

# inside frame: the hysteric's choice

By mapping Lacan's system of four discourses on to the 'cone of vision' diagram, it becomes clear that the discourse of the hysteric depends critically on the function of the 'inside frame' — the detail, object, or event that inverts the point of view and the POV's relation to the vanishing point (VP). The field of production links desire (a) with the Master (master signifier,  $S_1$ ). This explains how, as Žižek puts it, cinema is not simply an illustration of psychic structures but it's the 'place we go' to learn how to respond to the perplexing demands of pleasure.



The key in Alicia's hand inverts the scene in *Notorious*.

## 1. suture: the logic of inside-out

Hitchcock's film *Notorious* (1946): the American spy Devlin and his accomplice, Alicia, plan to investigate the cellar of her Nazi-spy husband, Sebastian, during a party. To build the tension, a slow boom shot takes the camera's view from a long high shot above guests arriving in the foyer to a tightly framed shot of the cellar key that Alicia has snatched from her husband's key-ring. Her clenched fist opens to show the key just as the camera 'arrives' at the extreme end of its magnification. This results in a 'flip' of space: while we are still able to consciously monitor the progress of the party, we are now aware of the counter-plot to get into the cellar through the 'inside frame' that expands outward from the key. Hitchcock sets in motion a 'ticking clock' device. As the guests begin to finish off the champagne, Sebastian may need to give the butler the cellar key; if he does, he will notice that it is missing from his key ring and investigate. Through the lens of the inside frame we now see every glass of champagne as dragging Devlin and Alicia one step closer to disaster. This is the logic of suture: a small detail, an excess, a vitriolic out-of-place object (that in many cases actually symbolizes, as does the key, a conditional passage) inverts the 'logic' of the scene, which 'plays in counterpoint' to the normative, generally recognized scene.



Thornhill becomes 'Kaplan' for real.

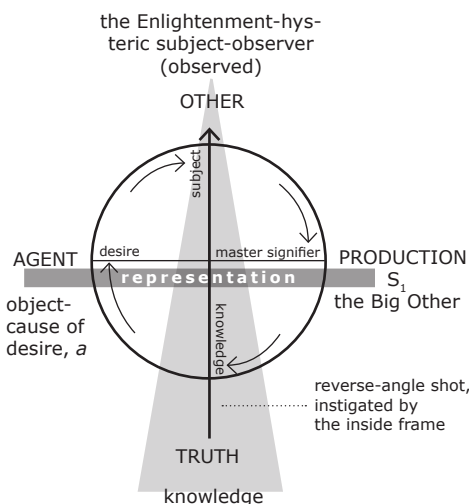
## 2. who's watching? (the super-ego, that's who)

In another Hitchcock film *North by Northwest* (1959) Walter Thornhill catches the freshly stabbed body of Lester Townsend in a room at the UN, in plain sight of visiting dignitaries and press photographers. While the real murderer flees, Thornhill eases the body to the floor and extracts the knife just in time to be photographed and ogled. Before this scene, Townsend was a 'face in the crowd', an ad executive in a city filled with similarly gray-suited businessmen. Now, he is pursued not just by the police who believe he is a murderer but by KGB agents who have mistaken him for George Kaplan, an FBI/CIA agent they have targeted for months. The topological knot that can't be untied is the fact that Kaplan does not exist. The FBI/CIA have invented a fictional agent — planting clues about his movements — to waste KGB time. Thornhill cannot prove that he is not Kaplan because Kaplan doesn't exist in the first place. This inversion shows that the inside frame converts the periphery of the view — which first belongs to the normative audience — into a super-dimensional space inhabited by a generic gaze, whose power and knowledge is derived directly from the Freudian idea of the super-ego. In paternal form, Townsend's super-egos are a double-monster: on one side the police, on the other the KGB. He is given the forced choice of following the FBI/CIA's advice to help them in their pursuit of the KGB master spy, Phillip Vandamm. On the way to a final show-down at Mt. Rushmore, Thornhill imagines that the giant carved faces of the presidents — paternal super-egos *par excellence* — are 'looking at him'. As in *Vertigo* and *Secret Agent*, Hitchcock uses verticality to emphasize the key role of castration in the creation of hysteric drama.

## 3. the return of the Cartesian subject

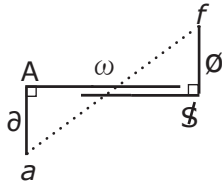
The inside frame allows us to superimpose the Lacanian formula for the discourse of the hysteric directly over the 'cone of vision' model of Enlightenment knowledge, where the subject-as-other is portrayed as gazing towards the truth, divided by the gaze into visible and invisible components. The hysteric subject is alienated by occupying the position of the viewing other. By filling a position defined by the feminine, the subject is 'automatically castrated'; the essential object is missing. Thornhill responds to Eve Kendall, who asks him what the 'O' in his monogram stands for, 'Nothing'. The gaze (of the police) disarms him. He dons sunglasses when he sees his photo on the newspaper's front page. He is given sanctuary in her train compartment as he flees New York for Chicago. Further signs of castration come when he is set up to go to a rural crossroads to meet 'Kaplan' but is strafed by a bi-plane instead; later he must fake being shot by Eve to protect her identity as an undercover agent for the FBI/CIA.

Knowledge takes the place of Truth, converting it into Hitchcockian 'MacGuffin' truth



In the position of the hysteric, the Enlightenment subject is put into the 'impossible-Real' situation of the (filmic) reverse-angle shot. Instead of being the observer, the subject is now the interpellated observed, and the frame of representation turns 180° to frame the subject instead of the object of study. Knowledge in the position of truth becomes the MacGuffin, the gratuitous secret that, once known, is revealed to be inconsequential. Desire and the Master Signifier work in dialectic to manipulate visibility.

— revealing just enough to keep the plot moving. The mystery isn't very important (it's microfilm smuggled inside a statuette that Vandamm pretends to export as an art dealer), but that's the point of truth in the discourse of the hysteric. When we find out, it loses its power over us. Only as a secret does it maintain the symmetry binding the knower and the known. This arrangement returns us to the Cartesian subject. Exiled by phenomenology and post-Modern cultural criticism, the Cartesian subject never left the domain of the hysteric, where its implicit irony (the observed is conditioned by the media of representation) insures a circular logic that sustains itself in the face of any contradictions. (Thornhill cannot prove that he is not Kaplan.) Like Enlightenment representation, the hysteric's plane of representation is a dynamic exchange between the object-cause of desire (NXNW: the duplicitous Eve Kendall) and the Master, who normally represents the subject to the Other but in this case occupies the place of production (the cat-and-mouse game of spies chasing spies). There is 'no knowledge' when  $S_2$  occupies the position of Truth, because knowledge is a matter of secrets important only as commodities of exchange between the competing masters (the Professor and Vandamm).



The formula for the representation ( $a \rightarrow S_1$ ) is the action of the 'return of the Real', the relocation of the object-cause of desire to the scandalous center of the Other, the hollow basis of authority (as in the CIA's 'ruse' of Kaplan as well as the MacGuffin of the microfilm). This depletes the value of the representation as 'only an illusion provided to effect a result' (the mock shooting of Thornhill; the auction scene where Thornhill plays an idiotic art-hater). This same diagram is naughtily exploited at the end of the film, when Thornhill and Eve's honeymoon consumption is punctuated with a train entering a tunnel.

Eve Kendall is a member of the species named for the most famous exponent, the 'Bond Girl'. In James Bond films, Bond Girls perfected the boundary function of eros, and we are reminded that Hermes, god of the boundary, was also the god of erotic seduction. Just as the figure-ground reversal is responsible for Thornhill's hysteria, Eve facilitates extensions of this reversal by concealing him in her train compartment but then seems to reverse this logic by exposing him in the landscape of dry cornfields. Ever the Hermes, she obeys the master's instructions by engineering a fake argument and assassination, this time dragging Thornhill from the region of the living to that of the dead. In the final scenes, the match-book again becomes a passport when Thornhill tosses it down to her to warn her of Vandamm's plan to murder her.

#### 4. the representation of the Real

In the bolagram, the Other contains a void that becomes the site of the inside frame that 'deconstructs' the Other's authority when 'a', the 'object-cause of desire', returns the missing object or message to its destination. In Lacanian terms, the letter always reaches its destination through a reversed logic: the destination is where the letter ends up — the most perfect example being the letter that is written but never mailed because it has 'achieved the intended result'. The return of the Real to the center of  $S_1$  is the aftermath of the story of the Emperor's New Clothes. Thornhill forces the CIA to admit that 'Kaplan is not real'; or, rather, that Thornhill is now the Real that they had denied through the fiction of Kaplan. He has returned to the precise center of the ruse by being in the wrong place at the wrong time, but in retracing the plot to this moment we realize it was the moment where Thornhill stood up when the name Kaplan was being paged by the bell-hop. He 'answered the call' in the eyes of the KGB, although he had really intended only to send a telegram to his mother.

The formula for hysterical representation,  $a \rightarrow S_1$ , reveals that, for this mode of discourse, the representation consistently maintains the status of a Hitchcockian Macguffin. Even though the Enlightenment subject-as-other was put in a reverse-angle shot by the project of knowledge (just as Thornhill is the object of the reversed gaze), the inside frame is the watching Other — invisible precisely because 'she' is exported to the position of an Evil Eye or indeterminate guard in the Panopticon's opaque tower: in other words, 'interpellation' — the power that compels the subject to obey an imagined, invisible authority without being forced or prodded. As the example of the Panopticon teaches (and this is the Enlightenment subject par excellence), the subject needs no Other but, as self-intepellated, exists 'without a Kaplan'. Conversely, the absence of 'a Kaplan' induces the hysterical condition with its inside frame.