic rebirth is at the same time one of his most macabre. Very near the beginning of his black comedy, *The Trouble with Harry* [1955], a young boy discovers a dead body. Hitchcock photographs the scene from the corpse's feet in a way very reminiscent of the Andrea Mantegna's 1490 painting of Christ, certainly a well-recognized symbol of rebirth and resurrection. The boy seems to be springing from the dead body like Athena from the head of Zeus.

The comparison of the youthful life with death is, for Hitchcock, pretty obvious. The camera placement makes it look like one body: Harry's torso ends where the boy's begins – even the zippers align. Looking still closer, we see the body is dressed in a business suit and well-used shoes even though located in an almost prelapsarian countryside. The old way, very similar to Thornhill's world, is dead. The boy, in comparison, is not only youthful, but is armed with a toy six-gun and a toy ray gun – simultaneous references to the American past and the American future, both of which the boy seems to handle very comfortably. A truly hopeful image of the future of America.

North by Northwest's camera then cuts to a view of the train speeding up the banks of the Hudson River; a view identical to what we saw before.

North by Northwest [1959] (55:17)

North by Northwest [1959] (55:21)

This is the second time Hitchcock repeats a piece of film. The introduction – people streaming out of the Madison Avenue office building – was bookended by the same piece of film. Now, however, he adds something. Not only do these repeated frames of film bookend the first interaction between Roger and Eve, Hitchcock gives it further significance.

There is a fade/dissolve to what appears to be the same scene, just a little bit later in the evening and thus a bit darker. In addition, there is another, symbolically more important change: Hitchcock fades from a view made with a tilted camera to one with the horizon level (time code 55:17 to 55:21). Is Hitchcock saying that, after Roger's meeting with Eve, his feminine guide, and his experience in the womb and his subsequent rebirth, things have now starting to "straighten out?"

75. CONFESSING & NECKING

North by Northwest [1959] (57:06)

After showing us a sunset along the Hudson River, the train still traveling on the edge, we find Eve and Roger hugging and kissing. Eve begins giving Roger advice about George Kaplan – apparently Thornhill told her everything about his adventure.

This indicates two things. First, Eve softened his suspicions to the point he feels no threat from her. He finds her sexuality so appealing that his better judgment dissolves. Second, what he could not tell his mother, he finds he can tell Eve easily. This is further evidence that Eve is taking place of Mother as the feminine in his life.

While necking they carry on a conversation. First, Eve offers to find George Kaplan for Roger, who refuses because it would be too dangerous for her. Second, she wonders out loud if, in fact, Roger is indeed a murderer. They then both participate in a double entendre equating sex and death. Eve asks, "How do I know you're not a murderer planning to murder me?" "Shall I?" asks Roger. She purrs, "Please do." After all, in French an orgasm is called "*le petit mort*," "the little death."

In the 1927 *The Lodger*, Hitchcock makes a similar association when the inept policeman Joe says about Daisy, whom he is courting, "When I put a rope around the Avenger's neck, I'll put a ring around Daisy's finger."

Their necking gives Hitchcock an opportunity to inspect love – the great, unexplainable miracle he worships in so many of his films. As they kiss, their bodies rotate – Roger blames it on the unsteadiness of the train (so why don't they sit down?).

North by Northwest [1959] (56:19)

In the tight quarters of the train compartment, Hitchcock doesn't have an opportunity to rotate his camera around the lovers as he's done in so many other films in similar situations (*Vertigo* [1958], *Notorious* [1946], and *To Catch a Thief* [1955]). He does this, I believe, to inspect this amazing thing called love from all sides, closely, minutely. His camera movement is a celebration of a miracle.

Roger's hands are posed rather strangely during their kissing: they hover about Eve's head just barely touching her hair. Her hands too are quite oddly placed on his shoulders. Typically, men put their arms around a woman's waist or shoulders while she responds with arms around his shoulders or neck during a standing kiss. Perhaps the non-enclosure, the non-encirclement of the arms indicates the current lack of commitment of their emotions to each other – Roger, perhaps the irresponsible rogue male, may

still see Eve as just a pickup on a train, a quick sexual encounter and a place to hide from the police; Eve, we find out shortly, has ulterior motives. (These strange hands have another meaning that will become clear when Roger encounters Eve in her hotel room after his adventures at Prairie Stop.)

A porter comes to make the bed and interrupts their necking. This time Eve hides Roger in the bathroom. Why did she not hide him there the first time? It would have been far simpler to simply close the bathroom door behind him than stuffing him into the upper berth. The answer, I believe, is in the symbology of the two places. Had Roger not hid in the bed, he would not have experienced the regression of the womb, the symbolic broken glasses, and the beginning of his slow rebirth. We see a very different symbology now happening in the bathroom.

North by Northwest [1959] (58:33)

Roger picks up Eve's shaving things and inspects her tiny razor. We get a close up of Roger's hand and the miniscule razor. Is Hitchcock inviting us to see this as a normal razor and a gigantic hand? Is this Roger's opinion of himself with regard to Eve – an inflated ego? At the same time, Hitchcock introduces the idea of the size distortion, an image that will return with Mt. Rushmore's gigantic heads.

Frenzy [1972] (1:24:09)

In 1972 in *Frenzy,* Hitchcock uses a similar scene: Bob Rusk unsheathes a tiny pocket knife with which he tries unsuccessfully to retrieve an incriminating pin from the rigor-set hand of his victim. In this case, the tiny knife may symbolize the rapist Rusk's own sexual inadequacies.

Suddenly and surprisingly, Eve informs Roger that he will be sleeping on the floor. After all this sexy talk, this comes as a bit of a shock and a letdown. But, then again, this is 1959. This statement throws Eve into yet another perspective. Does she derive pleasure from sexually teasing men (an accusation Roger will later throw at her)? Or has she simply been playing Roger's game against himself to teach him a lesson? Or is there some ulterior motive of which we are not yet aware? Or perhaps feeling he has gone too far in the preceding dinner conversation, is this a necessary bow to the censors of 1959 on Hitchcock's part? On the other hand, there are strong indications Roger may have started on the floor, but wound up in her bed for later he comments, in anger, that she "uses sex like others use a flyswatter," the latter an image with interesting sado-masochistic possibilities.

North by Northwest [1959] (59:39)

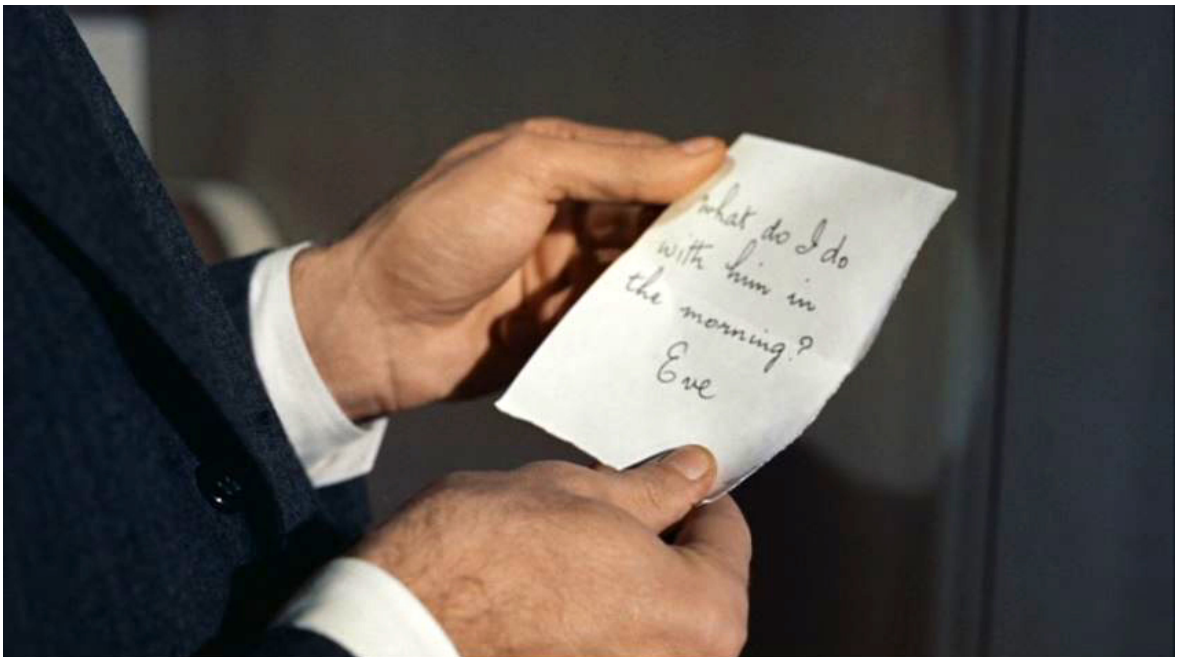
And the scene in Eve's room ends with another question: What is the meaning of that "shifty-eyed look" Hitchcock finishes the scene with? The answer follows immediately. Hitchcock used the same look in almost the same situation – the end of a kiss – in 1927 in *The Lodger* and in 1958 in *Vertigo* [1958]. In *Marnie* [1964] we get the same look but in a very different situation: Marnie is about to be raped. This is further evidence that at about the time of the making of *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock is radically changing his approach to film making and beginning to use familiar devices in very different ways.

Vertigo [1958] (1:17:10)

The Lodger [1927] (1:03:51)

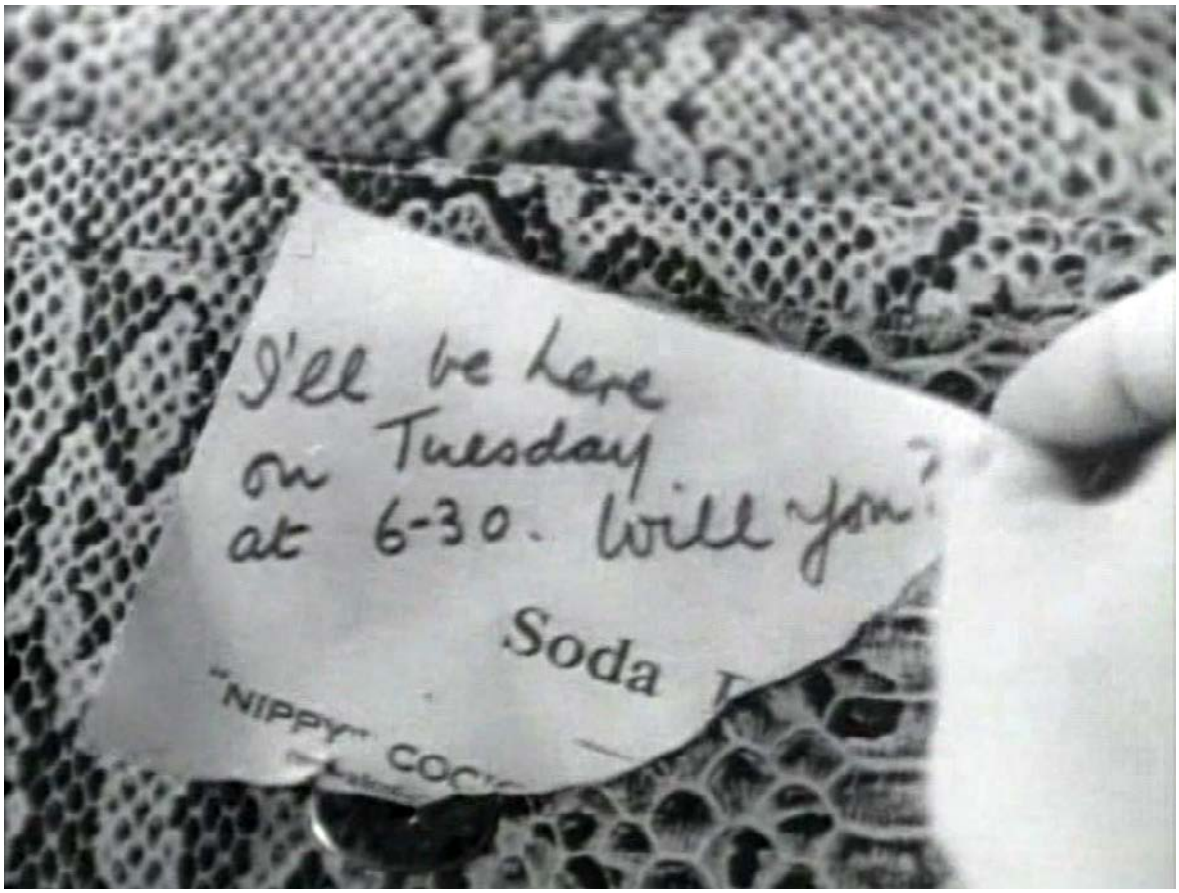
Marnie [1964] (1:18:53)

76. PASSING THE NOTE



North by Northwest [1959] (59:52)

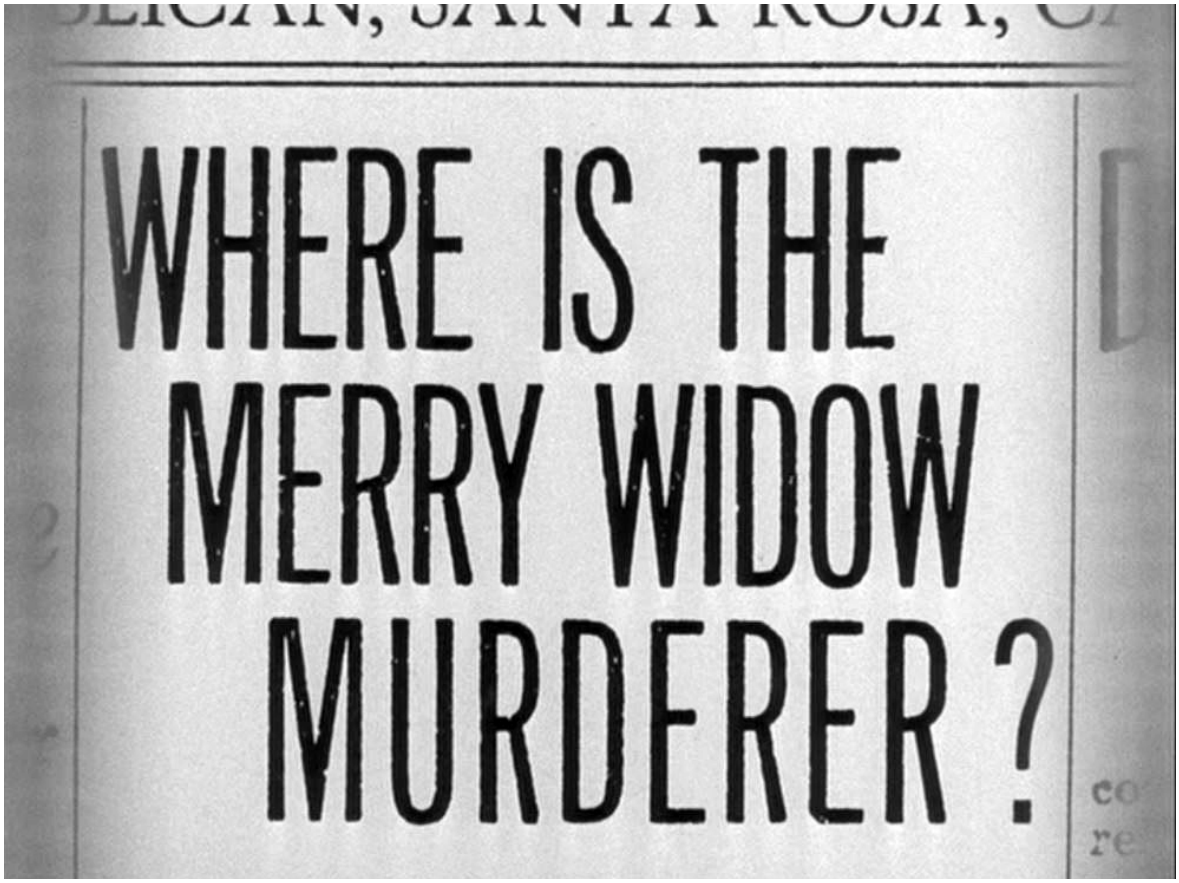
The answer comes at the end of this sequence: Eve has been lying to Thornhill and to us all along. The note she sends reads, “What shall I do with him in the morning?” It comes as a shock to find she has been in league with Vandamm and Leonard all along.



Blackmail [1929] (14:15)

The revelation of a character's perfidy through a note appeared before. In Hitchcock's first sound film, *Blackmail*, in 1929, Alice's clandestine rendezvous is revealed in a note she removes from a wonderfully symbolic snake-skin purse.

Eve turns out to be the film's most complex character. Our feelings – and Roger's – about Eve take wild swings throughout the film – this being only the first (or second). In the train, she is playful and seductive, and yet something of a slut and a tease. When she informs Roger he will be sleeping on the floor, we don't know if she is protecting her chastity, or simply responding to the requirements of 1959 film censorship. Or perhaps, with our new information, we might propose that she is still faithful to Vandamm. Our evaluation of her will change again and again. Hitchcock sees women as unpredictable and endowed with infinite possibilities – a good description not only of characters like Eve Kendall that Hitchcock is so enamored of, but also of a repressed or ignored psychological feminine function that inhabits men's psyche.



Shadow of a Doubt [1943] (1:05:13)

Hitchcock revels in these plot twists. Almost every one of his films has a similar twist. In *The Lodger* [1927] the man we suspect of being a mass murderer turns out to be the murderer's hunter; in *Shadow of a Doubt* [1943] benign Uncle Charlie turns out to be a mass murderer, etc.

Vertigo [1958] (1:44:02)

Hitchcock used the idea of giving written information to the audience before. In many ways this is the modern equivalent of the silent films' title cards.

In the film previous to *North by Northwest*, *Vertigo* [1958], confronted by the obviously suffering and pathetic Scottie, Judy, guilt-ridden, decides to come clean. She writes a note to Scottie explaining Elster's plot to rid himself of his wife and how Scottie was manipulated into being a false witness. Thinking better of it, she tears up the note, but not, of course, before we have had a chance to read it. This device to communicate mountains of information in a very efficient form is clever, but a little clumsy. It feels too much like a title card in a silent film (writing these was, indeed, Hitchcock's first job in the film industry).

In *North by Northwest* the clumsiness of writing and destroying a long, explanatory note as in *Vertigo* [1958], obviously for the sole convenience of informing the audience, is gone. The effect of the succinct note in *North by Northwest* on the audience is enormous. Upon the appearance of the note, we immediately and efficiently construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct what has "really" been going on for the past hour – but now it becomes believable and far more subtle.

The shock of finding out that Eve is in league with Vandamm is perhaps the greatest shock in the film. This is one of the best examples of one of Hitchcock 's methods of suspense. Because of what we just learned, a pleasant situation – one that Hitchcock carefully lulled us into over the past twenty minutes – suddenly turns dangerous and mysterious. Any possibility of the romance we just witness growing to greater depth is now blocked by deceit, evil and deception. We curse ourselves for having been lulled into such complacency – something we should know better to do in a Hitchcock film. And at the same time, we are thrilled at having been gulled.

The very next time we see any of these characters, our view of them will have changed radically. Eve turns from the rather kinky seductress into a villain, one bent on destroying the hero. We view Thornhill with simultaneous pity and alarm. We pity him because he has so naively been taken in, taken in through his personal weakness – ego, roving sexuality, self-confidence and so on. He is the Madison Avenue trickster who has himself been tricked. And we view him with alarm because he is in far greater danger than he suspects – another typical Hitchcock device. And in the process, we gain a new respect for Vandamm whose tentacles extend much further than we suspected.

At this point Eve's name takes on three-dimensionally. At first, we think of Eve as Adam's mate and helpmate in the Garden of Eden. And it certainly seems that their relationship – heavy necking in a Pullman car, eluding the police – has a paradisiacal, prelapsarian flavor to it. However, we now suddenly discover we have had the wrong Eve in mind. Eve Kendall is the Eve who has already eaten the apple and is in cahoots with the Snake. Her seduction of Adam (according to the patriarchal myth) is about to lead to his downfall. This is only the first installment of a series of religious references in *North by Northwest*. More later.

A further irony will reveal itself shortly: while Eve may have penetrated Roger's role, she has not fully pierced her own. She finds that in addition to the role she assumed – confidante and false helper to Thornhill – she has unwittingly and unknowingly begun to assume another role. And this does not involve her collusion with Vandamm or her employment by the Professor, but rather her still unrecognized emotional involvement with Roger himself. But in this scene, as in many others, Hitchcock oes not quite give us enough information to come to a complete conclusion.

Learning that Eve may herself be a criminal is shocking. But many of Hitchcock's film revolves around the question of whether the central character is or is not a criminal. For example, in *The Lodger* [1927] we do not know whether the murderous Avenger and the lodger are one and the same or in *Suspicion* [1941] where we are never sure if Johnnie is really intending to kill Lina, and so on.

The scene ends in a panning edit from the interior of the train compartment to an exterior view from the train with a landscape rushing past. This type of panning edit through black was used before in *Rope* [1948] but here is used in a much more sophisticated, mature way to make the whole adventure on the train symmetrical: We began outside the train, moved into the train with a panning edit, and now we move out again when the story is both complete and a cliff-hanger at the same time. The two panning edits are visual bookends on a chapter of great importance in the development of the characters of Roger Thornhill and Eve Kendall and their growing mutual involvement. And notice we are back to a now slightly tilted landscape.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:00:14)

77. BOWLING BALLS

North by Northwest [1959] (1:00:21)

The first image we see on Roger's arrival in Chicago's LaSalle Street Station after the 15-½ hour trip is the front of the train: The New York Central. The name emblazoned in a large red oval. It is only until the final scene that we see the rest of the red on the train: a large area on the back of the art deco engine. So, continuing Hitchcock's use of hermetic color symbolism, Roger has followed the color red all the way on his trip from New York to Chicago. While we know Roger is now (again) in danger from Vandamm and his henchmen, from the color symbolism we also know this is the correct and necessary path to Roger's psychological growth. Oddly, the red carpet that was traditionally rolled out both in New York and Chicago for the 20th Century Limited is missing.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:00:25)

Once in Chicago, Eve helps Roger avoid the police by dressing him in a porter's uniform and having him carry her luggage. This is the ultimate revenge against the man who began the film: upper class, self-confident, used to being served at every whim.

The role between Thornhill and his beleaguered secretary is now reversed. To see the change, we need only compare this scene to the similar one at the beginning with Roger and his secretary walking down the street, he is dictating, she is complaining about her painful feet. Here *he* complains, "I might collapse at any moment." Now he is degraded into carrying someone else's luggage – a mere porter. This is a scene of major deflation.

Notice also that it is Eve who dressed him this way, a clear indicator she is responsible for the changes – physical and what they symbolize – taking place in Roger.

According to Hitchcock, and many myths and fairy tales, before the hero can gain his (or her) rightful position, one must be lowered and deflated (Job, Jonah, Snow White, Cinderella, Heracles, etc.). For instance, in *Notorious* [1946], Alicia sinks into an alcoholic stupor from which she recovers and then later sinks again into being the unwilling mistress of a man she doesn't love.

The 39 Steps [1935] (20:13)

Hitchcock used the idea of working-class clothing as disguise before. In *The 39 Steps* [1935], Hannay dons the uniform of a willing milkman (who thinks he is fleeing a jealous husband) to help him escape from pursuing spies.

The symbolic construct we have been following all through the film now comes to fruition: Roger actually joins with the color red. We noted at the beginning of the film the hermetic associations Hitchcock establishes with the color green**Error! Bookmark not defined.** – from the background of the MGM logo**Error! Bookmark not defined.** to the missed bus – and the color red – the black woman with the red sweater, and so on. From his office to the Oak Room bar to the mansion to the United Nations to Grand Central Station to Chicago, Roger seems to have been chasing little bits of red.

Now Roger joins with the color red – he not only dons a red cap, but becomes a Red Cap. He wears it, he is it, and he is now on the verge of constellating all that Hitchcock has gone to so much trouble to symbolize – growth, healing, and future possibilities.

Rear Window [1954] (03:18)

This symbolic assumption of redness does not mean Roger has a simple psychological task before him. In *Rear Window* [1954], L. B. Jefferies, a man of action, is immobilized with a broken leg and left to stew in an alchemical heat that causes him to develop psychologically. No such restrictions are necessary in the Thornhill of *North by Northwest*. He is already immobilized by his chosen position in American society; no need for a cast, his disability is invisible and thus both far more insidious and far more difficult to recognize and escape.

Psychologically, Roger has come down off his high horse; he has been deflated. He has been forced to abandon his hollow and pretentious persona in order to cope with the realities of the world. He suffers and complains about the weight of the luggage. The weight he now struggles under is his internal feminine's psychological baggage that contains the symbols of his own masculinity – bowling balls. Note that her "balls" are bigger than his "balls." And, in a completely different reading, the ball, the sphere, is a symbol of wholeness.

For the first time in the film, Thornhill is in someone else's shoes. Certainly, a part of his healing process is Roger's acquisition of a little humility and awareness of others, a good way to move his Ego from the center of his personality into a more appropriate position. He will now go on to play several other roles (metaphorically and literally) until his new psychological makeup gels into a new, healthier personality.

There is another meaning to Roger carrying Eve's luggage: hers is a growing psychic burden of conflicting allegiances between the Professor, Vandamm, and Roger. And it is a considerable weight. "What do you have in here? Bowling balls?" he asks. By carrying her burden and all it signifies, Roger begins to learn about real love – after all, Eve's love for him is lethally dangerous to her. She is taking a very big chance by falling in love with him. Roger quickly learns that growth involves risks, and in a Hitchcock film, lethal risks.

Eve again slickly lies her way past the police with a coolness that makes Roger's previous attempts to cheat people out of taxicabs look like child's play.

78. FALLING IN LOVE

North by Northwest [1959] (1:02:15)

When Roger says to Eve, "You're the smartest girl I've spent the night with on a train." the love theme swells up in the soundtrack. Eve gets a wistful look on her face and then turns to her left (we have discussed right /left symbolism above) and sees Vandamm and Leonard walking just behind them, just out of sight. She looks back at Roger on her right as he says, "I think we've made it." At the surface level, he is talking about making it from the train to the station, but in Hitchcock's clever editing, we get information about their growing love.

As they walk, behind them a large painted word appears, "NEW." From this sign and the music – romantic – we are led to believe she is establishing some new feelings toward Roger.

Strangers on a Train [1951] (11:19)

Just as Hitchcock cropped the words "New York . . ." to "new" to make his point in *North by Northwest*, so he cropped the foreground word "Music" down to "sic" meaning "sick" when Guy, trying desperately to get out of his "sick" relationship, is about to confront his shrewish wife in a music store in *Strangers on a Train* [1951].

We cannot pinpoint the exact moment when Eve falls in love with Roger. Still more disturbing, we cannot identify the reason. She knows nothing of him; for her he is simply a pawn in the duel of wits between Vandamm and the Professor. She falls for him irrationally – as many Hitchcock women do. Hitchcock seems to imbue his women with the intuitive power to find a good man despite all indicators otherwise.

In *Spellbound* [1945], Dr. Peterson falls in love with a man with amnesia and who may be a murderer to boot. It is interesting to speculate with what she is falling in love – after all, since he cannot remember who he is, she has very few rational indicators of his personality or his moral code or his ethical

stance or anything else about his past, his present, or his future. Her psychiatrist teacher/advisor even calls him “an actor” and advises caution. Yet her devotion to him is absolute.

The Fly [1986] (1:32:06) – David Cronenberg

David Cronenberg addresses a similar question in his 1986 science fiction horror film *The Fly*. As inventor Seth Brundle disintegrates from a handsome young scientist (Jeff Goldblum) into a drooling, slimy agglomeration of bones and corrupted flesh, Veronica remains in love with him. The film asks a question similar to that in *Spellbound* [1945]: as his good looks disintegrate, as his mind deteriorates, as his body collapses, as his humanity disappears, what is left for her to love? And yet she loves him. A remarkable, most romantic, if over-the-top gory, love story.

Madeline, too, in *Vertigo* [1958], goes through the same process as does Eve: she falls in love with the man who she is supposed to be manipulating. But in Judy/Madeline’s case, she is punished both for her complicity in murder and her deception of Scottie. Eve, by contrast, makes the correct moral decision and is forgiven her deception.

Eve is now faced with a difficult moral decision – pursue her love for Roger or serve her country and follow Vandamm. By comparison, Roger never has to face an equally difficult decision. His decision will be whether to

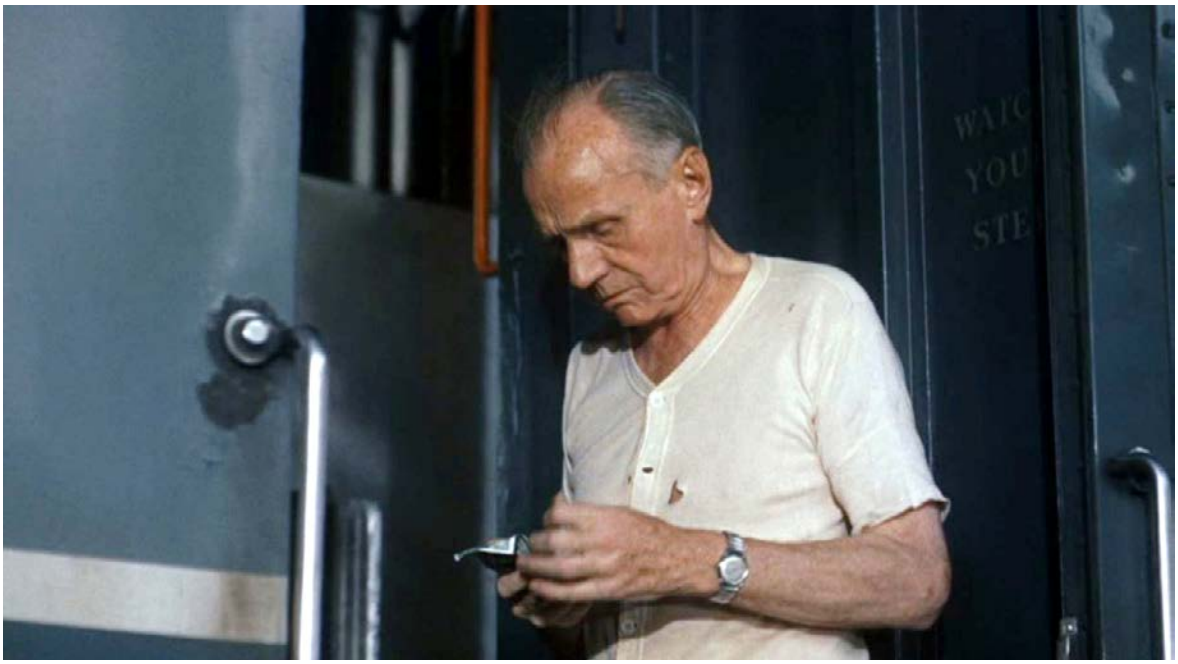
allow Eve to do what she wants and needs to do, or to simply walk away from the whole situation.

Rear Window [1954] (1:37:41)

There is precedent for this. Several of Hitchcock's films feature brave, adventuresome women. In *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1934] Jill Lawrence goes to the Royal Albert Hall to prevent an assassination while her husband and child are held captive. She knows interfering with the assassination could cost the life of her husband and child while allowing it to proceed could precipitate a world war. *Stage Fright* [1950], too, has a female hero whose investigation is crucial to solving the mystery. In *Rear Window* [1954], Lisa bravely undertakes an investigation of a murder that involves breaking and entering into the suspect's apartment – something that up till then had been reserved primarily for men.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:02:13)

After running the police "gauntlet," Roger and Eve near the end of the railroad platform. The camera gives us a subjective view of what they see – welcoming doors indicating escape. Just as Roger says, "I think we made it," it becomes clear that as they walk along the platform, they have been following: 1) a red cap, and 2) a woman in a red dress. And to mark their escape, they will pass between two track stops intended to halt the movement of trains. While they might stop the trains, they will not stop Roger and Eve . . . and, of course, they are painted red.



North by Northwest [1959] (1:02:29)

Roger's redcap uniform is "borrowed;" Eve bribed the train porter. After Roger runs the gauntlet of police, we glimpse the real porter reporting his loss to the police . . . and counting his money. The incident with the porter is a passing one but indicates how tightly knit the film is. The porter is bribed with five bills of some sort to give up his uniform for the duration. It is reasonable he would do this for, say, $25 or $50. The latter number recalls Thornhill's bribe to his mother to get the key to Kaplan's room in the Plaza Hotel in New York.

Another connection is between the porter and the cab driver in New York. Again, Hitchcock punctures our assumptions about the "honest" working class. The cab driver in New York, despite is promise to Thornhill to evade his followers, was unsuccessful. Here the porter, presumably bribed to give up his uniform and to keep quiet about it, betrays his trust and informs the police.

There is a great similarity between the two incidents of bribery, now and in the Plaza Hotel: both involve people in service to the public – hotel clerks and Pullman porters. However, there is also a difference. What was first curiosity (who is Kaplan) and vengeance (to prove his mother wrong about his drinking) now becomes a means of survival (to get away from the police). What once served the ego now serves the whole personality. Another similarity is that both times a woman is doing the manipulating.

This is the first time we see money used for the purpose of healing. Rather than tickets to the theater, dinners, drinks and cab rides, the money now goes toward Roger's symbolic transformation. The conflict of "good" money versus "bad" continues when Vandamm buys his statuette and, later, when Roger attempts to get Eve's attention by literally throwing money at her as if it had no value beyond a convenient metal object.

Foreign Correspondent [1940] (54:12)

In an earlier case of bribery, in *Foreign Correspondent* [1940], Johnny Jones tries to bribe a purser for the last available boat cabin. While Johnny's back is turned, the purser assigns the cabin to someone else. When the purser learns Jones was about to give him £5 and he took a much smaller bribe, a distinct look of chagrin fills his face. Here it is failed bribery that brings the couple closer together for, without a cabin for her and an outside seat for him, they will have to spend the night together.

This section of *North by Northwest* concludes with a spectacular shot of the Chicago train station. We see a number of red caps in a sea of passengers. We see a phalanx of police hunting and jostling each red cap looking for Thornhill. Hitchcock moves us closer and closer into the action in a series of seven shots, full of bustle and action (an echo of the seven shots after the knifing in the United Nations). Then suddenly this highly energetic sequence collapses into a very quiet shot of Roger shaving.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:02:38)

80. SHAVING

North by Northwest [1959] (1:03:13)

Roger ducks into the men's toilet at the Chicago train station to change his clothes and shave. I have always been struck how few films take advantage of the symbolic meanings of shaving. Every morning, for instance, a man stands in front of a mirror and scrapes off an outer layer to reveal what is underneath while a woman does the reverse: she applies a layer (or layers) – makeup – to disguise what is underneath.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:02:54)

The irony in *North by Northwest* is that Roger uses shaving to hide, the soapy foam covering his face prevents him from being recognized by the police. But here it is more complex. First, Roger is not yet ready to completely reveal his true face – he is using only a tiny razor to shave revealing only a little bit at a time. And second, here we see symbolized Hitchcock's belief that a man can only cure himself through the feminine: Roger is shaving with Eve's razor. It is through Eve's razor that Roger is stripping away his outer layer to discover what is beneath. By extension, we can conclude it will be Eve who will finally help Roger fully reveal himself to himself.

Murder! [1930] (32:34)

Hitchcock used simplified versions of this shaving metaphor several times before. In *Murder!* [1930] for instance, it is while shaving that Sir John, the hero, realizes his own moral and emotional involvement with a young woman he helped sentence to hang for a murder she did not commit. As in *North by Northwest*, shaving becomes a metaphor for "exploring beneath the surface."

Rebecca [1940] (20:45)

And in *Rebecca* [1940], Maxim de Winter reveals his love and proposes marriage to the unnamed future Mrs. de Winter in the midst of shaving. He emerges from a bathroom inexplicably filled with a web of shadows. Ordinarily, the symbology of emerging from a web of shadows would be a positive sign, however, here he is walking into another web of inexplicably similar shadows.

Rear Window [1954] (05:40)

Rear Window [1954] begins with L. B. Jefferies shaving. And the rest of the film is about him discovering what is beneath his own outer surface (symbolized by the cast on his leg).

North by Northwest [1959] (1:03:20)

As Roger shaves with Eve's tiny razor, a large, burly man next to him throws him a questioning glance. In our macho society any connection with

the feminine arouses the curiosity and perhaps homosexual suspicion from the other.

81. EVE TALKS TO KAPLAN

North by Northwest [1959] (1:03:30)

North by Northwest [1959] (1:03:43)

While Roger shaves, Eve calls Leonard from one phone booth to another. In a suspenseful side movement, the camera pans from Eve's booth,

across several others, to Leonard's. To add to the suspense, Hitchcock uses a very natural device to keep us in the dark – the phone booth doors are closed so we cannot hear what is being discussed. This, essentially, transforms these few moments of the film into a silent film, a device Hitchcock will exploit again at a more crucial moment at the Chicago airport.

It is a strange scene, making a phone call from one telephone booth to the next. At the level of the plot it is simply a device to prevent Eve and Leonard from being seen talking face to face. At another level, however, it symbolizes Eve's current process. She is trying to communicate with someone very close – Roger and her growing affection for him – by using instruments designed to communicate over great distances.

She receives instructions from Leonard and passes these on to Roger as if they had come from Kaplan. Notice that first Kaplan does not exist, then Roger took on the persona of Kaplan, and now it is Vandamm and his men who play at being Kaplan. Unlike Thornhill or Vandamm, *we* know Kaplan does not exist. Confusion reigns supreme.

Leonard exits the phone booth to join Vandamm in the background and then they quietly leave. Eve follows their departure. She looks from her left slowly to her right but stops in the center where she sees Thornhill entering from the men's washroom, shaved and back in his gray flannel suit. With one exception, her head gesture is the exact reverse of the scene on the train platform where she looked from the evil Vandamm and Leonard on her left toward Roger on her right. Now rather than being on her right, Roger is at the center of her vision – appropriate for their growing relationship.

Eve's true feelings toward Roger are growing: we saw this on the train platform and we see it again now in her difficulty in parting from him, especially now that she is complicit in a plot to kill him. She tells Roger she called Kaplan and got instructions for Roger to go to remote, rural bus stop to meet him. She knows she is sending him to his death yet lets him go. Clearly her moral decision is a difficult one: deciding between her personal feelings for Roger, her feelings about Vandamm, and her sense of duty to her country.

Roger begins to suspect something is wrong. "You look tense," he says to her. She lies to get him to go. He wants to meet again, to thank her, but,

fearing her emotional resolve will fail her, she lies that the police are coming and Roger hurries away.

82. PRAIRIE STOP

North by Northwest [1959] (1:06:55)

The Prairie Stop sequence is one of the most famous attempted murders on film and is analyzed in many film books and articles on Hitchcock and his techniques. For this reason, I will try not to duplicate the efforts of others and keep my observations here to a minimum.

Lured to this desolate spot, Thornhill gets out of the bus at Prairie Stop and finds himself, for the first time, outdoors for any extended period of time. We now sense the claustrophobia of the previous hour of film: the libraries, hotel rooms, the corridors, elevators, cars, and train compartments. Clearly Thornhill is a creature of the city. Now he finds himself a tiny figure in a huge landscape – dry, sere, brown, and drab. Almost as drab as his gray flannel suit.

Thornhill is, so to speak, a fish out of water. He steps off the bus from Chicago, finds himself blinking at the bright sunlight for the first time in the film (is he the deluded man finally freed from the darkened, protective, but blinding allegorical Cave in Book 7 of Plato's *The Republic* to learn the truth beyond appearances?). We know he functions well in the city – cheat people out of cabs, ride trains on the sly, and so on – but how about in this new

world? What devices will he use to survive? Will it be his new budding psychological vocabulary, or will he rely on his old, Madison Avenue self? These are the questions this famous sequence investigates.

The Third Man [1949] (1:35:54) – Carol Reed

Most films equate tight, narrow spaces with danger; this is especially true of spy films. Think of the sewers in *The Third Man* [1949] and *He Walks by Night* [1948]. There is rarely a James Bond film in which 007 is not endangered in some constricted space. Hitchcock reverses this: open spaces hold danger while being locked in a womb-like upper berth in a train is associated with sexual pleasure and psychological growth.

Richard Hannay of *The 39 Steps* [1935] is, in many ways, the opposite of Roger Thornhill despite the similarities in the story: hailing from Canada, he is troubled by the city and functions much better in the rough countryside.

Foreign Correspondent [1940] (30:49)

We expect a cornfield in the heartland of America to be green and verdant where, in typical Hitchcock fashion, he plays against our expectations and the one we see is brown and parched. Hitchcock seems to have had it in for the ideal of country idyll. In *Foreign Correspondent* [1940] he takes the serene, pastoral Dutch landscape, tulips, windmills and all, and in a stroke transforms it into a place of threat and torture. That reversal neatly symbolized by the hero noticing that one of the windmills under a lowering sky is turning backwards.

Everything at Prairie Stop is structured mythically. The fairy tale number "three" recurs throughout the sequence. For instance, three cars pass Thornhill on the highway. The third one, illogically, raises a cloud of dust, predicting the dusting Roger will get from the airplane. (The whole film is full of triple incidents – for instance, Thornhill hides in a bathroom three times.)

North by Northwest [1959] (1:08:04)

The second car that passes is a Cadillac limousine almost identical to the one used in the kidnapping in New York City. This makes us suspicious; this makes Thornhill suspicious. It seems quite odd for a Cadillac limousine to be driving the back roads of the Illinois farm lands. And it would be even more odd if a local farmer owned that car. We suspect that Vandamm sent his henchmen to drive by to make sure Thornhill was at the right place at the right time for the assassination attempt. This continues Hitchcock's idea that Thornhill is under constant surveillance from Vandamm and company.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:07:32)

As we would expect from what Hitchcock has presented so far, the crop-dusting plane enters in the far background from screen-left, a miniscule, almost insignificant speck.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:09:47)

Then a farmer (who, in some ways, resembles Emil Klinger – much the same way that Vandamm's sister resembles Thornhill's mother) emerges

from the crops like some gaunt fertility god. He is dressed in brown – the color of the soil and the crops – yet he emerges from a blue/green, verdant car. He blends in with his environment, in tune with the cycles of growth and decay – something Roger has yet to learn. This contrasts with Thornhill who still wears his blue-gray suit. It stands out clearly against the earthy browns surrounding him, indicating that, just as he blended in anonymously in the city, he is out of place in this environment, an easy target.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:09:51)

To further stress their differences, Thornhill and the farmer stand at the extreme opposite sides of the screen at maximum possible separation. Then the farmer is photographed in the center of the screen while Thornhill, who is a little off balance out here in the middle of the countryside, is never centered on the screen.

The Man Who Knew Too Much [1956] (1:05:22)

The farmer's brown suit echoes Hitchcock's idea of the American mid-West. The same brown suit often appears on Dr. Benjamin McKenna in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1956] who hails from Indianapolis, Indiana (the same state in which the apocryphal Highway 41 is placed) in the heart of the American midlands.

Family Plot [1976] (39:13)

Even more to the point, the cemetery caretaker, in a brown outfit of course, literally rises out of the earth in *Family Plot* [1976].

Thornhill, who is usually quick on the uptake, completely ignores the messages of impending doom. The farmer comments that the plane is dusting crops where there are no crops. The man of the earth can read messages of the earth while a man alienated from the earth by his city ways falls into danger through his ignorance.

There is a good reason for Thornhill's inability to read this message: it is a metaphor for his own life. Thornhill is paying attention to those aspects of his life – that of an ad executive – that do not lead to growth (money, success, power, status) and ignoring those aspects that involve relationships, life, and growth.

While Roger suspects the farmer might be Kaplan, we suspect he is somehow connected with Vandamm. We are almost disappointed when he gets on the bus (the last connection to civilization) and drives permanently out of the picture. False alarm.

To Catch a Thief [1955] (54:05)

Hitchcock used the "false alarm" device previously in *To Catch a Thief* [1955] when John Robie is inspecting a villa under false pretenses and a man in a highly symbolic white suit approaches them. We immediately think (and

fear) John's ruse will be discovered. However, the man simply walks by and keeps walking.

The Man Who Knew Too Much [1956] (1:04:21)

Similarly in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1956], Dr. McKenna suspects a man is following him with evil intent. However, the man simply walks past and goes to work in a taxidermy shop.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:12:02)

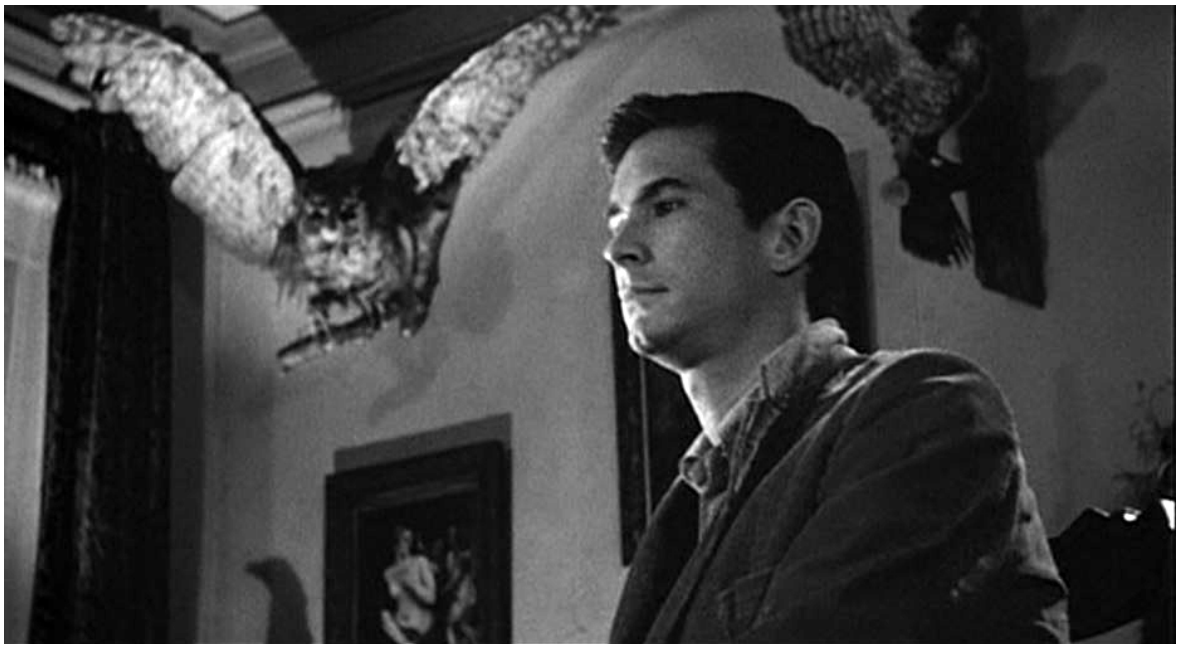
At Prairie Stop, what is a part of the normal, peaceful rural landscape, like the background buzz of insects, now looms into the foreground to become a lethal threat: the crop-dusting plane approaches. As the film moves from the urban to the rural, it destroys many of our assumptions about the difference between country life and city life. We all know the city is full of lethal terrors (including Eve who set Thornhill up for this attempt on his life), yet we harbor an idealism about the countryside. This idealism is clearly punctured as the plane swoops down on an unbelieving Thornhill – a substitute for our own disbelief at the dangers that can lay hidden in America's idealized heartland of country roads and cornfields.

To Catch a Thief [1955] (20:24)

Four years earlier, in *To Catch a Thief* [1955], Hitchcock sed a similar threatening airplane, but this was simply the police looking for John Robie, the supposed criminal, boating on the Mediterranean. With his typical sense of humor, Hitchcock named the boat, "Maquis Mouse," a pun on the Maquis (the French underground during World War II) and Mickey Mouse – a reflection on the past members of the underground's lack of support of Robie.

The 39 Steps [1935] (36:56)

Hitchcock's first "threat from the sky" was in 1935 with what then was the latest in high-tech, an autogyro, chasing Hannay in *The 39 Steps* [1935].



Psycho [1960] (40:05)

The image of an attack from the air seems to have stuck with Hitchcock through his next few films. *Psycho* [1960], his next film, is full of bird imagery and names (Marion "Crane"). This avian imagery is multiplied and made even more vicious in *The Birds* [1963].

To escape the machine gunning from the plane, Thornhill grovels on the ground and hides in a field. The plane then reverts to its original function – crop dusting. Perhaps the machine gun is too strongly associated with the city and does not function well out here in the countryside.

By being the subject of crop dusting, Thornhill is treated like little more than an intrusive insect. The dead corn stalks provide him no protection because they are a metaphor for his own life – dry, unproductive, and brittle. Furthermore, the graphics of the cornfield resemble the grid lines that opened the film. At the beginning Thornhill was trapped in the Manhattan office building and all it implied in terms of conformity and that version of the ideology of success. Now he is trapped in the cornfield with what it represents – lack of growth, dryness of spirit, the inability to nourish and so on. Bodily, as Thornhill rolls on the ground avoiding machine gun bullets and hides crouching in the dry corn field, he is at the physically lowest point in the film. From here, physical, and psychologically, there is nowhere to go but up.

Again, Hitchcock demonstrates his knowledge of depth psychology: in order to recover, one must first fall, fail, and be deflated. Thornhill's deflation is now complete. This is the nadir of his psychic journey; from now on we will see Thornhill slowly gain power over himself and over his circumstances.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:13:33)

Continuing the mythological numerology Hitchcock so loves, the crop-dusting plane makes three passes at Thornhill before he begins to run. Once inside the cornfield, the plane makes another set of three attacks, with the final pass ending in an explosion as the plane wobbles into a passing green gasoline truck.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:15:17)

The gasoline truck explosion is another bit emphasizing the contrast between city and country. Normally, we would expect the greatest danger to be in the city, yet here the only explosion in the film and the most ominous and anonymous murder attempt takes place in the mid-western heartland, the very place where America, at least in 1959, placed its idealistic "clean" versus the city's "dirty."

Hitchcock continues his previously established hermetic symbolism. The red dot on the side of the truck is similar to the red dot on the front of the train that brought Roger and Eve from New York to Chicago. The meeting of the two driving forces of the film, blue green and red finally meet head on. The result is a fiery inferno. On the burning airplane we see the number "05," one of the numbers of special interests to Hitchcock.

Hitchcock is never beyond an obscure, in-group joke: the name on the side of the fuel truck is "Magnum Oil." It turns out Hitchcock's son-in-law worked, at the time, for the Magnum Oil Company.

Again, it is Hitchcock's restraint that adds to the horror of this sequence. Unlike what most other filmmakers would do, he does not show the pilot and the gunner in the plane – one of Vandamm's henchmen is simply not seen for the rest of the film. A lesser film maker would show their grinning faces, the finger squeezing the trigger, Thornhill as a mere insect target

far below, the plane's view of the gasoline truck coming closer and closer, and finally their faces writhing in agony as their plane, and they along with it, burn to a crisp. While these scenes might add to the excitement of the scene, they would detract from the sheer terror of being pursued by a faceless, nameless enemy machine coming from the sky and attacking without warning, without reason, and without mercy. It is this nameless terror Hitchcock seeks for this episode. And to add to Thornhill's isolation, the whole 8-minute sequence is done without music.

Over the years, the "crop dusting scene" has become classic. It has been repeated and referenced in many films from the helicopter scene in *From Russia with Love* [1963] to the corn field in *The X-Files* [1998] with the buzzing crop-dusting plane transformed into buzzing bees. It even appears in several *Simpsons* episodes.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:15:40)

Toward the end of the Prairie Stop sequence, we see another example of Hitchcock's strong graphic sense: the heads of the onlookers (including the tilt of the hat) form a "V" pointing to Thornhill at the bottom. This is a graphic symbolization of his psychological deflation.

Murder! [1930] (07:24)

The use of the "V" shape to bring the viewer's attention to the central figure is used by Hitchcock in almost every film he made. It appears as early as 1930 in *Murder!* Now, however, the graphics and the psychology have been united.

After the crop-dusting plane crashes into the gasoline truck, Roger escapes back to Chicago by driving off in one of the onlookers' truck. The stealing of the truck parallels Roger's earlier "stealing" of the taxi in New York.

The habits Roger acquired in his life on Madison Avenue, as despicable as they are, become useful. The first of these conversions is his alcoholism – it saved his life in driving the Mercedes. Now his other "talents" come into play also – stealing cars, getting room numbers from hotel clerks, etc. It is typical in mythology that as the hero matures, what were once his faults now become advantages (just think of Dumbo's ears or Jack's "worthless" beans).

The Prairie Stop sequence offers a different kind of suspense from much of Hitchcock's work. His suspense specialty is giving the audience information the protagonist lacks alternating with the character knowing more than the audience. Here, however, we and Roger discover each incident at the same time.

This is very different than the suspense of foreknowledge in, say, *Sabotage* [1936] where we follow, for about 10 minutes of film time, a boy unknowingly carrying a bomb about to explode. In screenings of this film, people try to hold their breath and try, often unsuccessfully, not to shout a warning at the screen.

Actually *North by Northwest* may be one of the few films in which Hitchcock uses all three types of suspense: the character knows more than the audience (as in the fake assassination at the Mt. Rushmore cafeteria), where the audience knows more than the character (as in the note Eve passes to Vandamm on the train), and simultaneous discovery (as here in Prairie Stop).

Family Plot [1976] (1:30:31)

What is remarkable about the scene at Prairie Stop is that Hitchcock repeats it in shortened form, almost *verbatim* in *Family Plot* [1976]. The evil Malone chases George and Blanche down a highway trying to run them down with his car. They jump away and Maloney drives his car over a cliff. It is done in seconds with little suspense or tension. Self-satire?

83. BACK TO EVE'S HOTEL

North by Northwest [1959] (1:16:09)

Thornhill drives to Chicago in the stolen truck hauling a refrigerator. He abandons it on East Congress Plaza Drive and about 5 Michigan Avenue at the entrance to Grant Park before the sculptures known as *The Bowman* and *The Spearman*. What is odd about these sculptures is that both are missing their weapons, the bow and arrow and the spear. These may relate to Vandamm's unsuccessful attempt on Thornhill's life.

That this location was specifically picked by Hitchcock for its meaning is clear. It is 3-½ miles from the Ambassador East Hotel! What rational person would abandon a truck on a busy main street and then walk 3-½ miles to the hotel where he wanted to go? I would abandon it around the corner from the hotel on a dark street or in an alley. Clearly, Hitchcock is saying something.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:16:42)

Once back in Chicago, Roger goes to the hotel where he believes Kaplan is staying. Just as he returned to the Townsend Mansion from the courthouse to investigate the circumstances of the attempt on his life, now he returns to the Chicago Hotel from Prairie Stop to investigate the second attempt on his life. The difference reflects Thornhill's psychological growth: now he is acting on his own and alone.

In his brief introduction to the scenes in the Ambassador East Hotel at 1301 North State Parkway (now the Public Hotel at 11 Goethe St.), Hitchcock returns to the hermetic color symbolism he so carefully established. Thornhill enters the hotel between two green cars representing the danger and evil inside, but past a doorman in a bright red uniform implying he is still on his road to healing. And, as we have now come to expect, a woman in a red coat precedes him.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:16:47)

At the front desk, Thornhill learns that Kaplan left early that morning. Kaplan left Chicago before Eve "called" him. Thornhill suddenly realizes Eve lied to him. His soiled suit now reflects his newly soiled ideals.

To his surprise, he sees Eve entering an elevator. Is Eve Kaplan? Through a little trickery, he manages to get her room number. Notice that what he asked his mother to do for him in the Plaza Hotel in New York, he can now accomplish for himself. One of the signs of his growing maturity is that he is no longer dependent on his mother.

When he follows her upstairs, perhaps he is following the ultimate in red – Eve is completely enveloped in a bright red dress, red necklace, red ring.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:17:37)

How much of Roger's distrust of Eve comes from his own checkered past experiences with women, especially his ex-wives, we never know. But given Hitchcock's penchant for presenting current psychic damage deriving from past events (a common theme in *films noir* which much of Hitchcock's work echoes) like Alicia in *Notorious* [1946] and Ballantyne in *Spellbound* [1945], we can assume Roger is no different. In addition, Roger realizes Eve's "message" was not only phony but was part of the plot to kill him at Prairie Stop. In parallel to the opening scene in Thornhill's Madison Avenue building, Eve now stops to buy a newspaper.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:19:01)

When Roger bursts into Eve's room, she is in obvious conflict. Her personal feelings toward Roger (with the love theme swelling on the soundtrack) are directly opposed by her dedication to both Vandamm and the Professor. Roger's distrust is clear from their embrace: she fully takes him into her arms while he keeps his hands open in a telling gesture. His hand gesture here is reminiscent of his hands held near Eve's head while necking standing up on the train.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:19:19)

As Eve gets a drink for Roger, he glances down at a newspaper describing the incident at Prairie Stop. Just to remind us we are watching a film about the Cold War, Hitchcock places another article halfway down the page: "Diary Tells How Russians 'Hired' German Rocketmen."

Another symbol of Eve's emotional turmoil is that she adds ice to both their drinks when Thornhill specifically says, "no ice." Is she trying to cool off both her emotions of conflicted love and his emotion of growing anger?

North by Northwest [1959] (1:20:53)

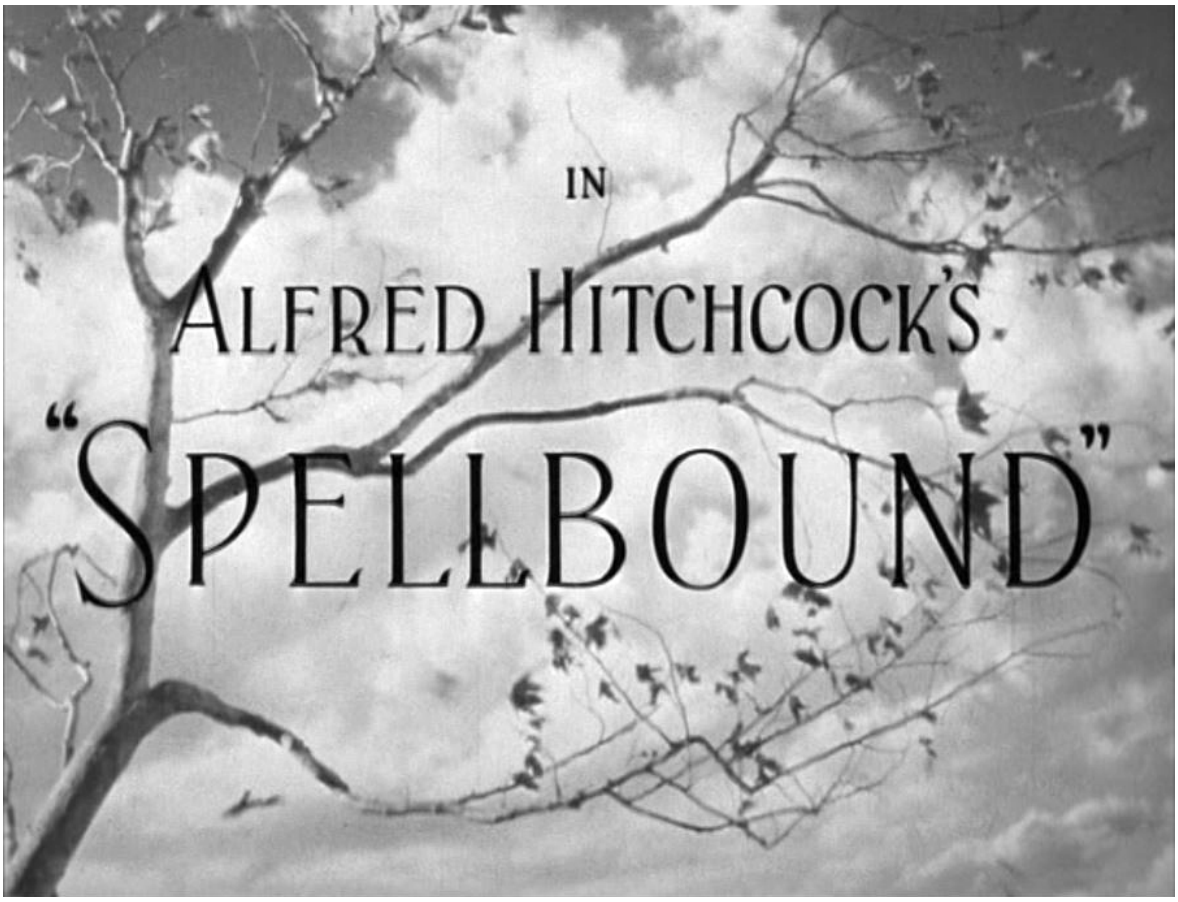
North by Northwest [1959] (1:22:12)

As Eve moves around the room, we see her various feelings projected, or reflected, in the various backgrounds she stands before. She begins very businesslike, spy-business-like, with a painting on the wall behind her: a branch with no leaves, but a smattering of small white flowers. A few moments later, responding more emotionally and trying to save Roger's life, she

stands next to a lush array of beautiful white flowers. It is almost as if the previously insignificant flowers suddenly burst forth into a full display of emotions.

The Farmer's Wife [1928] (49:18)

Much earlier, in his silent film period, Hitchcock already used this type of symbolism. In *The Farmer's Wife* [1928], farmer Sweetland just proposed marriage and was rejected – which he does not take well. Upset, he angrily rides from the farm with a bare tree in the foreground symbolizing his mood. Note that every other tree in the scene (obviously photographed in the studio) is covered with leaves.



Spellbound [1945] (01:01)

Under the titles of *Spellbound* [1945], Hitchcock uses a similar image of a bare twisted tree slowly losing its leaves to symbolize emotional loss. The similarity to the Japanese-style branch in Eve's hotel room is striking. The major difference being that Eve's branch has a few sparse flowers, a sign of hope.

84. SEXY PURSES

North by Northwest [1959] (1:21:32)

Eve receives a call from Vandamm and writes down an address promising to meet him later. Roger will later use his city wiles to learn the address and follow her. She carefully folds the note and puts it into her purse.

Suddenly another aspect of Eve is revealed. She has a gun in her purse! How is this gun to be used? To protect herself? From Vandamm? To shoot someone? Roger? Vandamm?

The symbology makes the scene even more complex. While purses are generally female genital symbols, guns are most often male genital symbols. So, lurking within Eve's feminine attributes are elements of traditional male power. Compare this representation of female power to the power displayed by Thornhill's mother: control through infantalization.

This scene also provides evidence as to Hitchcock's attention to clothing. He was dissatisfied with the studio-provided costume designs and instead took Eva Marie Saint to Bergdorf-Goodman department store in New York to buy what he thought appropriate off the shelf – including this symbolically

all-important red dress and purse – one can see the Bergdorf-Goodman label in the purse.

Downhill [1927] (18:07)

Hitchcock uses purse symbology in several other films. In *Downhill* [1927], when the pregnant Mable is about to falsely accuse Roddy of being the father, her heavy purse slips off her lap. The too-full purse is a wonderful symbol for pregnancy and slipping off her lap and onto the ground a wonderful symbol for her deceitfulness.

Psycho [1960] (09:57)

In another example, *Psycho* [1960]'s Marion puts the envelope containing the about-to-be-stolen $40,000 into a white purse sitting on her lap. While it may be a coincidence, the sexual/anatomical relationship is hard to ignore.

Psycho [1960] (12:51)

After she steals the money, she puts it into a black purse. We already saw her underwear change from white to black after the theft. The obvious

sexuality of the underwear is now attached to the perhaps less obvious sexuality of the purse.

Marnie [1964] (02:31)

Hitchcock begins *Marnie* [1964] with a close-up of a very sexually-symbolic purse, one into which Marnie stuffed handfuls of money, her substitute for normal sexuality.

Throughout his films Hitchcock makes symbolic references to sex and sexuality. In addition to purses, Hitchcock seems to use sexual symbolisms whenever he thinks he can get away with it. Here are a few examples.

The Ring [1927] (22:35)

In *The Ring* [1927], when the future lover gives the object of his affection a bracelet, the camera cuts to a vibrating kettle with steam veritably about to explode out of it.

The Ring [1927] (58:25)

Later in the same film, the boxer's wife is sleeping with another man. During a celebration, the boxer is about to open a bottle of champagne when Hitchcock cuts to the adulterous couple ascending an elevator with the intention of having sex. At just that moment the champagne bottle ejaculates its contents.

The Manxman [1929] (34:07)

In *The Manxman* [1929], a couple's lust for each other is symbolized by the woman starting a grain mill – the large stones turning and grinding upon each other.

Suspicion [1941] (10:22)

In *Suspicion* [1941], ne'er-do-well Johnnie just met slightly over-age and virginal Lina and, without permission, reaches into her purse to take a postage stamp to make up the price of his railway ticket. She instantly and inexplicably falls madly in love with him. The surface explanation is she finds him physically attractive (it is Cary Grant, after all). Yet his rummaging in her purse has symbolic sexual meanings too.

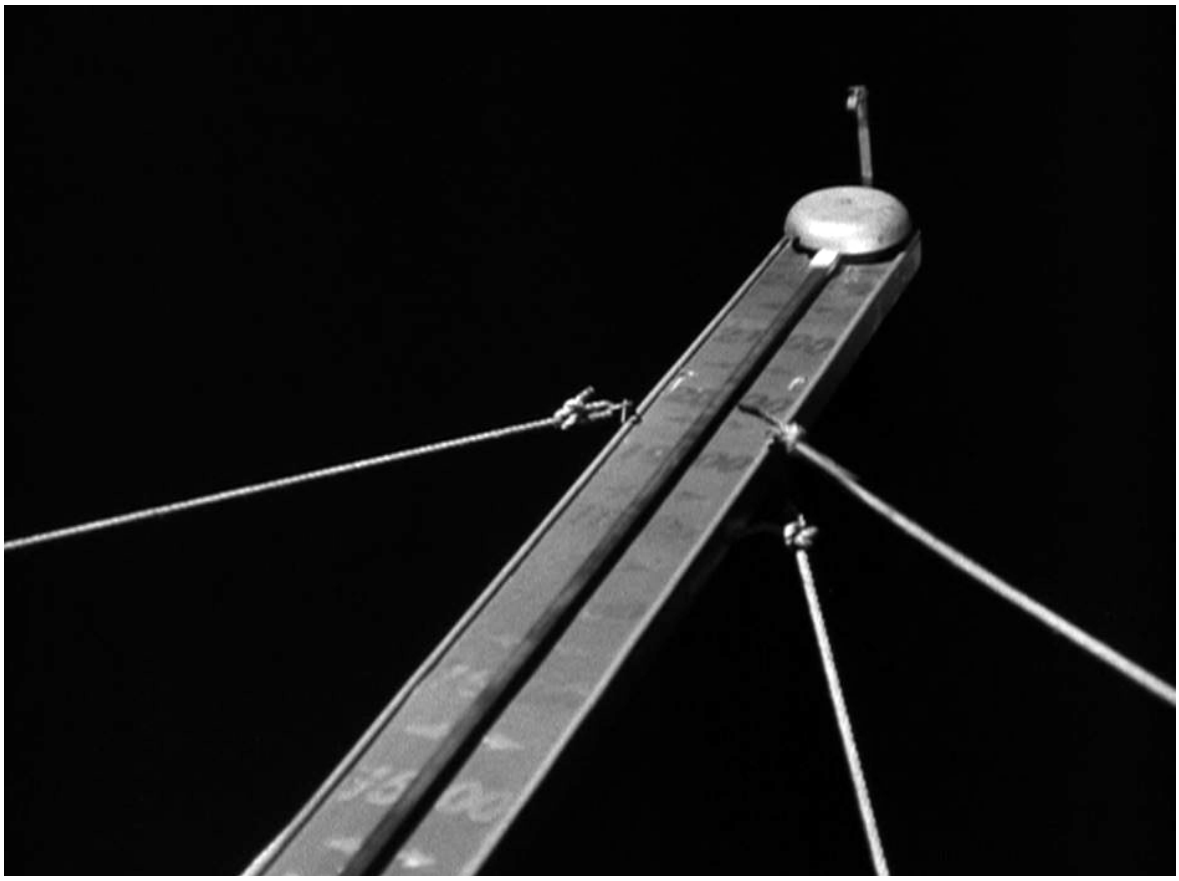
In addition, if we are willing to push the sexual symbolisms a little further, the stamp he purloins from her purse is something that is to be licked. This brings to mind the thinly veiled talk of oral sex during Eve and Roger's dinner conversation on the train to Chicago. Hitchcock makes the sexual symbolisms of the purse perfectly clear when Johnnie attempts to kiss Lina and she turns her head away while at the same time snapping her purse shut!

Mr. and Mrs. Smith [1941] (25:35)

The same year Hitchcock uses another device in his screwball comedy, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* [1941]. Ann and David are on their way to bed and David is looking forward to a night of sex. On the way, he twirls a very phallic bottle of Champagne while she holds two bulbous glasses directly over her breasts.

Easy Virtue [1928] (25:01)

Much earlier in *Easy Virtue* [1928], Hitchcock makes a similar visual double entendre by having Franklin Dyall hold and shake a cocktail shaker suspiciously low.



Strangers on a Train [1951] (22:52)

Strangers on a Train [1951] (23:04)

In *Strangers on a Train* [1951], Hitchcock uses different, slightly less blatant sexual symbolism. Bruno, in order to attract and impress the promiscuous Miriam, proves his prowess in the carnival by using a large mallet in a strength machine. When he "rings the bell," Miriam looks at him with sexual appreciation . . . especially since the two boys she is with could only raise the weight about halfway up.

Spellbound [1945] (16:28)

However, one of the most remarkable and blatant (hidden in plain sight) examples of Hitchcock's sexual symbolisms is in *Spellbound* [1945]. Constance uses a fork to draw the shape of a swimming pool onto a table-cloth. Its resemblance to a vagina is unmistakable. And in typical Freudian fashion – the point of the film – John Ballantyne freaks out. And to make things even more barefaced, Ballantyne picks up a knife, presumably silver but carefully photograph to appear black, and in an attempt to erase the figure, begins rubbing this obvious penis over the vagina.

85. THE SUIT & THE SHOWER

North by Northwest [1959] (1:23:50)

Meanwhile, at Eve's insistence Thornhill has his suit cleaned to remove the soil of the assassination attempt. Symbolically, Roger is cleaning up his persona, his outward demeanor. He has learned a lot in the last few hours and is now integrating that knowledge into his personality.

He is no longer being led around by Eve; now he is aggressive and in control – and he no longer trusts her. And, most significantly, he takes control of his own sexuality: he tells her to stop trying to seduce him. He is now independent of control by women. For the first time in the film, he is able to make self-governing decisions. From this point forward, Roger becomes the investigator who aggressively, not passively, delves into the mysteries of both the external world of international spies and the internal world of his own psyche.

The film's last reference to Thornhill's mother is a statement of his independence from her. He says that, as a boy, he would not let his mother undress him. While this may imply that his reluctance to be undressed by her was caused by the fear of an incestuous relationship with his mother (recalling the relation between Bruno and his mother in *Strangers on a Train*

[1951]), it also seems to be a recollection of about the only thing she didn't do for him.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:25:27)

Roger now pretends to take a shower. No longer naïve but in charge of the situation, he watches through a crack in the door knowing Eve will break her promise to him and leave. Roles have reversed: It is he who now takes advantage of her naïveté rather than she manipulating him.

To convince Eve he is really taking a shower, what better than to depend on the clichés of showering: the noise of the water and whistling a tune from one of the most popular films of the 1950s, *Singin' in the Rain* [1952].

The shower, or rather non-shower, scene also involves Roger undertaking a subterfuge – lying to Eve. He lied before, several times. But usually for some expediency or laziness on his part. Now he is undertaking a no-holds-barred investigation of his circumstances.

Foreign Correspondent [1940] (46:02)

Hitchcock uses an almost identical scene in *Foreign Correspondent* [1940]: Huntley Haverstock, trying to escape from some henchmen (disguised as police – another Hitchcock theme), dressed only in his underwear and a bathrobe, retreats to the bathroom and fakes a bath while escaping out of a window.

But Thornhill's shower has more implications. He took off his clothes. And clothes, according to Jung, are symbolic of the Persona, that outermost layer of the personality we present to others in everyday life. Roger's persona was that of the conforming Madison Avenue advertising man. All that changed during his encounter at Prairie Stop, where his outer layer, i.e., his clothes, were literally and metaphorically soiled. Between Prairie Stop and the art auction, Roger changes his persona from the naive, passive, average American Joe (or Roger) to an active participant and determinant of his own future. Removing his old clothes, that is, his Persona, is necessary for that change. He will soon put on his old clothes again, but now cleaned. We will have to wait until Rapid City for a complete change of clothes.

Had he really taken the shower, we would have no difficulty in explaining it as cleansing of his old self, baptism, etc. However, he is not cleansed. He does not get rid of his old habits, rather he now uses them to a new purpose. The rest of the story is not about a clean, idealized American hero. Rather it is about a corrupt and selfish man who uses his corruption and selfishness to join with others who are perhaps even more corrupt than he, like the Professor, to fight those who are still more corrupt.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:25:46)

As soon as Eve departs, Roger leaves the fake shower and immediately goes to the notepad on which Eve wrote the address given her by her "client." Roger, by this time, is intensely suspicious of Eve and recognizes that her "client" has nothing to do with the "industrial design business." Knowing Eve took the note with her, he turns to the next leaf of the pad, rubs it with a pencil and materializes the address.

This seemingly insignificant act celebrates Roger's newfound ability to look below obvious surfaces to discover truths.

Armed with the address, Roger is on the offensive for the first time in the film. And it is off to the art auction.

86. THE ART AUCTION

North by Northwest [1959] (1:25:19)

Continuing with the hermetic color symbolism Hitchcock established in the opening frames of the film, Thornhill arrives at 1212 North Michigan Avenue, the Shaw and Oppenheim Galleries art auction house, the place where he will discover the true depth of evil into which he has been plunged. The relation between Eve and Vandamm will be revealed. Government secrets will be bought. And another attempt will be made on his life. No wonder he arrives in a green cab while a green bus is passing by.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:26:36)

Roger follows Eve to the address on the notepad: an art auction. The sequence is not only complex in the plot points but is one of the most elegantly and subtly constructed sequences in all of Hitchcock's films.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:26:10)

Let us keep in mind that an art auction is a place where objects of beauty or cultural importance are sold to the highest bidder. In this atmosphere, Roger spies Eve sitting next to the ever-suave Vandamm. From Roger's point of view, we see a close-up of the back of her neck being rather mechanically and stiffly caressed by Vandamm's stubby, claw-like hand. At the same time, we hear the auctioneer saying, ". . . this magnificent . . ." Obviously, Vandamm's caress are in response to the "magnificence" of his mistress, and, in his inflation he probably sees their relation as "magnificent."

As happens so often with Hitchcock, one aspect of a film comments and explains another. Eve is available to the highest bidder; Vandamm bought her affections. The auction becomes a metaphor for the relation between Vandamm and Eve – people bought and sold.

The Man Who Knew Too Much [1956] (44:21)

Hitchcock used this gesture of possessiveness before. In the 1956 version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, a man who thinks he is in control of his own life and his wife, physically and emotionally, makes the same shoulder holding gesture with an almost identical claw-like hand.

The camera now slowly pulls back to show both Vandamm and Eve, and then still further to show Roger standing at the back of the auction room, taking it all in, confirming his suspicions.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:27:11)

During the auction, all the characters reveal their feelings. Thornhill is justifiably irate at Vandamm and Leonard for trying to kill him (both at the Townsend mansion and at Prairie Stop) and at Eve for having been taken in by her and betrayed. His wounded sense of (sexual) pride seems to have an equal impact on his ego as did the murder attempts, perhaps even more so.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:27:57)

In another example of a flaw being used to advantage, Thornhill, with his previously adolescent sexuality now under control, can now instinctively recognize it in someone else – Vandamm – and uses it to drive a wedge between Eve and Vandamm. When Vandamm learns that Thornhill was in Eve's room – "Hasn't everybody?" – he removes his hand as if he suddenly realizes his prize possession is in some way contaminated. Thus, like Roger, Vandamm's vulnerable spot is his male pride. So, there are not only parallels between Eve and Thornhill, but also between Thornhill and Vandamm. More of these will be brought out later in the film.

The irony here is that of the pot calling the kettle black. No matter what Eve has done wrong, morally, or ethically, it pales in comparison to Vandamm's crimes. Hitchcock intensifies this by combining Roger's accusations about Eve's services being for sale with Vandamm bidding for a pre-Columbian statuette. One is not exactly sure which Vandamm is bidding on.

Vandamm's reason for going to the auction is to pick up a statuette containing a microfilm of government secrets. Just as Hitchcock emphasizes our (according to Hitchcock) incorrect assumptions about the evils of city life and the safety of the rural world, here he similarly inverts the popularly held values regarding the art world. This art auction is really a trysting place for a den of spies out to destroy America. Art itself is the carrier of the seeds of America's destruction.

The statuette is a work of pre-Columbian art. Even this most ancient and elegant of art forms ironically contains the most modern of communications and destruction – microfilm that contains who knows what kind of atomic secrets. The choice of the shape of the sculpture allows Hitchcock to later make a pun: its shape will later allow Thornhill to call it a "pumpkin," which, as we shall see, has considerably political implications.

The relation between Vandamm and Eve is in many ways a mirror image of the relationship between Roger and his mother. Vandamm is parental and controlling. His control is through power and jealousy while Roger's mother's is through manipulation and disempowerment . . . and both will do just about anything for money. The difference is that Eve has consciously made the decision to place herself under Vandamm's power while Roger has made no such decision. In relation to a controlling figure, Eve is conscious while Thornhill is unconscious.

Jealousy fascinates Hitchcock – even though he does not study it often. While in *North by Northwest*, little comes of Vandamm's jealousy of Roger even though we must wonder what proportion of his decision to have Roger killed at the auction house is jealousy. As early as 1927 in *The Lodger*, jealousy is a powerful force driving people into unknown areas of their psyche. Detective Joe's jealousy of the lodger drives him to conclude, with only the thinnest of evidence, that the lodger/rival is a mass murderer. And the consequences are almost lethal for an innocent man.

At the art auction, we now get a flood of theatrical references: Vandamm points out that Thornhill is playing three roles: the outraged Madison Avenue advertising executive, the fugitive from a crime he knows he didn't commit, and now the peevish lover. (In parallel, we later find the Eve, too, plays three roles.) Actually, Vandamm misinterprets Thornhill's expression of emotions (something that Roger has not done up to this point) as a trick, a piece of melodrama.

The art auction scene also reads in terms of Cold War propaganda: rather than recognize a simple American truth, the foreign spy projects his own Byzantine thoughts on every situation. Vandamm's inability to read the commonplace – like love – eventually leads to his downfall. Thus, Vandamm's flaw (being himself incapable of feelings beyond rudimentary jealousy) is his inability to recognize love when he sees it. This, of course, is also Roger's error, for he cannot recognize love when he feels it. But the difference is Thornhill can learn and change, while Vandamm cannot and is thus doomed.

We are reminded here that the film has been full of theatrical references from the very beginning: "I have two tickets for the Winter Garden Theater," Roger complains when he is being kidnapped. And now Vandamm comments that Roger needs more lessons from the Actors Studio and less from the FBI, to which Roger replies, "Apparently the only performance that's going to satisfy you is when I play dead." Vandamm: "Your very next role. You'll be quite convincing, I assure you." Of course, his next role *will* be to "*play* dead." And he will be convincing indeed when Eve shoots him with fake bullets.

The mention of “The Actor’s Studio” is another in-group joke on Hitchcock’s and perhaps writer Ernst Lehman’s part: Eva Marie Saint and Martin Landau were both members of the famed The Actor’s Studio.

87. THE COMMENTING CAMERA

North by Northwest [1959] (1:28:56)

While the text of this encounter at the art auction stresses Hitchcock's interest in theatricality, the editing does something quite different. What we see is a simple conversation between Thornhill and Vandamm. Therefore, we would expect the camera to show the two men making statements and reacting to each other's words. This is the normal way of filming a conversation.

There is a completely different message in the editing. At the words, "a peevish lover," Hitchcock first quickly cuts to Leonard and then to Eve. I believe this is a visual/editing hint at Leonard's homosexuality (the Production Code censors also seem to think so for they strenuously objected to this scene – I'm surprised that got it). It is Leonard who is the peevish lover, as the editing indicates, and Eve his rival for Vandamm's affections, again as the editing suggests.

Hitchcock used this "commenting camera" – letting the editing add a layer of information that is not in the text – many times before, but rarely so

powerfully as in *North by Northwest*. Indeed, this type of editing may be Hitchcock's favorite device for expanding the normal information flow of a film into a complexity rarely seen in other films.

Here are a few examples:

Juno and the Paycock [1929] (41:37)

In his early sound film, *Juno and the Paycock* [1929], when a man is talking about ghosts, killing people and those of a "peculiar personality," Hitchcock slowly dollies toward Johnny, signaling through his camera work that this is the traitor responsible for the death of others long before it is revealed in the text. Later when his mother is saying that a killing was the "work of an informer," Hitchcock again moves the camera to Johnny.

In *Murder!* [1930], a trial scene Hitchcock shows the prosecutor charging Diana with murder while the camera quickly cuts from one juror to the next. The brief speech ends with, "It is your duty to determine whether she is

guilty or not." During these twelve words there are cuts to five different jurors, but rather than show another juror on the last word, "not," Hitchcock cuts to Diana herself, clearly telling us she is not guilty.

When Hannay in *The 39 Steps* [1935] toward a newspaper in the crofter's house, we hear the words, "all the wickedness" reflecting the crofter's belief that the world outside his isolated farm is the root of all evil.

In 1936, he does something similar in *Sabotage*. While young Stevie is talking about what he learned from undercover policeman Ted about gangsters – that they look like everyone else – the camera doesn't look at Stevie, but slowly closes in on Verloc, Stevie's stepfather, the saboteur.

Young and Innocent [1937] (24:18)

Similarly, in 1937 in *Young and Innocent*. At the dinner table Erica's younger brother displays a rat he killed. A few moments later her other brother says that fleeing Robert will be "caught like a rat in a trap."

Shadow of a Doubt [1943] (16:10)

In *Shadow of a Doubt* [1943], Hitchcock puts a humorous spin on this editing technique. Mrs. Newton is talking on the telephone about her younger brother and that families tend to spoil the youngest. Hitchcock shows us the cringing Robert, the youngest in this family.

Spellbound [1945] (48:06)

A little more audacious by 1945, Hitchcock's "camera comment" gives *Spellbound* [1945] away . . . if we are perceptive enough to pick it up. When the assembled psychiatrists are discussing Ballantyne's various diseases, at the word "insane," Hitchcock cuts to Dr. Murchison who, it will be revealed at the end of the film, is indeed insane.

In the same film, while Dr. Peterson is explaining the concept of the guilt complex to a patient – about doing something in childhood for which one later feels guilty – the camera watches the slightly worried Dr. Edwards who, you guessed it, feels guilty about something that happened in his childhood.

In 1958 in *Vertigo*, the owner of the Argosy Book Shop describes the sad life of Carlotta Valdez to Scottie while Midge listens. At the words, "a child, a child," Hitchcock cuts to Midge telling us of her child-like and innocent devotion to Scottie – and also her child-like naiveté in being unable to grasp the depth of Scottie obsessive diseases.

Psycho [1960] (33:30)

In *Psycho* [1960], Marion just wrapped her illicit $40,000 in a newspaper (whose headline has an ironic "okay" showing). From a far distance we hear Norman Bates' "mother" shouting, "No."

Also, in *Psycho* [1960], when Tom Cassidy describes buying a house for his "baby" daughter, he says he's not "buying happiness, but buying off unhappiness." At that last word, Hitchcock cuts to the other secretary – unhappily drugged in a world in which she cannot cope with sex. Just to make sure we get the point, a few moments later Marion tells her, "You can't buy off unhappiness with pills."

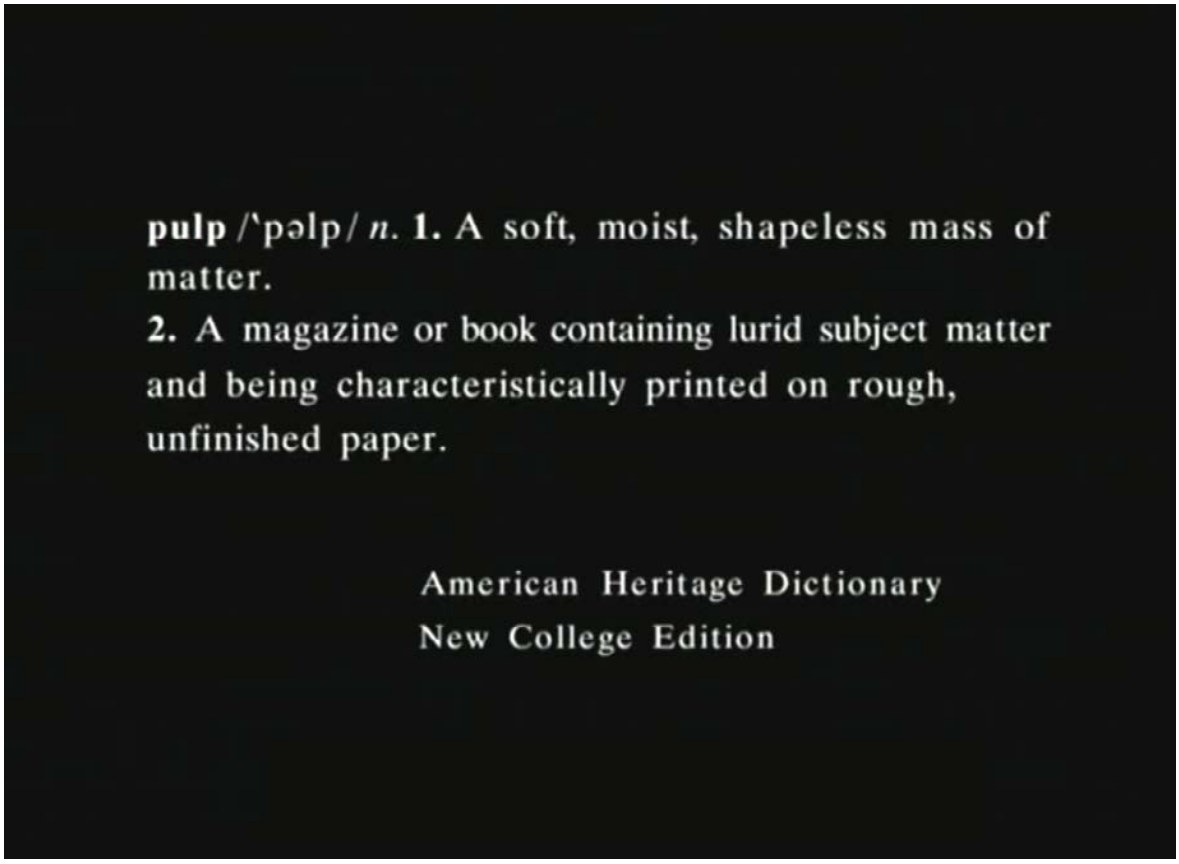
Frenzy [1972] (13:43)

In *Frenzy* [1972], a policeman asks Bob Rusk about the strangler and at the words, "a bloke like that," the film cuts to Blaney, the real criminal when all indications have pointed to Rusk.

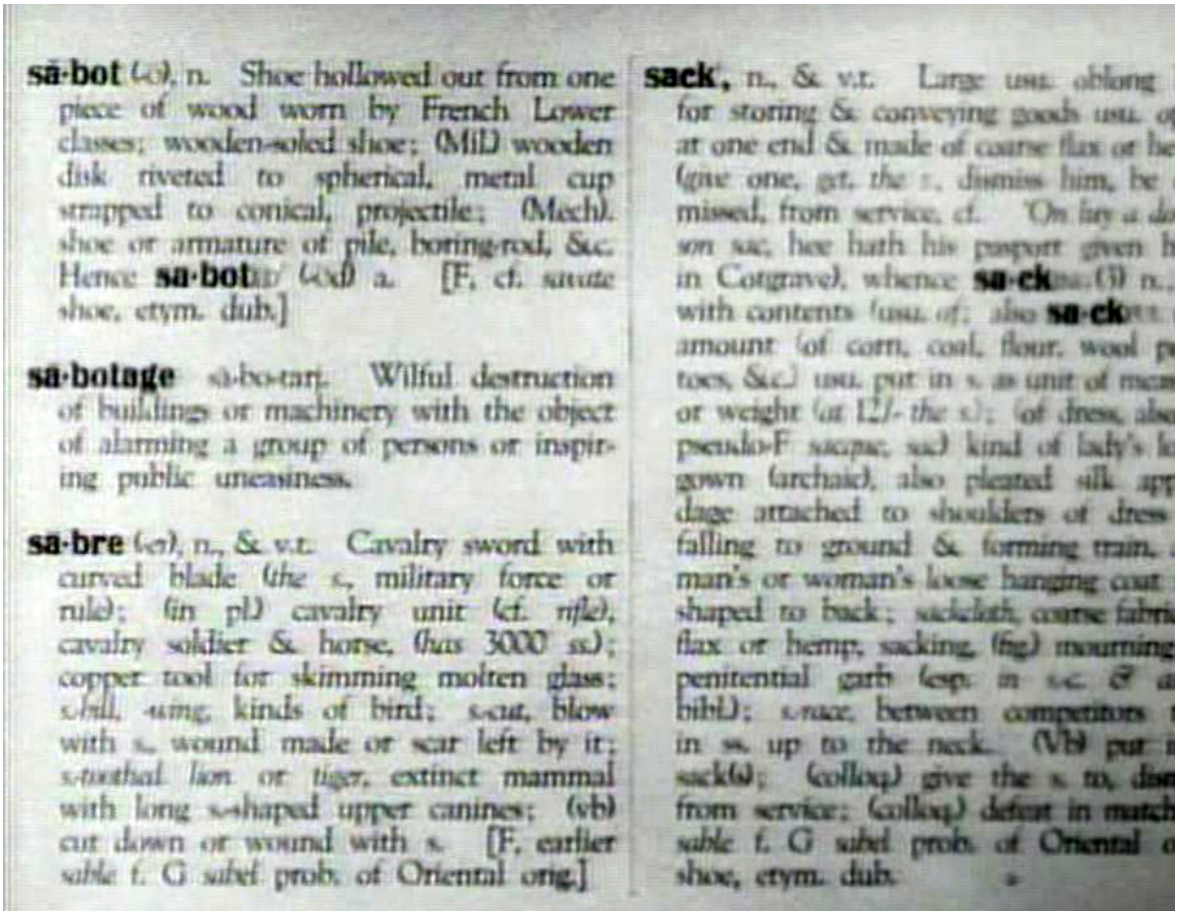
Gladiator [2000] (1:12:54) – Ridley Scott

A few contemporary directors have caught on to this technique, but rarely use with Hitchcock's subtlety. For example, in *Gladiator* [2000], during a conversation between the hero Maximus and the gladiator manager Proximus, director Ridley Scott cuts from the two men to a scraggly hyena at the mention of Rome and Commodus, the heinous Emperor. (Indeed, Scott

learned a lot from Hitchcock. Much of the battle and gladiatorial scenes are edited in the same montage technique used by Hitchcock in *Psycho* [1960]'s famous shower scene, using kinetic editing to obscure what is happening while at the same time convincing the audience it is seeing what, in fact, is not there.)



Pulp Fiction [1994] (00:14) – Quentin Tarantino



Sabotage [1936] (00:09)

Other directors have picked up on several of Hitchcock's other ideas and imitated them, perhaps as an homage. Bryan Singer takes the "lying flashback" from *Stage Fright* [1936] and expands it into a whole hit movie: *The Usual Suspects* [1995]. Quentin Tarantino borrows the opening dictionary definition in *Pulp Fiction* [1994] from *Sabotage* [1936].

88. THE CRAZY ESCAPE

North by Northwest [1959] (1:32:48)

Thornhill now finds himself trapped in the auction house with Vandamm's henchmen blocking the exits. When Roger attempts to leave, the auctioneer again echoes Thornhill's or Vandamm's thoughts. With the camera on Eve, we hear, "am I bid $1200?" Eve is still for sale.

To escape, Thornhill makes a scene, spreading disarray through the stuffy proceedings that force the auctioneer to call the police. His mad bidding makes a mockery of the auction proceedings, and, at the same time, of the art world. He demonstrates his insanity by ignoring the value of money, another thing he held sacred in his previous life on Madison Avenue. Another example of a character flaw, in this case the lust for money, being used in a positive way.

In addition, this scene recalls the people in the Plaza Hotel elevator laughing with his mother while Thornhill is deadly serious. However, the rolls have reversed. In the hotel, it was his mother who, in disbelieving her son, caused the laughter at Roger's expense. Now, in a similar situation of lethal threat, Roger is in control, generating the laughter. And like many of his character flaws that, one by one, become positive aspects of his personality, that

he is the brunt of the laughter now takes on a means of controlling those around him rather than being subject to their control.

Another echo of a previously negative situation now made salutary, is that Thornhill finds himself serious faced in the middle of a crowd that is laughing at him. The last time this happened, he was trapped in an elevator with his would-be killers. His mother, in her naiveté and disbelief, was the cause of the laughter. Now that mother is gone, Thornhill has integrated some of her negative characteristics and can now use them in a positive way. Another sign of growth.

Thornhill escapes because he can act crazy. Compare his outrageous behavior in the auction house to the tippling businessman we knew in New York – straight, uptight, and relatively unimaginative. Roger is tapping into and expanding the previously repressed and undeveloped aspects of his personality. And it is this expanding vocabulary of the psyche that here saves his life.

Hitchcock uses a similar trope – escape through generated chaos – in several previous films. We can see him slowly building up to the subtly, complexity, and sophistication he used in *North by Northwest.*

The 39 Steps [1935] (52:55)

In his first comedy-thriller, *The 39 Steps* [1935], Hannay attempts to elude the police by ducking into a building only to find himself on the speaker's platform at a political rally where he makes an extemporaneous and patently bizarre speech. But instead of being rescued by the police after his rousing ovation, he is taken off by spies pretending to be the police.

Secret Agent [1936] (1:05:56)

The "crazy escape" works better in *Secret Agent* [1936]. Hitchcock's spies escape from a chocolate factory by one feigning choking while his partner surreptitiously triggers a fire alarm. They escape in the resulting pandemonium.

Young and Innocent [1937] (46:33)

By 1937, in *Young and Innocent* suspected murderer Robert needs to escape from a birthday party when the guests become suspicious of him. During a game of blind man's bluff, the most suspicious character, the matronly mother, is blind folded allowing the escape.

Foreign Correspondent [1940] (52:29)

In *Foreign Correspondent* [1940], the two would-be assassins are trapped in a room that, at Huntley Haverstock's doing, is filled with a dozen hotel service people allowing him to escape (very reminiscent of the scene in *Night at the Opera* [1935] with the Marx Brothers).

Night at the Opera [1935] (37:06) – Sam Wood & Edmund Goulding

Saboteur [1942] (1:20:17)

In *Saboteur* [1942], Barry, trapped in a house of spies during a charity ball for the hoity-toity, gets up to make a speech intending to disclose the nefarious goings-on upstairs. Because his girlfriend is being held captive, he suddenly realizes he cannot reveal the various villainies to the public. He instead makes an improvised laudatory speech about the hostess that is mostly gibberish and nonsense.

To Catch a Thief [1955] (25:34)

John Robie destroys a flower market to escape from the police in *To Catch a Thief* [1955], but the scene is unelaborated. This scene feels like an experimental beginning that would develop into the insanity of *North by Northwest.*

Hitchcock's earlier "crazy escapes" are fresh, complex, and funny while later (after *North by Northwest*) they become perfunctory and primitive.

Torn Curtain [1966] (1:59:43)

By 1966, in *Torn Curtain*, Armstrong simply yells “fire” in a theater and ducks out the rear door during the panic. One gets the feeling that Hitchcock did not really care about how the nuclear scientist got out, he just had to get him out and the easiest way was to fall back on a tried-and-true device. While there is panic on the screen, there is a feeling of listlessness in the film making.

Topaz [1969] (08:31)

In 1969 in *Topaz*, Hitchcock uses a variation of this device. To elude Soviet henchmen in a porcelain factory, Tamara Kusenov simply picks up, drops, and breaks a figurine to cause a distraction enabling her to sneak into a private office and thus escape.

At one point in the art auction, Roger questions the authenticity of a piece of art. He does not know the piece bought by Vandamm is indeed a fake – it contains the microfilm everyone is after. Further irony is added as a woman, unaware he has been mistaken for a spy and a murderer, turns to Roger and loudly observes that he is "not a fake, but a genuine idiot." In fact, he *is* a fake and he most decidedly is *not* genuine.

89. THE PROFESSOR TAKES ACTION

North by Northwest [1959] (1:34:06)

Sitting quietly and anonymously amongst the bidders is the Professor. In a way, like Vandamm, he too is there to buy. Unlike Vandamm, he is here watching his investments – Eve and Roger. As things spiral out of (his) control, he finally takes action. Moments after Roger starts his bidding war, we see the Professor on the phone.

Tarantula [1955] (08:34) – Jack Arnold

Hitchcock's choice of Leo G. Carroll to play the duplicitous "Professor" is perfect. He's played a similar roles in many films, from Hitchcock's own *Spellbound* [1945] to Jack Arnold's sci-fi potboiler *Tarantula* [1955] where . . . he plays a duplicitous "Professor."

How did the Professor wind up at the auction? One possibility is that Eve told him. However, this is unlikely. She had little time from the moment she wrote down Vandamm's message at the hotel to the time she arrived at the auction house. The other, more sinister possibility is that the Professor has himself been spying on either Eve or Roger or both.

If this is so, and it seems likely, Roger is the victim of multiple surveillance. He has been watched through almost the whole episode – certainly from the incident at the United Nations on, perhaps even before – watched by Vandamm and watched by the Professor.

The idea of Roger as the victim of surveillance or the victim of voyeurism fits well into the Cold War ideology of 1959 and into Hitchcock's oeuvre in which voyeurism is often central to his films. If, according to the political hysteria of the day, anyone could be a Communist and thus a spy, then anyone could be an equally anonymous counterspy. Both Communists and anti-Communists looked like everyone else. Both Herbert Philbrick (left), spy and counterspy, and Senator Joseph McCarthy (right), Communist hunter, looked pretty ordinary.

Hitchcock used the character of the omniscient and cold-hearted Professor before. In *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1934], Gibson comes from the Foreign Office to explain what has been going on to poor Bob and Jill Lawrence whose child has been kidnapped. Cruelly, he puts all responsibility for the child's safety on the parents.

Hitchcock has always been fascinated with people watching other people and the parallel act of the camera – under his direction, of course – watching people. *North by Northwest* echoes these ideas in that Thornhill is an unsuspecting victim of being watched by Vandamm, Eve, and the Professor who are at the same time watching each other. And, at another level, all are being watched by Hitchcock . . . and by us.

At the time of *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock had just finished *Vertigo* [1958], his film most concerned with voyeurism. Private investigator Scottie first follows, then obsesses on Madeline. His blindness prevents him from solving the crime and preventing Madeline's death. He is the ultimate movie voyeur. In *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock seems to have reversed his position: Instead of identifying with Scottie the voyeur, we now have the tables turned on us and are asked to identify with Roger, the victim of voyeurism and surveillance.

Rear Window [1954] (44:54)

Another film that represents one of Hitchcock's deepest investigations of voyeurism is *Rear Window* [1954], made a few years before *North by Northwest*. Like so many of his ideas, Hitchcock expands the idea of L. B. Jefferies watching the dozen or so people in the apartments across from his front (*sic*) window into a web of watchers being watched by other watchers. He makes it so subtle we hardly notice, being so busy watching them ourselves.

90. ESCAPE & ARREST

North by Northwest [1959] (1:33:59)

The police arrive at the auction house and save Thornhill from Vandamm's thugs. Roger comments to the police, as they haul him bodily out of the auction house, "Not so rough." We immediately see the Professor making a phone call that will relieve some of the roughness Roger is currently experiencing. However, it will simultaneously plunge him into moral and philosophical decisions that will be far rougher. It is almost as if Roger directs this comment to the Professor who previously left Roger out in the cold to die.

Thus, it is the Professor's role to push Roger into those very places in his psyche he has avoided his whole life: commitment, decision, and purpose. In this way, the Professor represents the opposite end of Roger's Shadow from Vandamm. Vandamm is evil, but the Professor represents the undeveloped possibilities that will eventually make Roger a happy man. Another prime example of this bifurcated Shadow figure appears in James Cameron's 1984 *The Terminator* where hero Sarah is faced with the negative aspects of the Shadow in the eponymous killer robot from the future and the positive aspects in the solder sent to help her.

The Professor also represents the Wise Old Man Archetype (like Obi Wan Kenobi of *Star Wars* [1977], or Merlin of the Arthurian Legends, or *Q* and *M* of the James Bond films) who functions as a guiding father figure and provides the hero with the physical (as in the case of Bond) or psychological (as in the wizard in *The Wizard of Oz* [1939]) equipment necessary to solve the physical and/or psychological problem.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:35:15)

What seems to be the arrest of an apparently insane troublemaker is really a rescue – a typical Hitchcockian inversion. Just as the police who arrested Thornhill for drunk driving at the beginning of the film are not aware of Roger's true situation, so now the police in Chicago are unaware they have one of America's most wanted sitting in the back seat of their police car. They want to book him for being drunk and disorderly (just like the police in Glen Cove at the beginning of the film). They are so dense and disbelieving that Roger must show them his driver's license to prove to them he is a criminal. But his scheme to place himself into the safe hands of the police backfires when the police car receives a call from the Professor.

In parallel to the "Detective Junket" we met back in Glen Cove, Hitchcock now introduces another policeman as inept as the first with the equally funny name of "Sergeant Flamm."

When the police car sets out for the airport rather than the police station, Thornhill fears another abduction. Indeed he is not far from the truth – being kidnapped and taken to Glen Cove put his life in danger no less than this current abduction will send him to face death on Mt. Rushmore. He now suspects that even the police are involved in some sort of elaborate conspiracy. And again, he is not far from the truth, for the police are indeed under the control of the Professor. Again, the film clearly parallels the methods of the Professor and other governmental agents with those of Vandamm.

91. THE AIRPORT

North by Northwest [1959] (1:36:40)

Hustled into the airport, Roger passes under an airline sign, "Northwest." This is *not* the direction Roger traveled from New York to Chicago (pretty much directly west) while the rest of his journey, from Chicago to Rapid City is west-northwest. The Professor's journey too is west-northwest from Washington D.C. to Chicago. These are simple distractions from the title's real meaning. As discussed previously, *North by Northwest* takes its title not from any physical direction (there is no such direction as "north-by-northwest"), but from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*:

> I am but mad north-northwest: when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a hand-saw. – Act II, scene ii.

Because this distraction appears here, let us look further at the implications of the film's title.

One of the ideas in *Hamlet* that seems to fascinate Hitchcock is the "play within the play." Very early in his career, Hitchcock uses Shakespeare openly as part of the plot. In *Murder!*, Sir John, a theatrical producer, instructs Malcolm, the suspected murderer, to "consider *Hamlet*, Act III, scene 2" (the

"play within the play"). Malcolm's reaction to the reading furthers suspicion against him.

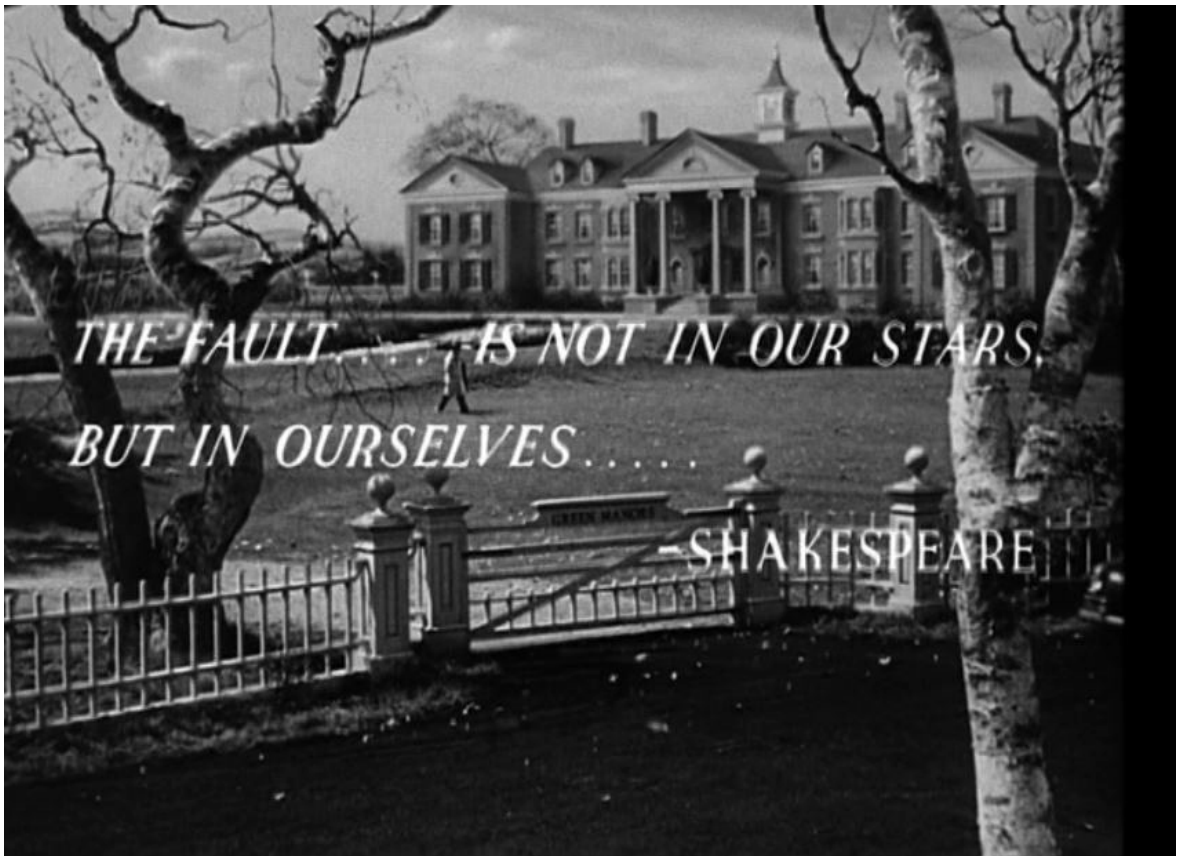
The Trouble with Harry [1955] (11:06)

The bumbling doctor who almost discovers Harry's body in *The Trouble with Harry* [1955] is reading Shakespeare's Sonnet 116, a clever comment on the film itself.

> Let me not to the marriage of true minds
> Admit impediments. Love is not love
> Which alters when it alteration finds,
> Or bends with the remover to remove:
> O no; it is an ever-fixed mark,
> That looks on tempests, and is never shaken;
> It is the star to every wandering bark,
> Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
> Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
> Within his bending sickle's compass come;
> Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
> But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
> If this be error and upon me proved,
> I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Rebecca [1940] (57:09)

Variations of the “play within a play” motif appear in various guises throughout Hitchcock’s career. For instance, in the 1940 *Rebecca* it appears in the form of watching home movies.



Spellbound [1945] (02:23)

It is clear that Hitchcock was not only familiar with *Hamlet*. He integrated many of Shakespeare's other works into his films. For instance, he begins *Spellbound* [1945] with a slightly edited quote from *Julius Caesar* Act I, Scene 2. And the title of *Rich and Strange* [1931] is from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*:

> "Full fathom five they father lies,
> Of his bones are coral made,
> Those are pearls that were his eyes:
> Nothing of him that doth fade,
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange."

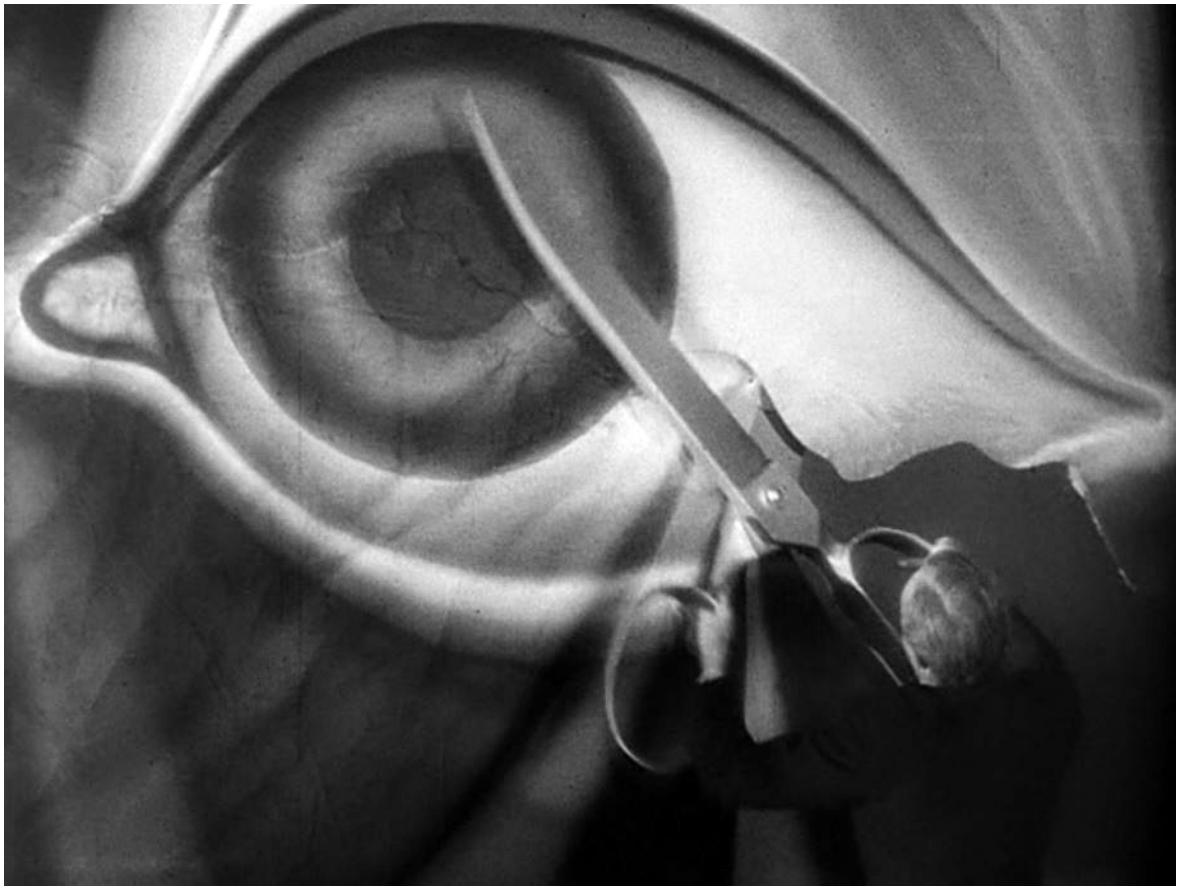
Rope [1948] (33:06)

In *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1934], Abbott, the villain, misquotes (after all, he is the villain) *Hamlet*. The whole of *Rope* [1948] is a reference to *Titus Andronicus*, albeit obliquely, in its presentation of cannibalism displaced – the father is given a meal served from a large chest holding the body of his dead son. In *Foreign Correspondent* [1940] even the working class Johnny Jones, recently renamed Huntley Haverstock, quotes *Romeo and Juliet*. Villain Rico Parra in *Topaz* [1969] misquotes (villains cannot seem to get it right) *Hamlet*, “a journey from which no traveler ever returns.” (". . . to that undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveller returns.")

That the title of *North by Northwest* has multiple meanings and references should not surprise us. In *The Ring* [1927], one of Hitchcock’s earliest films, the title refers not only to the boxing ring in which the two men, Jack and Bob, compete for their love, “The Girl,” but also to the wedding ring Jack gives her that figures prominently in the action and becomes a symbol for a chaste marriage. Additionally, the title refers to the ring-shaped bracelet,

sometimes flaunted, sometimes hidden, Bob gives her that becomes a symbol of adultery.

92. HITCHCOCK AND THE ARTS



Spellbound [1945] (1:31:16)

Hitchcock's films are peppered with borrowings not just Shakespeare, but from all areas of art, music and literature: Sir Humphrey in *Jamaica Inn* [1939] quotes Byron upon first seeing Mary Yelland. *Easy Virtue* [1928] begins with a famous quote from the rather obscure Sir John Vanbrugh, "Virtue is its own reward." Constance in *Lifeboat* [1944] quotes Kipling, "The sins ye do by two and two, we must pay for one by one." Young Ann Newton in *Shadow of a Doubt* [1943] is reading Ivanhoe. The first portion of *The Manxman* [1929] is a variant on Edmund Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. In *Dial M for Murder* [1954], Margo's handbag rests on two books: "Leonardo da Vinci" and "Giovanni Bellini." And, to top it off, Melanie in *The Birds* [1963] states she is enrolled in a course in General Semantics.

In the world of painting, Salvador Dali's "eye-opening" dreamscapes in *Spellbound* [1945] are perhaps the most recognizable. But Hitchcock quoted many other paintings and painters in his films. A few examples:

John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* is echoed in *Vertigo* [1958] when Madeline/Judy tries to drown herself in San Francisco bay.

John Everett Millais *Ophelia* (1851-1852)

Vertigo [1958] (45:17)

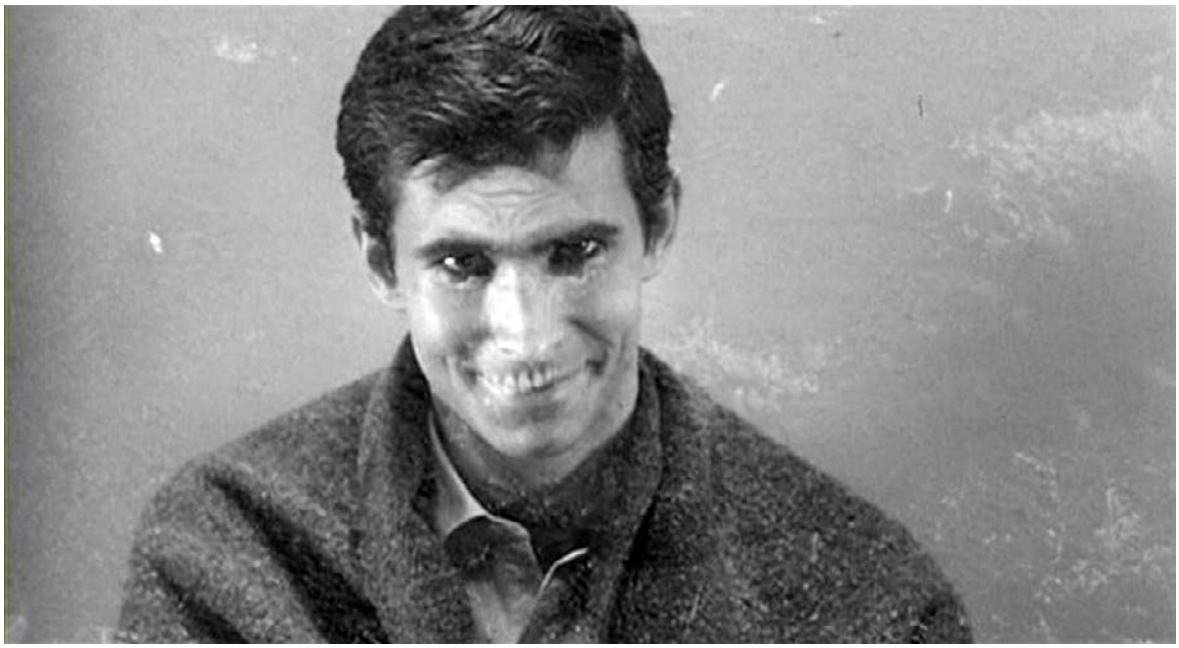
Edward Hopper's *The House by the Railroad* inspired the Second Empire Victorian house behind the Bates Motel in *Psycho* [1960].

Edward Hopper *The House by the Railroad* (1925)

Psycho [1960] (1:34:32)

The skull image flashed upon “mother’s” face at the end of *Psycho* [1960] reminds us of the hidden skull in Holbein’s *The Ambassadors*.

Hans Holbein the Younger *The Ambassadors* (1533)



Psycho [1960] (1:48:05)

Paintings also appear in almost every Hitchcock film, He would use a painting to add another layer of information into a background. *Psycho* [1960]'s Norman Bates sit beneath a predatory bird seemingly about to attack – predicting his attack on Marion. However, just below the bird is a painting of S*usannah and the Elders* (Frans Van Mieris – ca. 1650) a Bible story in which a man spies on a woman during her bath and then attacks her – again anticipating Norman's action. And, ironically, Norman's spy hole is underneath that painting. (Apparently Gus Van Sant did not understand these complexities for in his 1998 remake of *Psycho* he changed the painting to one similar to Titian's *Venus with a Mirror.*)

Psycho [1960] (40:32)

Frans (or Willem) Van Mieris *Susanna and the Elders* (ca. 1650)

One of the major characters of *The Trouble with Harry* [1955] is a modernist abstract painter. Indeed, he discovers the corpse not by direct observation, but through his own sketch of the landscape where it is partially hidden behind a bush.

A whole book has been written on Hitchcock's use of music (see bibliography) so I will here indicate only a hint of that complexity. Popular and classical music fills almost every Hitchcock film. Hitchcock's choice of music varies from whimsical, as in Miss Torso of *Rear Window* [1954] dancing to Leonard Bernstein's ballet score, "Fancy Free," to more serious elements. Classical music in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1934] is the key to an assassination plot. In his mind, Uncle Charlie equates *The Merry Widow Waltz* in *Shadow of a Doubt* [1943] with decadence and murder.

The Lady Vanishes [1938] (17:41)

In *The Lady Vanishes* [1938], the hero attracts his love with a "magical" flute in direct reference to the Mozart opera (in addition to the mention of Mozart as musical therapy in *Vertigo* [1958]). And, a melody in *The Lady Vanishes* holds the secret code.

Strangers on a Train [1951] (25:37)

Hitchcock uses direct references to classical mythology as in *Strangers on a Train* [1951] when Bruno pursues Miriam into the Tunnel of Love on a tiny boat named Pluto. *Psycho* [1960] is a reworking of the Aeschylus tragedy of Agamemnon in which a woman stabs a man to death in a bathtub only to be murdered by her son. Later the deities of vengeance, the Eumenides, pursue the son for murdering his mother.

It is not only literature and the arts Hitchcock uses as a source of references, museums are a recurring theme in his films: the painting of Carlotta at the Palace of Legion of Honor in San Francisco in *Vertigo* [1958], the Berlin Museum in *Torn Curtain* [1966], and the British Museum in *Blackmail* [1929].

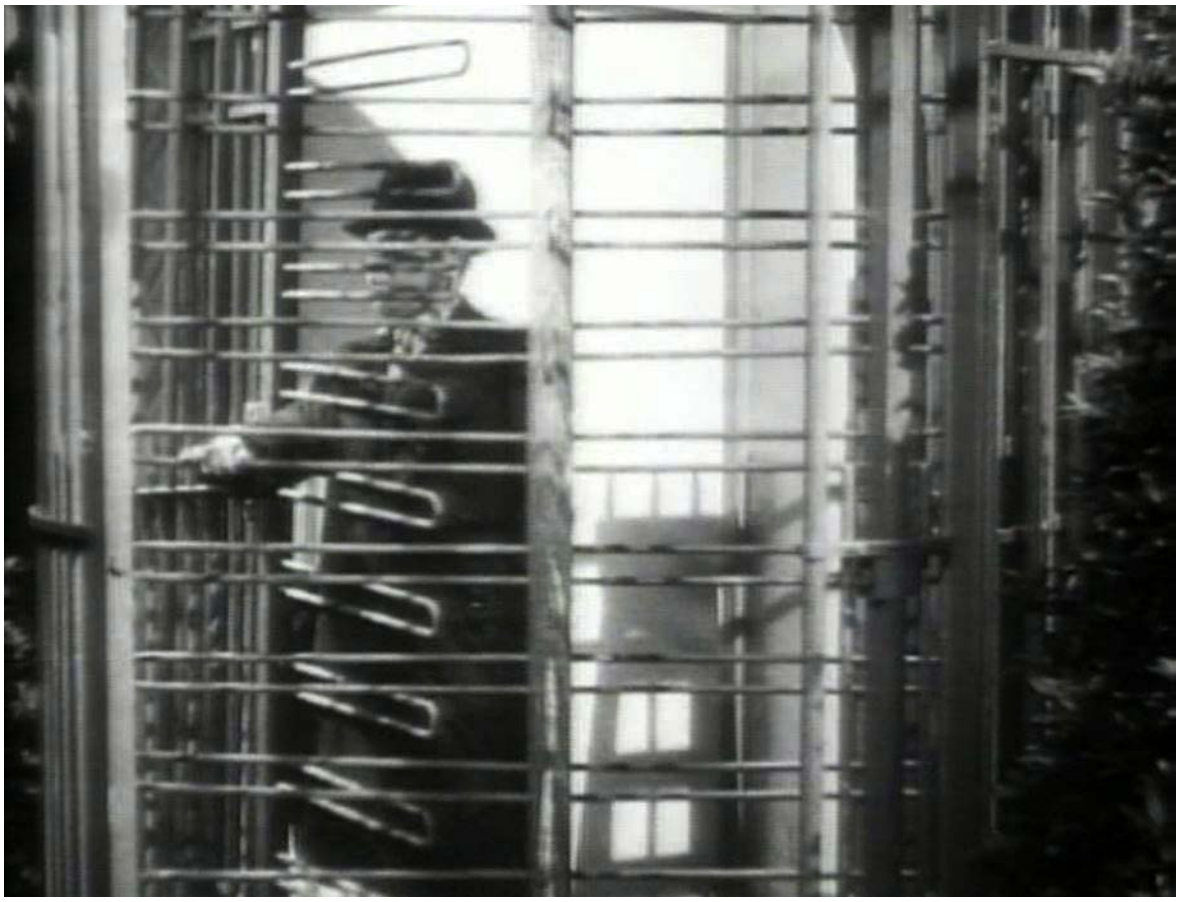
93. OUT THE WRONG WAY

North by Northwest [1959] (1:37:26)

When Thornhill faces a series of entrances and exits at the airport, it is the time for him to decide whether he will return to his Madison Avenue job (a debilitating drone from the film's point of view) or become a self-actualized individual who values and can act on his own emotions? Remember, this film was made in 1959, when the Organization Man and the Man in the Gray Flannel Suit were cultural ideals. In this respect, *North by Northwest*'s championing individuality over conformity definitely makes an anti-establishment, revolutionary statement. This is emphasized when the Professor picks up Roger and leaves the terminal through a door clearly marked "In Only."

North by Northwest [1959] (1:37:29)

Leaving the airport terminal in the Professor's tow, Roger is now going "the wrong way." He and the Professor leave the airport under a sign, "Entrance Only" in echo to the previous sign, "In Only." All these background signs are signs that Roger's life will now "change direction." Like it or not, Thornhill is committed to a life of growth.



Sabotage [1936] (19:57)

This "out the exit" symbolism was used before. In *Sabotage* [1936], Saboteur [1942] Verloc tries to go out the exit from the aquarium where he just met with his handler. In this case, he seems trapped by the bars, his arms flailing almost in desperation. His entrapment, however, is that of the criminal. Roger, on the other hand, can easily navigate against the current as he and the Professor move easily out the airport exit.

94. THE PROFESSOR COMES CLEAN

North by Northwest [1959] (1:38:03)

During their walk across the tarmac, the Professor explains Vandamm's role as a spymaster, the fact that George Kaplan does not exist, and that Roger is going to have to go on with the accidental charade. Another theatrical reference: the Professor asks Roger to be an actor in a play of which he is the author.

And just to make sure we continue to get the symbolism, there is another "Entrance Only" sign and another "Northwest" sign is in the background.

At this point, the roar of an airplane engine drowns out the details of their conversation. This is a brilliant stroke of economy on Hitchcock's part, for in this way we do not have to listen to a recitation of what we already know. Roger catches up to what *we* already know.

Thornhill refuses to go along and help the government until the Professor details Eve's activities as a double agent. Here Eve's third role (still another theatrical reference) is revealed: to seductress and spy add counterspy. I cannot but think this is a subtle reference to the very popular book and 1957

film *Three Faces of Eve* where a similar, though etiologically different, resolution of personalities takes place.

North by Northwest [1959] (1:40:57)

When Roger learns of Eve's involvement and how he has endangered her, the noise of the airplane engines comes up once again – this time perhaps materializing the churning of his thought processes driving him to a decision. A light shines on his face – a visual pun for the enlightenment he just experienced. While a bit tacky, this visual pun prepares us for the even worse (or, depending on your taste for such things, a better) visual pun that concludes the film.

Notorious [1946] (29:07)

Like so many devices Hitchcock uses in *North by Northwest*, he experimented with these moments of "illumination" before. In *Notorious* [1946] Devlin explains to Alicia that she must bed down with Alex Sabastian, a man she doesn't love, a distant lighthouse "illuminates" the back of her head as she begins to understand the situation. In *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock refines this device considerably bringing to it an unmistakable meaning.

Rope [1948] (1:12:34)

Rope [1948] (1:12:37)

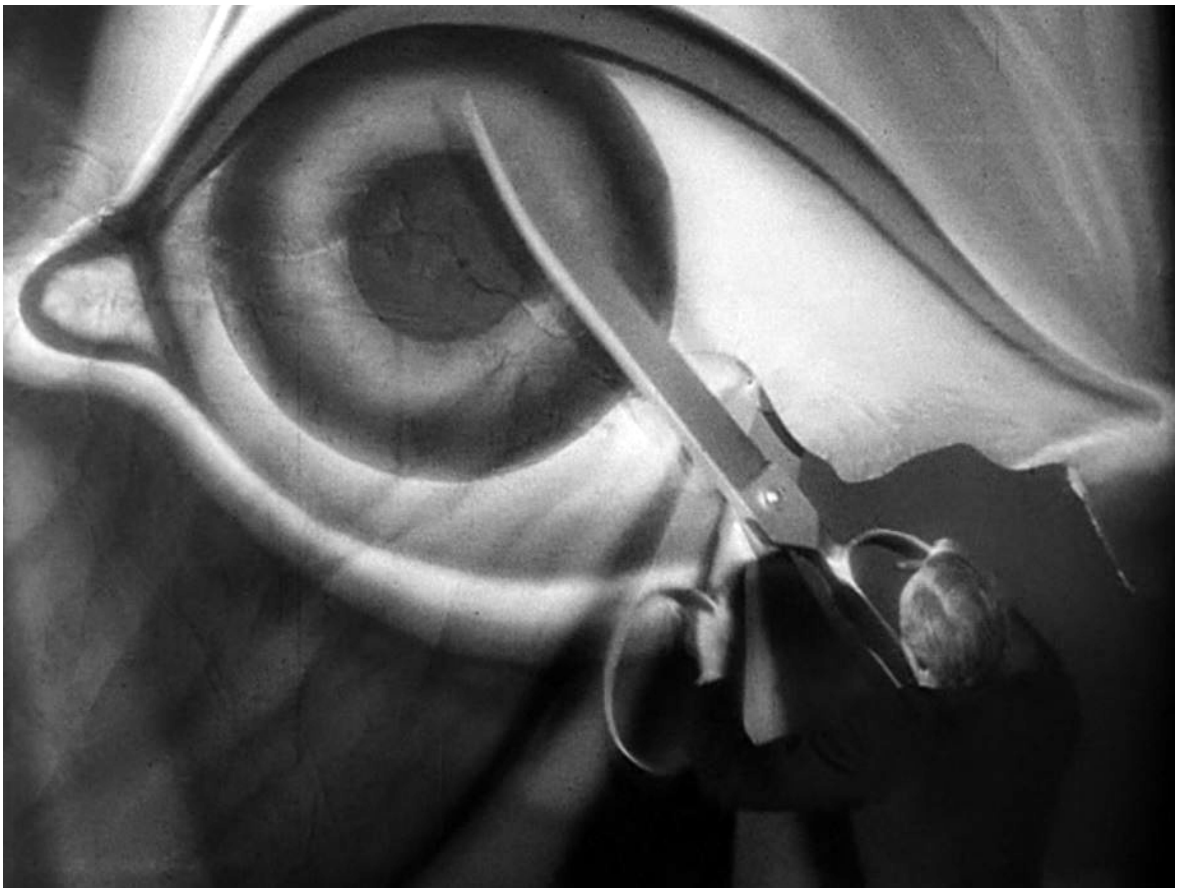
Hitchcock uses a similar device in an almost identical situation in *Rope* [1948]. When Rupert confronts Phillip and Bandon about killing David and stuffing him into a box off which everyone has (unknowingly and ghoulishly) just eaten supper, Rupert and the rest of the room, apparently because of a flashing neon light just outside the window, turn from innocent white to a devilish red.

The Pleasure Garden [1925] (55:22)

We can see Hitchcock's "bag of tricks" is almost endless. However, he is always very restrained in their use. Here I must point out what Hitchcock does not do in *North by Northwest*. In many of his past films (and future films), he uses irrational, non-realistic film rhetoric to communicate to the audience the character's state of mind. For instance, in his first film, *The Pleasure Garden* [1925], murder and philanderer Levett is haunted by visions of the girl he killed.

The Lodger [1927] (23:51)

Another example is the transparent ceiling of *The Lodger* [1927] to show the thoughts of the people beneath in their suspicion of the man above. Hitchcock, never one to shy away from gilding a lily, adds another layer: the chandelier's three lights represent the triangular relationship between the characters (actually the film is decorated with triangles throughout).



Spellbound [1945] (1:31:31)

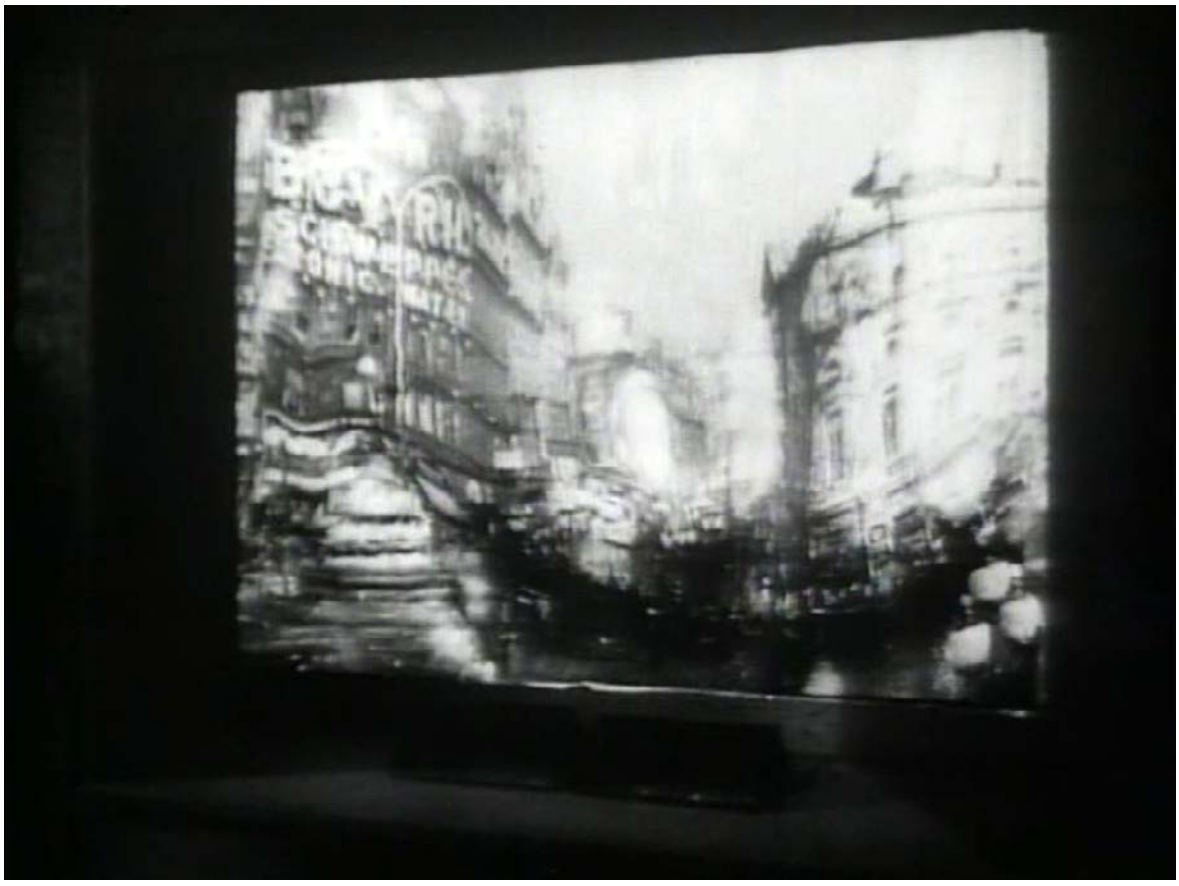
Other examples are the dream of *Spellbound* [1945],

The Ring [1927] (40:18)

the hallucinations in *The Ring* [1927],

Vertigo [1958] (1:26:19)

Scottie's tackily animated dream and the simultaneous rack and zoom of *Vertigo* [1958],



Sabotage [1936] (19:31)

and Verloc's vision of collapsing buildings in *Sabotage* [1936] in which an aquarium – a watery symbol of the unconscious – morphs into a movie screen – a place of projection – that then exhibits his inner fears.

All these and similar devices have been abandoned in *North by Northwest*. The characters – Thornhill, Eve, The Professor, and Vandamm – express themselves without resorting to camera trickery; in fact, Hitchcock rarely even uses his signature subjective camera in this film. In keeping with Hitchcock's own insistence on "pure cinema," *North by Northwest* may be his purest film.

On the tarmac of the Chicago airport, Roger finally understands and now takes responsibility for what he has done in ignorance – put Eve in dan-

ger. Hitchcock's films are full of men who take on the responsibility for others, often completing their tasks for them: Hannay takes on the spy work of the dying Annabella Smith in *The 39 Steps* [1935]; Roddy assumes responsibility for his friend Tim getting a waitress pregnant in *Downhill* [1927], and so on.

Guilt is one of Hitchcock's favorite themes and Roger is now washed with waves of guilt. All the things Roger's done, all the thoughts he has had now come rushing back to be reconsidered and reordered.

Hitchcock's films are overflowing with guilt. There is barely a Hitchcock film without it. *Vertigo* [1958] comes to mind as Hitchcock's pinnacle of guilt. So too L. B. Jefferies in *Rear Window* [1954] feels terrible, frustrating guilt as he watches Lisa climb up the fire escape into murderer Thorwald's apartment.

In a Hitchcock film, one does not have to *do* anything to be guilty. In *Rope* [1948], for instance, all Rupert did is teach a class in philosophy. This eventually leads to a murder. Hannay feels guilty about the death of Annabella Smith in *The 39 Steps* [1935] even though he had nothing to do with it. And guilt doesn't have to reside on the shoulders of a single individual; in *The Trouble with Harry* [1955], almost everyone in town believes they are guilty of Harry's murder.

It is now that Roger's feelings toward Eve go from hate to love. Hate turning into love is nothing new for Hitchcock. In *To Catch a Thief* [1955], Francie's hate for John Robie turns to love. Similarly in *The 39 Steps* [1935] and *Notorious* [1946].

In most romantic comedies, the transition from hate to love occupies most of the film – the audience knowing from the start that the couple is perfect for each other, but they must go through a great number of trials and tribulations to come to that conclusion themselves. Realizing an important aspect of *North by Northwest* is the romance, Hitchcock conforms to the rules of romantic comedy, but on his own terms. He compresses what usually takes over an hour of film time – the realization of love – into less than a minute.

The new and enlightened Roger Thornhill now joins forces with the Professor and it is off to North Dakota.

95. SILENT FILM TECHNIQUES

North by Northwest [1959] (1:39:19)

With the sound of the airplane drowning out the conversation between the Professor and Thornhill, what Hitchcock does is to insert a piece of silent film technique into a sound film.

It is my belief Hitchcock realized, having made both silent and sound films, each form has its own sense of time. In sound films, the rate at which the film moves is governed by the rate at which the words of a conversation can be spoken. Howard Hawks attacked this problem by having several people speak at once (see, for instance, *Bringing up Baby* [1938] or *His Girl Friday* [1940]). In a silent film, by contrast, how rapidly a film can move forward is governed by the body language communicating the emotions involved in the conversation. The second is far more efficient for two reasons. First, body language communicates more rapidly than words (think about how many words it would take to describe a physical expression of emotion). And second, the point of this scene is not to communicate the words (we already know everything that could be "spoken" here), but the emotions. And thus, the silent method is often more direct and more efficient, especially here.

As a bonus, by using silent film techniques, Hitchcock avoids repeating what the audience already knows. Thus, Hitchcock reverts to silent film techniques whenever he can: the silent techniques communicate emotion more quickly consequently speeding up the film and making it more exciting for the audience.

The Skin Game [1931] (27:43)

This efficiency can be seen in *The Skin Game* [1931] when an assistant to an auctioneer must read a detailed (and obviously boring) description of the property to be sold. During the reading, Hitchcock simply turns off the man's microphone and all we hear are the noises of impatience from the audience (accompanied by a graphic background illustrating that this man is the target of their scorn). Again, we see a blatant manipulation of sound to avoid exposing the audience to unneeded information.

Another, more common, use of this technique is to not give the viewer access to information that is driving the plot. This lack of knowledge – keeping us guessing – increases the suspense for the audience.

Waltzes from Vienna [1934] (47:56)

Even in his early sound films, Hitchcock often reverts to silent film techniques when the details of a plot point are to be withheld from the audience. A good example is the plotting of a prank on the elder Strauss in *Waltzes from Vienna* [1934] where the camera slowly retreats from the conspirators so we cannot hear their machinations.

Rear Window [1954] (1:41:52)

In *Rear Window* [1954], the whole interaction between Thorwald, Lisa and the police, after she breaks into his apartment to steal Mrs. Thorwald's wedding ring, is silent.

The Man Who Knew Too Much [1956] (1:38:23)

Perhaps the longest wordless sequence in any of Hitchcock's films is in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [1956] when the whole 12-minute Royal Albert Hall sequence is without words: we only see Jo in her agony about the assassination she is about to witness weighing it against the knowledge that if she reveals it, her son will be killed. We can trace her internal emotional argument by an amazing combination of the music (Arthur Benjamin's *Storm Cloud Cantata*) being played by the orchestra and her body language.

Torn Curtain [1966] (1:08:38)

A few years later, in 1966, Hitchcock, never one to give up a handy story-telling device, uses it again in *Torn Curtain* [1966]. Michael and Sarah walk to the top of a distant hill (on a studio set that can only be called tacky), seemingly the only green spot in all East Germany, to have a private conversation. Sarah believes nuclear physicist Michael is a defector to the East. Without sound but with a lot of body language, we *see* Michael reveal he is actually spying *for* the U.S. in order to steal atomic secrets *from* the Communists. Without having heard a word, we see them come down the hill all smiles, and we know they are in love again.

Topaz [1969] (40:13)

In 1969, Hitchcock uses this device several times in *Topaz.* The first is a discussion inside a flower shop cooler, with carefully arranged flowers to enhance the composition, of spy plans that are withheld from the audience.

Topaz [1969] (44:05)

The second is only a few moments later: a rather long interview with the Cuban secretary that is covered up with street noises.

Frenzy [1972] (57:41)

In *Frenzy* [1972], when Blaney, on the run from the police, meets his old army chum Johnny in the middle of a park, we watch from a great distance and from a high angle. Their animated gestures substitute for what would surely be an unimportant and uninteresting conversation. The meeting, the talk about old times, the invitation to stay in the friend's apartment all happen in a matter of seconds using a silent scene.

Mr. and Mrs. Smith [1941] (49:52)

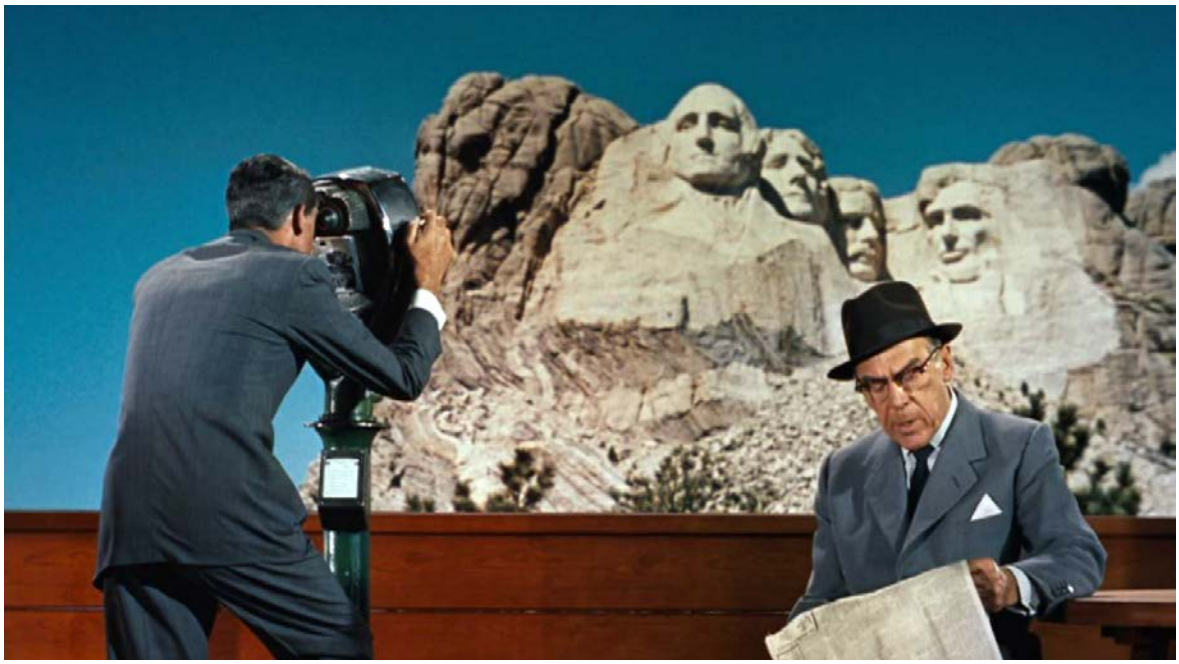
In *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* [1941], a screwball comedy of remarriage, Hitchcock turns the "silent film" technique on its head. David has been fixed up with a grotesque date. In trying to impress his estranged wife sitting across the club, he wants her to believe his date is a very beautiful woman sitting next to him with another man. So, he mouths a conversation with her – he plays the role of a silent actor.

Easy Virtue [1928] (32:54)

Hitchcock uses an interesting variation of this device in *Easy Virtue* [1928] where a marriage proposal and its acceptance are "seen" only through the body language of a telephone operator eavesdropping on the conversation.

In a sound film, using a silent sequence is only one way of manipulating the "sound." The manipulation of sound is something Hitchcock undertook with a vengeance from his very first sound film. For example, in his 1929 *Blackmail*, Alice knifes to death the man who tries to rape her. The next morning, still in the grip of the emotional terror caused by the incident, she hears a gossipy neighbor relate the newspaper account of the murder. All the words are a blur, only the word "knife" is loud and clear. This is the aural equivalent to the subjective camera where we see through a character's eyes; we now hear through her ears.

96. LOOKING BACK AT TEDDY



North by Northwest [1959] (1:41:12)

We now find ourselves on a platform beneath Mt. Rushmore. While Roger uses binoculars to view the gigantic visages of the Presidents, the Professor turns his back on them, quoting Teddy Roosevelt's dictum, "Walk softly and carry a big stick."

The two men's physical positions reveal their true feelings about the rule of law in people's lives: while at first refusing to become part of the Professor's "harebrained" scheme, Roger respects his country and is willing to sacrifice himself for its needs. His binoculars enlarge the visage of the already gigantic presidents and what they represent. The Professor, on the other hand (who is part of the governmental apparatus), is cold, unfeeling, and disrespectful of individual rights and freedoms . . . and a blatant liar. He indeed has turned his back on what the four Presidents stand for. Notice that the heads of Presidents (Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt, and Lincoln) on Mt. Rushmore are photographed to form a "V" shape with the Professor at the bottom placing him at the moral bottom of the situation.

The psychology of Roger's progress is now clear. Having, at least partially, resolved the problem of the feminine – his feelings for Eve are now clear and his mother has disappeared from the scene completely – he can undertake facing and, hopefully, resolving his "father problems." Observing this monument of gargantuan paternal figures is certainly a good indication of what he is up against. Indeed, he immediately undertakes dealing with the two father figures in this film: the controlling and seemingly benevolent Professor who Roger will discover has an evil side, and Vandamm who holds thrall over Eve.

The relation between Eve and the Professor can be seen as a father/daughter relation in terms of control. However, the relations between Eve and Vandamm, presuming the age difference between the characters represents the age difference between that actors, 15 years, could be seen as closer to incestuous. And thus, the Professor's competition with Vandamm can be seen as a symbolic conflict for the daughter's affection.

Hitchcock 's fascination with the oedipal conflicts (and its variations) is, as would be expected, nothing new. For instance, perhaps Hitchcock's most complex formulation is in *Notorious* [1946]. Alicia begins to hate her father when she learns he is a Nazi spy. She eventually transfers her "affections" to the much old Nazi spy, Alexander Sabastian. Into the mix is thrown Devlin, simultaneously a jealous father-figure, a jealous lover, and an all-around heel.

The conflict between the various father figures now plays out in the Mt. Rushmore cafeteria. The Professor is about to deceive Vandamm using both Roger and Eve as pawns.

Continue reading Part V