

# Screening and disclosing fantasy: rear projection in Hitchcock

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In the opening shot of *Shutter Island* (Martin Scorsese, 2010), a title card informs us that the narrative about to unfold on screen is set in Boston Harbor Islands, 1954. To the sound of seagulls and the forlorn moan of a foghorn we see a ferry boat slowly emerge from a heavy mist, a lone man at its prow. After a brief sequence in which a seasick Teddy Daniels (Leonardo DiCaprio) is shown throwing up in the washroom below deck, we cut to a scene where a strained conversation starts up between Teddy and Chuck Aule (Mark Ruffalo). These two men, allegedly US Marshals, are about to investigate strange occurrences in a mental hospital for the criminally insane on Shutter Island. What immediately strikes one about this opening sequence is the rear projection, used by Scorsese to portray the choppy waves that are making his hero sick. In an era of computer-generated imagery (CGI) this cinematic technique is entirely anachronistic, and is marked out as such. As the two men talk about the accidental death of Teddy's wife in a fire, they are conspicuously not on location; instead the dusky seascape that surrounds them is explicitly cast as a visual illusion – a film image set within a film image.

Two points are worth noting. First, the choice of date – 1954 – recalls the year of *Rear Window*'s release, and with it the atmosphere of suspicion that characterized America's Cold War culture.<sup>1</sup> In the course of the film we will recognize this date as an anagram for 1945, the year the Allied Forces liberated concentration camps throughout Europe. Second, the conspiracy around which Scorsese's psycho-thriller revolves involves a double psychic screen memory, visually anticipated by the use of rear projection in the establishing scene. We will discover that Teddy is, in fact, a traumatized

1 See Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (1965) (New York, NY: Vintage, 2008).

World War II veteran who has devised for himself a paranoid narrative concerning national security to cover up his recollection of a domestic crime. Although he is posing as a government official, he is in fact an inmate of the same mental institution that he is allegedly investigating, interned for having killed his wife after discovering she had drowned their children in the backyard. In order to blot out this traumatic knowledge he has shifted his guilt to a different scene, convincing himself that at the end of the war, in the process of liberating Dachau Concentration Camp, he committed a war crime by having all the guards executed.

The rear projection that serves as the scenic backdrop for the first conversation between Teddy and the man who is actually his doctor thus sets the tone for an investigation involving a case more psychological than criminal. The fact that the two men are in an illusory space corresponds to the way in which psychic reality takes precedence over actuality in their relation to each other. Yet Scorsese's choice of rear projection is double voiced in a further sense. It also functions as a mark of cultural memory, explicitly recalling one of the favourite stylistic devices of Hollywood's master of the psycho-thriller, Alfred Hitchcock, known for bringing to the screen suspense stories based on a paranoid structure in which private delusions and national conspiracies prove to be two sides of the same coin.

*Shutter Island*'s use of rear projection thus supports two distinct forms of haunting. On the one hand, given that the artificiality of the seascape draws attention to the fact that there is no reality beyond the filmed scene, an audience familiar with Hitchcock will recognize that we are being brought into an affective state of lived paranoia. Everything is under suspicion because implicitly everything is the protagonist's deluded self-projection onto the world around him. The ominous storm, brewing on a horizon behind which nothing lies, serves as a visual indication that by mutual consent these two characters have come to share a fantasy space from which there is no escape. An all-inclusive hallucination is visually underscored by the conspicuous artificiality of the set and serves to draw us into the psychic turmoil of DiCaprio's tormented war veteran. On the other hand, Scorsese's explicit Hitchcockianism is marked by the self-reflexivity of postmodern homage. Rear projection is, of course, nearly always legible as a special effect to an audience familiar with the conventions of film language. Yet in the opening scene of *Shutter Island* it does not merely recall one of several conventional technical devices for which classic Hollywood cinema is known. Cineastes are called upon to take note specifically of the way it cites Hitchcock's use of rear projection, invited to assume an ironic distance to the scene and enjoy a conversation between Scorsese and his admired predecessor.

While the hallucinatory quality invoked by the rear projection involves psychological identification and thus an affective response, the self-reflexive citation produces the hermeneutic pleasure Roland Barthes calls a 'thrilling of intelligibility'.<sup>2</sup> And while the former threatens to draw the spectator emotionally into a maelstrom of misinterpretations (with Teddy a pawn in a self-induced conspiracy), the latter pulls us back intellectually

2 See Roland Barthes, 'Structural analysis of narratives', in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. Stephen Heath (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 119.

from this paranoid world, drawing attention instead to the fact that equally at issue is Scorsese's masterful play with an inherited cinematic illusion. In other words, the use of rear projection in this opening scene not only signals Scorsese's debt to Hitchcock, appealing to our intellectual ability to recognize the visual analogy, it is also replicates precisely the dual mode of narration found in Hitchcock's work, itself predicated on fusing the emotional identification elicited by suspense with the ironic distance afforded by the director's implicit presence as the presiding intelligence of the film.

Scorsese reminds us that while in Hitchcock's psycho-thriller characters may be putting on an act for themselves (or for each other), the director himself is putting on an act for the camera by playing with technical devices, drawing our attention to the fact that we – those meant to witness his dexterity – are 'in the know'. Indeed, as William Rothman has argued, Hitchcock's films repeatedly foreground the relation between his supreme power as director and his quest for recognition by the viewer in order to establish a bond based on mutual acknowledgement.<sup>3</sup> If, in this opening scene of *Shutter Island*, the antiquated use of rear projection serves to conjoin two spaces in one film image – the illusion of a wavy ocean and the actual ferry boat on which the actors are standing in the studio – it also sustains the tension between affective proximity and intellectual distance. On the diegetic level of the narrative, the foreboding storm serves as a proleptic indication of the consequences of the psychic experiment a doctor is willing to undertake with his patient, enveloping both in a dangerous therapeutic exercise. Because this storm is depicted as a marked rear projection, however, attention is also drawn to Scorsese's identification with Hitchcock's art and his trust in the genre memory of his audience.<sup>4</sup>

I have chosen Scorsese's homage as point of departure for this exploration of the role played by rear projection in Hitchcock's system of narration because it brings into focus two of his central narratorial concerns: the assertion of directorial power and the affirmation of his contract between his cinema and the audience. As Susan Smith argues, while suspense places the viewer in an allegedly unmediated relationship to the film world, Hitchcock's inclusion of humour serves to sabotage any complacent viewing. The 'threat of generic and tonal slippage between the comic and thriller aspects', she writes, 'often contributes substantially to dislodging the security of the viewer's position', suspending us between character-based involvement and a detachment based on Hitchcock's directorial presence.<sup>5</sup> My contention here is that rear projection, while not exclusively deployed to underscore the insertion of humour into suspense, also foregrounds the illusion and artifice on which Hitchcock's narrative system in general is based. This cinematic device thus serves to disrupt the direct emotional connection to the film's diegesis, in order to reaffirm what Smith calls a 'more knowing bond between film-maker and audience: one based, that is, upon the notion of mutual affirmation and recognition'.<sup>6</sup>

I would question Smith's point that the relationship to the film world which suspense calls forth is unmediated, given that suspense always also implies a degree of selfconsciousness on the part of Hitchcock's authorial

3 See William Rothman, *Hitchcock: the Murderous Gaze* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), as well as Fredric Jameson's discussion of this book, 'Allegorizing Hitchcock', in *Signatures of the Visible* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), pp. 99–127.

4 I take this term from Robert Burgoyne, *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at US History*, rev. edn (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 8, where he discusses the way film texts set up a complex dialogue between the sedimented memories preserved in genre forms, recalling past usages and responding to the present in a new way, such that recognizing stylistic formulas typical for a genre serves 'as the principal vehicles for shaping and carrying social experience from one generation to another'.

5 See Susan Smith, *Hitchcock: Suspense, Humour and Tone* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 49.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

position. After all, it depends on withholding information, on keeping the question of what will happen suspended. Were the viewer unaware that information was being withheld, she or he would simply be surprised at the unexpected turn of events. As I shall show, the inclusion of rear projection helps first and foremost to control the relationship the audience entertains towards the characters and the positioning of their fantasy work. It serves either to critique the characters' blindness and dangerous self-absorption or it signals their privileged knowledge, shaping the attitude the audience adopts towards the events for which it is a backdrop. And yet the rhetorical strategy at issue in the use of rear projection also follows what Barthes calls the duplicity of the signifier.<sup>7</sup> The contract which comes to be reestablished between Hitchcock and his audience by virtue of this cinematic device works at the expense of his characters. The double vision at play serves to distance both him and us from the very obsessions we are drawn into through the hallucinatory power of his camerawork.

The camera's omniscient narration may align the viewer with a character's view, and with his or her incomplete knowledge. At the same time it allows the viewer to know what the characters may not be cognisant of. Even while we are meant to empathize with a character's fantasies, the rear projection exposes the technique deployed to bring about this effect. Given that Hitchcock's double-voiced contract is most explicit in his cameo appearances, I begin by looking at how these make use of rear projection. In a second step I discuss the way this specific device is part of the stylistic arsenal through which Hitchcock displays his central concern with artifice. Finally I focus on the way rear projection draws attention to the issue of both external and internal staging in order to distinguish between characters shown to be caught in a theatricalized world and those caught in internal projections.

At issue in all cases is the way this cinematic device shapes our response to the world viewed on screen, emphasizing the dangers of voyeurism and thus making us aware of our complicity in the obsessions we are also called upon to vicariously enjoy. The importance of the disruption that rear projection causes to the suspension of disbelief lies in the way this affects our emotional implication in the fate of the characters and the narrative. I argue that Hitchcock deploys this technical device in order to straddle both identification and distancing. The conspicuous artificiality of rear projection allows the viewer to indulge in the pleasures – conscious and unconscious – of what Freud called disavowal: knowing that the world unfolding on screen is artifice but all the same believing and trusting in it, playing the game along with Hitchcock both intellectually and viscerally.<sup>8</sup>

Susan Smith notes that while Hitchcock's cameo appearances seem to violate classic Hollywood's standard codes of transparency 'by drawing attention to the constructed nature of the fictional world, the effect, in practice, is not so much to disturb as to affirm the contractual, pleasure-based nature of our relationship to Hitchcock's films'. As the director

7 See the discussion of the dynamic interrelation between meaning and form in Roland Barthes, 'Myth today', in *Mythologies*, ed. and trans. Annette Lavers (New York, NY: Hill and Wang 1972), pp. 109–59. My claim is that the enmeshment between emotional empathy and intellectual distance in Hitchcock's use of rear projection undertakes a similar rhetorical strategy.

8 See Sigmund Freud, 'Negation' (1925), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, Volume XIX (London: Hogarth Press 1961), pp. 235–39.

intrudes into his own fictional world, she adds, character-based modes of involvement are renounced ‘in favour of a more direct, self-conscious bond between the film-maker and the audience’.<sup>9</sup> The inclusion of a rear projection in these cameo appearances in turn enhances Hitchcock’s control over the content of the image, explicitly drawing attention to the fact that the world he brings to the screen is not only fictional but one over which he presides. At the same time, his sudden appearance on screen exceeds spontaneous playfulness. His presence in front of what is clearly marked as an artificial backdrop serves as an implicit comment on the scene unfolding on screen, intended to guide our assessment of it. By including his own cameo presence, Hitchcock not only selfconsciously presents himself as omniscient narrator but also offers this position to the viewer, thus securing our identification with the unfolding story as well as the way he has chosen to put it on display cinematically.

In *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), playing on the audience’s knowledge of his cameo appearances in previous films, Hitchcock crosses paths with the protagonist John Jones just after the young American journalist has arrived in Britain. Jones (Joel McCrea) is leaving his hotel to attend a luncheon given in honour of Van Meer, a political figure seminal to the ongoing peace negotiations. At the exact moment that Jones hears someone call the name of the man he expects to interview, we see him pass by Hitchcock. Walking towards us, the director is deeply immersed in the newspaper he is reading, while Jones, with his back to us, is walking towards a rear projection of an ordinary street in London. We are meant to recognize that both the director and his star are on a set. The director’s presence onscreen draws attention to the fact that, like the London backdrop, the world of espionage his hero is about to enter is nothing more than an illusion of which Hitchcock is the man in charge (figure 1).

Yet given that Hitchcock is shown to be absorbed in the front-page news, we are also meant to understand that his fictional world is related to the actual



Fig. 1. *Foreign Correspondent*  
(Alfred Hitchcock, 1940).

world, currently at war with the Axis powers. Indeed, having heard the name of Van Meer being called, Jones turns and approaches his target, setting out on the adventure that will transform him into an impassioned war correspondent. He only reaches Van Meer, however, after Hitchcock has been seen once more, this time walking in the direction of the elderly politician. For a moment we see the director and his actor both face us, in front of the rear projection. While the former is still calmly reading his newspaper, the latter has completely changed his attitude. He is no longer peacefully embarking on a stroll but has suddenly been moved to excited action. He has found a way into the news story that he has been sent to report. Placed next to his character, Hitchcock's bodily presence produces a selfconscious bond that serves as a direct appeal to the audience. Twice it draws us away from the fictional world, just seconds before we become engrossed in his hero's battle with Nazi agents. What the rear projection of this ordinary street foregrounds is that there is a political frame to the spy narrative. John Jones's story not only serves as a comment on the front-page news but is meant to have consequences for the American war effort at home.

In Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (1951), the director's cameo appearance is itself doubled. The first cameo shows Hitchcock on location, boarding the same train to Metcalf as the hero Guy Haines (Farley Granger), the latter en route to confront his estranged wife Miriam. Hitchcock is carrying a double bass, performing a corporeal doubling of Guy and his potential partner in crime Bruno (Robert Walker). A more playful, because oblique, cameo appearance occurs at the Mellon Gallery, where Guy goes to meet his girlfriend Ann. At this point in the narrative the trouble with his double has taken centre stage, because Bruno has fulfilled his part in the criss-cross murder he proposed to Guy during their accidental meeting on the train. In this scene Hitchcock can be seen as an out-of-focus rear projection, passing behind the two lovers at exactly the moment that Bruno calls Guy's name. This interpolation forces the couple, who up to this point had been fully engrossed in each other, to turn around and face not only the man who wants to draw them into his lethal fantasy but also the audience, enjoying the dangerous challenge. Hitchcock, the man behind the fiction, disappears behind the large marble urn which they had been walking towards but are now compelled to turn away from.<sup>10</sup>

As in *Foreign Correspondent*, this is a decisive shift in the narrative trajectory. Guy will try one last time to get rid of his troublesome shadow. As he approaches his nemesis there is a cut to a location shot. The heated conversation, during which Guy tells Bruno to stop following him, takes place in front of marble columns and a fountain, while Ann, still standing in front of the rear projection of the urn, watches the two from a distance. Although she is unable to overhear their conversation, she notices the pin that Bruno is wearing. Her gaze is an extension of the camera as it zooms in on this meaningful object. Once Guy has returned to his beloved (claiming the man who called his name is a stranger), the two are shown walking towards the rear projection of the art gallery, while Bruno, on location and encircled by marble columns, looks on. Attention is drawn to the fact that

10 Hitchcock described his brief appearance as a librarian in this scene at the Mellon Gallery to a Warner publicist as follows: 'It's such a small bit I'm just likely to do another one before the film is finished'. As Bill Krohn comments in *Hitchcock at Work* (London: Phaidon, 2000), p. 124, although this cameo lasts only about a second, 'the director is nonetheless recognizable if you know to look for him'.

once the violent fantasies of others have caught up with Hitchcock's heroes, they find themselves locked into a hermetically sealed world that screens them from ordinary reality by delimiting the space around them. By moving in and out of the marked rear projection of the hall exhibiting the marble urn, Hitchcock deliberately uses this cinematic device as the screen beyond which Guy and Ann will not be able to move until they have found a resolution for the murderous hallucination that has been imposed on them. Placing Bruno outside the rear projection gives the sense that, at least at this point in the narrative, he is the director of the claustrophobic fantasy.

Perhaps the most emphatic example of Hitchcock's association of his own directorial presence on screen with a rear projection is found at the beginning of *To Catch a Thief* (1955). John Robie (Cary Grant), wanted for questioning about a wave of burglaries in grand hotels on the Côte d'Azur, has managed to trick and elude the police by getting onto a bus. Here Hitchcock wants us to note his own cinematic sleight of hand. He briefly switches to a location shot, showing us the police car driving past the bus in the opposite direction. In a medium shot we see Robie, who has positioned himself at the very back of the bus, looking out of the back window to ascertain that the police are, indeed, driving the wrong way. His face and upper body are framed by the back window, which in turn reflects the trees outside. The reverse-shot is an actual location shot of the police car taking a wrong turn, superimposed with Robie's face, and is followed by a return to a shot of Robie smiling as he turns away from the world outside. Only now do we see a front shot of him inside the bus. The landscape from which the police have disappeared is a rear projection, placed inside the back window of the bus as though this vehicle were a stage, safely removed from reality. Hitchcock then embellishes what, by the mid 1950s, had become recognizable as his visual signature. Robie, grinning sheepishly, is disturbed by the sound of birds chirping in the cage on the seat next to him. As he quizzically shifts his gaze away from the woman sitting beside him to look at his other neighbour, the camera pans to the right to disclose Hitchcock himself, grimly staring into space, while a bemused Grant is shown looking obliquely at his director (figure 2).



Fig. 2. *To Catch a Thief* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1955).

While Hitchcock's presence in *Foreign Correspondent* references the news media as an essential tool in the war effort, and in *Strangers on a Train* marks how completely his lovers have come to be locked in the fantasies of another man, this explicit association with a rear projection is a ludic distancing device. It positions the director as the magisterial author of a visual hoax in which the viewer is complicit. He appears at precisely the moment that Robie's pursuers have successfully been put off the scent, as though to register that he is the one behind this ploy. The pursuers have been magically removed not so much by his hero's wit as by his own intervention. The Provençal countryside in which the police continue to follow a false lead proves to be only a moving image, projected onto the back window of a bus. Although the rear projection is not particularly overt, the whole construction of the image is highly contrived. As the backdrop for a comic interlude that places Robie between a birdcage and Hitchcock, the rear window screening the empty road seems to dominate the image. Indeed, the fact that all the other shots in the sequence are location shots emphasizes the artifice of this back projection. It functions as a frame within the film frame, drawing attention to what is beyond the cinematic world on which, for this brief moment, both Robie and Hitchcock have turned their backs.

When Hitchcock's editing moves in and out of location shots in this way, such a rhetorical ploy not only underscores the fictionality of the world in which his characters act, it also interrupts our absorption in the suspense (selfconscious though this may be) and our identification with the hero or heroine. The audience is called upon, in an attitude of disavowal, to join in the director's verbal and visual game with the cinematic medium itself, giving both parties a hand in the narrative. Robie seems to be directing the movement of the police, but at the end of the sequence he is shown to be an image in front of a framed image, in the hands of another director.

Hitchcock thus selfconsciously turns technical constraint into an aesthetic gain. When, in conjunction with his cameo appearances, he interpolates rear projections into location shots, it is not because of the difficulties of working outside a studio; it signals his preference for the special effects and illusory spectacle that allow him to control the content of the image in its overall design. If rear projection is one of the devices that enables Hitchcock to oscillate between identifying with his characters and keeping an ironic distance from their plight, in its conjunction with his cameo appearances it draws attention to the way he moves the audience not *despite* but *because of* the fictionality he commands on screen. Indeed, commenting on Hitchcock's seeming obsession with using rear projection, one of his set designers, Robert Boyle, explains, 'if he could have, he would have filmed everything in a studio, without ever leaving it'.<sup>11</sup>

The artifice that Hitchcock's persistent use of rear projection selfconsciously enhances is predicated on the spatial doubling inherent to this device. It is thus significant that this technique involves bringing a foreground action, filmed in a studio against a blue screen, together with a background action, filmed earlier and projected from behind the screen. The

11 Quoted in Dominique Paini, 'Les égarements du regard (A propos des transparences chez Hitchcock)', in *Hitchcock et l'Art: Coïncidences fatales* (Paris: Mazzotti, 2000), p. 52.

12 Ibid., pp. 55–66.

rear part, filmed on location, serves as the setting, surrounding the action and dialogue that are performed in a studio and then placed in front of this other scene. In its conventional use one is not meant to notice that the foreground and background are separate, yet Hitchcock more often than not makes this disjunction discernible. By placing one filmed image behind the other, a doubled spatiality emerges within one frame to trouble our vision. The viewer's attention oscillates between the action in the foreground and the images projected onto the back wall of the studio. The visual amalgamation draws our attention to the fact that something is out of place. As Dominique Païni argues, by making sure we see the rear projection, Hitchcock makes sure that we see that he is deceiving the eye;<sup>12</sup> he intends the audience to notice the break with the illusion of an infinite space, framed by the screen at the back of the scene.

Païni explains that in Hitchcock's oeuvre this visual technique calls upon us to explicitly notice a grain in the image, a vibration in the window frames of cars and trains that enclose our vision of the landscape outside. The rippling of the projected image visually corresponds to the movement on which Hitchcock's suspense incessantly feeds, moving us even though we know it to be a fabrication. If this spatial disjunction means his stars seem to float in space, this achieves an instability that we viscerally feel more than we see, let alone take note of intellectually. A worried world is rendered by a troubling of visual phenomena, with the malaise of the characters corresponding to the disturbed homogeneity of the cinematic representation itself. As Païni concludes, this visual trick installs verisimilitude without effacing the illusionist magic by which it is brought to the screen. By producing a dream-like universe, rear projections sustain the tension between a realism in the details of the world viewed (projected in the back) and the fictionality of the screened world as a whole.

What troubles the eye is that the bodies of the stars are *inscribed onto* rather than *placed in* a decor. The juxtaposition of backdrop with the set in a studio produces a hybrid space-time in which both become theatrical. One notices that the actors are not in the location in which the scene is allegedly taking place, while the reality effect of the rear shot is also troubled since we recognize that it is a filmed landscape; though filmed on location it appears as contrived as the studio set, creating a self-reflexive moment that points to the scene as a cinematic construction. Rear projections are among those technical devices producing the essential instability that André Bazin saw as characteristic of all Hitchcock's images.<sup>13</sup> They offer an intimation of a real that remains unrepresentable, the invisible glue between a location from which the actors are absent and a set that has no marked location, enclosed as it is by screens. This mood of uncertainty regarding the reality of the screened world thematically corresponds to the way Hitchcock's characters, by projecting their fantasies onto the world, affectively colour it even while exchanging the actual for a psychic reality. It signals that they are forced to deal with the disintegration of their everyday. Owing to their psychic distress, the world in which they are actually located is receding from them, while their response to what is happening around them, to the people they

13 As André Bazin notes in 'Hitchcock contre Hitchcock', in *Le Cinéma du la Cruauté* (Paris: Flammarion 1975), p. 171, 'every shot is, thus, for him like a menace, or at least an uncanny participant'.

encounter and the events that occur, is perceived as taking place on an internal stage.

A particularly striking example is found in *Marnie* (1964), in which the heroine's fantasies are rendered visible through the use of rear projections. The first of these, which critics vehemently condemned when the film was released, shows Marnie (Tippi Hedren) exuberantly riding her horse Forio after having successfully robbed yet another of her employers. The framing in this sequence is significant in that it enhances the artifice of the rear projection. Initially we see Marnie on location, mounting her horse in front of the stable and riding into the woods. Only then does Hitchcock cut to the shot in which his heroine is visually drifting in an artificial space, her gallop far too smooth to be real. The separation between foreground and background is transparent, making the viewer focus on her facial expression. As Laura Mulvey notes, 'her emotion trumps her parody of movement. In fact, Marnie herself loses all sense of time and place just when the discordance of time and place characteristic of rear projection is most evident.' For the duration of her ride she has visibly escaped into her dream-world, even while, as Mulvey adds, 'the impossible space, detached from either an approximation to reality or the verisimilitude of fiction, allows the audience to see the dream space of cinema. But rear projection renders the dream uncertain' (figure 3).<sup>14</sup>

The way the scene is filmed encompasses the studio-shot actress in front and the screened world of her fantasy release at the back, rendering unreliable the radiant happiness her face projects. Hitchcock follows up this mood of uncertainty by cutting her ride short and moving seamlessly to a scene overshadowed by another artificial device that critics originally faulted for its clumsiness. A top shot shows a taxi driving up the street to Marnie's mother's house, towards the painted backdrop of an ominous-looking ship. As Robin Wood points out, Hitchcock could have 'achieved a similar effect with a real ship and a real street; but this would have sacrificed the most important aspect of all: the constrictedness of Marnie's life belongs essentially to the world of unreality'.<sup>15</sup> In the course of this narrative sequence the editing moves from a location shot of the stable to a rear projection of the woods, ending up with a painted backdrop of a ship,

14 Laura Mulvey, 'A clumsy sublime', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 3 (2007), p. 3.

15 See Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p. 175.



Fig. 3. *Marnie* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1964).

16 For a discussion of hysterical trauma in *Marnie*, see Elisabeth Bronfen, "'You Freud, Me Jane': Alfred Hitchcock's *Marnie*, the case history revisited", in *Hysteria and its Discontents* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 332–77.

drawing us ever deeper into Marnie's claustrophobic world, even while Hitchcock signals this to be the psychic production of his heroine's hysteria. Although during her horseriding the rear projection visualizes her fantasy of being free of a troublesome world, by drawing attention to itself as a cinematic device it also indicates that the space through which she is moving, far from being infinite, is delimited by a screen at the back. In other words, even before her taxi drives up to the theatrical backdrop depicting the ship that implicitly references the primal scene of her trauma, we have already seen her riding along a transparent wall, her fantasy of open space a marked illusion.<sup>16</sup> The inclusion of rear projection at this point visually articulates the danger inherent to her fantasy life, disclosing it to be not a viable escape but rather a pernicious trap (figure 4).

In the hunting sequence Hitchcock once more uses discernible rear projection to bring closure to Marnie's wish to screen out the consequences of her criminal activities. The sequence begins on location with a crane shot showing Marnie fleeing from the other members of the hunting party, with her sister-in-law Lil (Diane Baker) in close pursuit. The following rear projection of the open field across which she gallops again indicates that she is moving through a dreamscape, only now it completely envelops her, as if signalling that what is hunting her down are primarily her own delusions. Both Lil, riding behind her, and the wall of the farmhouse towards which Forio is racing are illusory projections. Furthermore, to heighten the suspense this furious ride is interrupted with details of a horse's hoof actually pounding the ground. As her horse falters while jumping across a fence, Marnie falls in front of a rear projection of the sky and trees but lands on a patch of grass on location; in other words, as Forio, the vehicle of her delusional ride, is fatally injured, she falls out of the rear projection connected with him. Killing her beloved horse is tantamount to destroying her access to the impossible space of autonomous enjoyment. She has reached a dead end and can only turn back, to the marriage she tried to escape from and, in the concluding sequence of the film, to the traumatic past her husband forces her to confront. Our attention is drawn to how conspicuously the fantasy of this con-woman and thief, with whom we were initially invited to identify, is separate from any actuality. The instability of

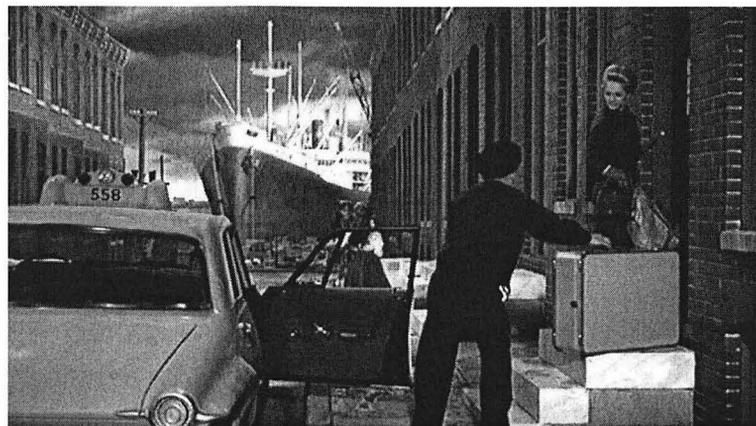


Fig. 4. *Marnie* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1964).

the screened image that transports it not only corresponds to the instability of Marnie's fantasy, it also renders visible the impossibility of the fantasy space in its equation with the dream-space of cinema. By making the illusion transparent, Hitchcock draws our attention to the way there is no reality beyond the filmed scene; or rather, what lies beyond is irrevocably screened out by the projection. The instability of the film image is such that it intimates an unrepresentable real – both the traumatic knowledge haunting his heroine as well as what lies irrevocably outside all cinematic figuration.

A similar mood of disjunction is produced by the culminating scene at the funfair in *Strangers on a Train*, during which Guy one last time confronts his double on a carousel that has spun perilously out of control. First we see the men grappling with each other between the wooden horses that rise and fall in accelerated motion. The rest of the funfair, spinning in the background, is shown as a rear projection, signalling that the men's dangerous bond has also spun out of control. The editing moves back and forth between the two men on the carousel, fighting ever more viciously with each other in front of this rear projection, and location shots of the policemen who have followed them there, and the bystanders commenting on the spectacle. After the operator has managed to crawl underneath the merry-go-round in an attempt to end the infernal spinning, we see its sudden and crashing halt as a rear projection, while the sequence concludes with the carousel on set, now matched to the back projection.

The lived hallucination that joined two strangers in an uncanny blurring of reality and fantasy has come to an end. The site of their final deadly embrace has been transformed into a pure backdrop, in front of which Guy can finally clear himself of the murder of which he is suspected. In their final confrontation, both actors are back in a studio with the wreckage and the horrified onlookers scurrying behind them. The rest of the funfair is no longer a swirling rear projection but a stable image. The scene has expanded beyond the two characters, as though to mark the closure not only of their embroilment but also of the film narrative itself. Rear projection is used here in different ways: on the one hand to offer one last spectacle, in which Guy's haunting by Bruno comes to an end; on the other to procure a spectacular conclusion to the film as a whole (even though this is not the final scene). The controlling presence in this conspicuously artificial sequence is not Bruno – who, in possession of the tell-tale lighter, has Guy's life in his hands – but the film's director.

Yet in Hitchcock's use of rear projection throughout this sequence there is also a glaring disjunction: the world of the funfair may be one from which the two fighting men are separate (exclusively concerned, as they are, with their battle for the lighter); as an illusory scene projected behind their struggle, however, it also fully envelops them. During their perilous spin they are not attached to the location in the actual world that the rear projection references. They are in a non-space, in front of a screen, which is a studio set at its most pure: a stage framed by transparent screens. At the same time, while these two characters are locked together in a strange, disorienting space, detached from ordinary reality, we also see them as

actors on the carousel, and we see the man crawl under it and the people crowding around it – all filmed in studio shots that approximate the everyday reality of other visitors to the funfair. In other words, while we are at times with Guy and Bruno, caught alongside them in their conspicuously artificial world of shared delusion, at other times they are shown from the outside, not separate from but part of the entire fictional world unfolding on screen. The disjunction in this scene is thus not only between the studio shot of the men on the carousel and the funfair spinning behind it, but also between two distinct visualizations of their confrontation: one uses transparent artificiality to foreground their illusion, the other uses a studio set to approximate reality.

If the screened image of the world spinning out of control corresponds to the delusion they had come to share, its effect thrives on the contrast afforded by moving in and out of the rear projection. Because we are privy to both their self-absorbed fantasy and the detached gaze of the onlookers, ours is the double vision of disavowal, involved in the dream-space of the cinema and selfconsciously reflecting on the uncertainty of this dream. In the climactic scene of *Strangers on a Train*, in which Hitchcock begins in a real setting, then moves between it and the illusory space of rear projection only to end up once more in a studio set, he plays with devices such as a transparent projection and a backdrop, setting them against each other. By foregrounding the extreme artificiality, the camerawork reveals the conditions under which this fictional cinematic space will unravel in the very act of being created.

This shift between location and rear projection corresponds to the characters' experience of disequilibrium, and underscores the disjunction between their personal delusions and the actual world this screens out. At the same time it draws attention to the artificiality of their illusory fantasy that is about to come to an end. By combining the theatricality of cinema (the foreground of the filmed scene) with mimetic detail (the location shots in the rear), two aspects of the film's fabrication are brought to the fore. What is visually foregrounded is not only the conspicuous artificiality of the cinematic narration, disclosing it to be a film fantasy for which Hitchcock selfconsciously takes directorial credit; the effect of the rear projection in this scene is also such that it knowingly draws attention to the optical illusion produced by the medium itself. If the film space is discernibly not real but a projection, this involves both the diegetic narration, in which characters are caught inside or framed by personal illusion, as well as the fact that, as master of the spectacle, Hitchcock is playing with all of us. He never lets us forget that he is in control. His characters may derail but his cinematic artistry never will. Hitchcock ensnares his audience not only in the danger of the story but even more overwhelmingly in the intricate illusion that he fabricates on screen.

Given that the spatial doubling produced by rear projection signals how a set of characters are separated from the ordinary world by being players in a

17 Ibid., p. 77.

18 See Alenka Zupančič, 'A perfect place to die: theatre in Hitchcock's films', in Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 79.

drama imposed on them or of their own design, it is fruitful to consider how this cinematic device is linked to Hitchcock's broader interest in theatre. Like the stage curtain – which, as Alenka Zupančič explains, 'is the basic means for a theatrical "construction" of the story'<sup>17</sup> – rear projection can also be used to reduce the difference between film and theatre, bringing a theatrical element back to the cinematic perspective. And where the actual stage in Hitchcock's films is often 'a place of truth and a place of death',<sup>18</sup> rear projections, by conspicuously turning the world into a stage, can also serve to introduce a reality alien to the fictional world that is tantamount to a moment of revelation.

Sometimes this intrusion of the real is directly linked with death, as in the final sequence of *Saboteur* (1942), when a treacherous Nazi sympathizer falls to his death from a studio replica of the top of the Statue of Liberty after the sleeve by which Barry Kane (Robert Cummings) is holding him comes undone. During this risky narrative moment, in which the falsely accused hero could himself be hurled into the depths below, he is shown kneeling in the perilous space between the gigantic stone thumb and forefinger of the hand holding the torch. The top shot of the head of this national monument, the park at her feet and the skyline of New York in the background are all rear projections.

If the theatricality of this rescue scene, which turns the Statue of Liberty into a stage high above everyday New York, underscores the excitement of confronting an enemy of the state, the lethal descent into a discernibly illusory space corresponds to a falling out of the fantasy world in which the two antagonists have been struggling. The last shot of *Saboteur* shows the romantic couple, finally united, turning their backs on us. They are returning to the inside of the statue, which is to say they are turning away from the perilous rear projection that marked the culmination of the spy adventure they shared with the saboteur. As in *Strangers on a Train*, the hero is now cleared; and yet, because this takes place against the backdrop of a spy meeting his death by falling into an illusory space, the happy ending is transparently artificial. The theatricality of the rear projection evokes a very specific reality beyond the fabrication. When the film was released, the threat of German Fifth Columnists in the USA was all too real. By foregrounding the artificiality of one agent's demise, this final scene offers a revelation directly aimed at the political reality of the world beyond the screen, the conceptual vanishing point of the fictional reality brought to the screen through this cinematic device.

Earlier in the film, the use of a rear projection had already produced a stage within a stage for a moment of truth that anticipates this narrative closure. After Pat has finally realized that Barry is not the enemy agent sought by the FBI, we find these two lovers on the dance floor, at a ball held at the luxurious Seaton House as a cover for a private meeting of real Fifth Columnists. To underline their recognition of how they have been entrapped by enemy forces while the other guests blithely ignore all danger, the mise-en-scene makes us privy to their clandestine conversation. Significantly this takes place in front of the other dancing couples, shown in rear projection.

19 While Dominique Paini locates this dancing sequence in the Hitchcockian scenario of falling in love, my suggestion is to see a political plot haunting the romance plot. The rear projection signals the presence of a world of espionage to which the ordinary world is oblivious, relating the instability of the film image to the instability of the real world war politics overshadowing the production and reception of *Saboteur*. Disavowal here entails acknowledging that, while this film is part of Hitchcock's war effort, the romantic narrative is necessary to sell his political message.

20 See Michael Walker, 'A perfect place to die? The theater in Hitchcock revisited', in *Hitchcock Annual*, vol. 16 (2010), p. 28.

The content of this conversation, so blatantly severed from the festive surroundings, sets the tone of patriotic fervour Hitchcock seeks to elicit with this film. The rear projection signals that his romantic couple are speaking not only as characters in a spy narrative but as the two film stars, Pricilla Lane and Robert Cummings, warning the audience about the vigilance required at this historical moment.<sup>19</sup> Their stark visual distinction from all the other dancers – who, in their insistence on simply having a good time, are shown, as the heroine literally notes, to be unreal – signals the illusory safety of ignoring political danger (figure 5).

The fact that Hitchcock's protagonists are in a different location to the grainy rear projection of the other guests both authenticates and justifies their suspicions. Theirs is no longer a paranoid narrative but one that gives a clear insight into the state of the nation, its urgency rendered visceral by this cinematic illusion. As Michael Walker notes, with Hitchcock the stage is often the place for a public confession: 'when the hero has been falsely accused, Hitchcock is keen that there is an audience present to bear witness to the identification of the true villain'.<sup>20</sup> The theatricality produced by the rear projection in this scene also serves to turn something secret into something public. The seminal difference, however, is that this stage is located outside the diegetic space of the film's narrative. The conspicuous artificiality of the couple talking in front of a rear projection of other dancing couples underscores that we are dealing with two separate space-times. In their direct appeal to us, the two actors/characters are meant to be separate from the fictional world. The audience is needed to bear witness to a political revelation that is directed beyond the screened world, in direct contrast to the other party guests who are absorbed in a different drama. In this double vision, those not in the know are shown to be part of the screened illusion while those in the know are on a distinct studio set.

This revelation matches a rear projection in an earlier scene, in which Barry finds the surveillance equipment of a group of Fifth Columnists intent



Fig. 5. *Saboteur* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1942).

on exploding a dam vital to the energy supply of Los Angeles. First we see the endangered mountain range as a rear projection through a hole in the door of a cabin. Then the hero, like so many Hitchcock characters desperate to clear his name, finds the tripod and telescope matching the height of the hole. With him we look through the lens, which slowly brings into focus the target for the enemies of the state. While the dam is clearly an artificial backdrop, the imminent national danger this visual ploy evokes explicitly plays with our knowledge that political fantasies can become devastating realities. One year after the attack on Pearl Harbour, this theatricality, like the dance scene in *Seaton House* and the final demise of the saboteur, makes a direct appeal to the audience's vigilance. The hero is dissociated from the world because his ordinary reality has turned into political theatre, and this corresponds to the fact that, far from being deluded, he has a special insight. Disavowal is at issue in so far as urgency comes across not *despite* but *because of* the conspicuous artificiality that uses a screen within a screen to emotionally draw us out of all reel fantasies into a different theatre, that of a world war occurring in the real.

Yet significantly Hitchcock is also tapping into the genre memory of his audience, because he had already made a similar point regarding the force cinema can have as political propaganda in the British film *The 39 Steps* (1935). In that film's final scene, Mr Memory (Wylie Watson), who has memorized a vital secret of the British Air Ministry and is about to smuggle it out of the country, has been shot by one of the spies who recruited him. As he is dying, he recites the formula to the police inspectors who have come just in time, thus clearing the falsely accused hero Richard Hannay (Robert Donat). He does so in front of a rear projection of showgirls who have been called on stage to divert the crowd, creating once again the double vision essential to the cinematic device of rear projection (figure 6). Attention is drawn to the entertainment in the background as a pleasurable diversion. Yet in screening out the actual threat to national security on the diegetic level of the film, it serves to highlight the mood of vigilance on the extradiegetic level. Suspicions, even if initially played through in fantasy, may have consequences in the real. The truth that is revealed in the studio scene is meant not only to produce a satisfying narrative closure for Hannay, who is now free to marry Pamela, but also (as in *Saboteur's* the dance scene) to prevent a political disaster that references an actual political threat beyond this fictional world.

Because the two scenes (the showgirls and the dying man) occur in one and the same frame, we recognize that the entertainment in the background and the politically urgent confession in the foreground go hand in hand. Cinema's mass entertainment is shown to be a vital force in raising public awareness of national security issues. The fact that the rear projection is slightly blurred only serves to bring Mr Memory's confession into greater focus, transforming the film audience into privileged witnesses to a revelation about the spy-ring, to which the London Palladium audience remains dangerously oblivious. The rear projection of the showgirls on stage has become the backdrop for a second stage, where (as in *Saboteur*) the

Fig. 6. *The 39 Steps* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1935).



hero who alone is in the know can finally share his privileged knowledge with the police. The confession Mr Memory makes to those who have gathered round him not only clears the hero but targets those who go unnoticed in the political threat they pose. The conspicuous theatricality of this scene within a scene is now aimed not at deceiving our eyes but at correcting our political vision. As with his cameo appearances, Hitchcock affirms his bond with the audience. In these political films, however, the mutual recognition comes first and foremost in a direct appeal to our engagement in the political world outside the fiction he has fabricated for our entertainment.

The final set of films I wish to discuss use rear projection to visualize how characters project their internal fantasies onto the outside world and/or respond to a drama projected onto them. This is less about an external artifice whose theatricality signals characters caught in the political machinations of others, more about how the spatial doubling corresponds to the way in which obsessions transform reality into a stage for all-encompassing fantasies that draw everything into their force-field. At the same time, the conspicuous artifice of the image also draws attention to the delimiting frame of these subjective projections. We are supposed to notice that the illusory background is not a space the characters actually inhabit, but instead an indication of the constrictive enclosure produced by their excessive fantasy work.

In *Notorious* (1946), from the moment the FBI decides to send its agent Devlin (Cary Grant) to ask Alicia Huberman (Ingrid Bergman) to spy on her traitor father's Nazi friends in South America, the space the pair move in is dominated by rear projections. Alicia's villa in Florida, where Devlin is to make contact with her, is initially shown in a rear projection during daylight, with a plain-clothes detective walking in front of it. The following evening, at the end of a party she has given for her friends, a drunken Alicia will ask

Devlin to go for a ride with her in her car; after a brief location shot of the swerving car, we see the two speeding along a beach road that is shown in both the front and back of the car in rear projection. A traffic policeman starts to follow them, and for a brief moment we have a double vision: we see the policeman on his motorcycle, framed by the rearview mirror positioned in the centre of the front windscreen; this image is juxtaposed in turn with a slightly out-of-focus projection of the Floridian night into which Alicia is so precariously racing. The mirrored image of the man on the motorbike is a screen in front of a moving landscape, which is itself also a screen (figure 7).

Even after Alicia has stopped the car and begun to argue with the policeman, the dramatic action continues to take place in front of a rear projection of palm trees, gently blowing in the breeze. Having noticed that the strange man sitting next to her has passed his badge to the policeman, she suddenly realizes she is with a federal agent. The vehement skirmish that follows inside her car, in the course of which Devlin will strike her unconscious, is all theatre, serving two separate if intertwined scripts: Devin's romantic passion that begins that night, and the political spy job that he will cajole her into accepting the next morning. Once the two have moved on to South America, with Alicia now willing to cooperate with the government, Rio becomes the pair's illusory backdrop, first introduced in an establishing shot as a rear projection through the aeroplane window. We see the couple talking in a pavement cafe, kissing on a tourist trail or on the balcony of Alicia's apartment above the beach, and once her mission has begun they meet repeatedly on a park bench. The rear projection of the Brazilian city sustains the theatrical motif. Alicia continues to play a role, only now she has exchanged the part of cynical daughter of an enemy of the state for that of clandestine government informant.

Once she has married Sebastian Alexander (Claude Rains) in the hope of discovering the secret military plans of his organization, the drama in which



Fig. 7. *Notorious* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1946).

they are caught up becomes ever more complex. Devlin, motivated by jealousy of the man he has compelled Alicia to entice, unjustly suspects her of still being nothing more than a drunken flirt; Alicia, meanwhile, filled with self-pity, is unable to communicate her true feelings to Devlin. The arguments the two have in front of discernibly illusory locations in Rio signify the extent to which the pair are divorced from their surroundings, not only because they are not who they claim to be in their interactions with Sebastian and his Nazi accomplices, but also because, given their conflicted feelings for each other, artifice has come to inhabit their own interaction.

Multiple visual effects accompany the turning point in this relationship. When Alicia confesses that Sebastian has become her lover, she and Devlin meet clandestinely in front of a rear projection of a crowd at a racetrack. Here Alicia can give her report to Devlin, even though Sebastian watches them from afar through his binoculars. When Devlin mocks Alicia for having ensnared her target, her despair over his duplicity finds a visual correspondence in the binoculars she raises to her eyes. For a brief moment her face is erased by two circular screens on which is projected the racetrack she is watching, while behind her we see a rear projection of a few anonymous onlookers. In this closeup she is positioned between two illusory projections of the ordinary world from which she has been separated by her role as a spy. Sensing that they are being watched, Devlin does not look at her as she defends herself against his accusation of betrayal, insisting that she seduced Sebastian only in the interests of national security. The heightened uncertainty produced by this double rear projection (behind her and covering her eyes) derives not only from its ability to make us aware of how isolated Alicia is but from its potential to make her disappear into the very fabric of the cinematic image. For this brief moment she seems to be nothing other than a body onto and behind which projections are screened (figure 8).



Fig. 8. *Notorious* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1946).

In a similar manner, Madeleine/Judy (Kim Novak) in *Vertigo* (1958) draws her lover Scottie (James Stewart) into a hallucinatory space that, at seminal moments, is delimited by rear projections to foreground its theatricality. The streets of San Francisco along which Scottie drives, either following Madeleine or with her at his side, are consistently shown from within the car as screened projections. During these drives they are not moving through any real space but are instead contained in a dreamscape. The disorientation between foreground (the car in a studio) and the illusory background speaks to the fact that Madeline is performing the part of a woman who is allegedly haunted by a death-driven ancestor, and doing so for a lover whom she is consciously tricking but who is himself also willing to be duped. Seminal to this logic of entwined internal projections is a moment at the beach when their kiss seals this shared fantasy; Hitchcock deftly includes location shots in order to disclose the fabrication of the hallucinatory effect. Placed in front of a rear projection, Madeleine initially relates fragments of the death dream that she claims is repeatedly engulfing her. Then, playing on Scottie's anticipation that she might commit suicide, she detaches herself from his embrace and, in a location shot, runs towards the ocean. Once Scottie has caught up with her, the ocean is again shown in rear projection, allowing Hitchcock to synchronize their kiss with a wave crashing on the shoreline (figure 9).

This correspondence between their passion and the seascape produces dramatic excess, even while visualizing their separation from the ordinary world that their passion completely screens out. At the same time, this detachment from a real location anticipates the peripeteia in the second part of the film, in which Judy allows herself to be drawn into Scottie's lethal repetition of the impersonations she had performed for him in the first part. She finally gives in to his necrophilic desire and walks towards him in her hotel room, cast in a green light, an eerie replica of her previous impersonation of Madeleine Elster. In the long embrace that follows, the room disappears and as a rear projection we see the stable in front of the Spanish mission, where Scottie held her in his arms just before she ran from him. In contrast to the scene at the beach, however, Scottie notices the phantasmagoric change in scenery as the camera begins a 360-degree pan



Fig. 9. *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958).

21 David Sterritt, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993), p. 11.

22 Païni, 'Les égarement', p. 67

around the couple. For a moment he looks up before returning to the passionate embrace, at the culmination of which the couple are back in Judy's hotel room. The dual temporality produced by this cinematic device demonstrates the way the work of fantasy allows the past to screen out the present, while the theatrical artifice also transforms this embrace into the composite of several previous kisses, as though the scene were haunted by the romantic scenes that came before (figure 10).

The visual dislocation also draws attention to Hitchcock's sleight of hand. As David Sterritt notes, the images of the stable appear prior to Scottie's 'perplexed look, not simultaneously with it, allowing it to be read as a purely cinematic event generated not by Scottie's mind but by Hitchcock's and taking Scottie (as well as the spectator) by surprise'.<sup>21</sup> Yet one might also ask why Judy, the corporeal point of connection between the two scenes, remains oblivious to the hallucinatory change in decor. Perhaps she does not need to look because, as the actress drawing her deluded lover into the repetition of a fantasy scene in which she had already been directing his desires, she is implicitly aligned with Hitchcock and the images he projects. While Scottie wants to be duped by the illusion that a dead lover can return to him, she knows this to be pure theatre. While these two contrary responses to the conspicuous artifice of the scene signal the incompatibility of their desires, Judy/Madeleine is, however, also positioned at the centre of the 360-degree turn, pinned down energetically by Scottie's embrace, with his memory images screened behind her. The claustrophobia this technique invokes signals that for her there will be no escape from the fabrication she calls forth.

Païni considers the late 1950s and early 1960s to be a mannerist period in Hitchcock's oeuvre, marked by repetition, dilation and visual distortion of all sorts. Rear projections, he suggests, are now used to the maximum of their poetic significance, transforming the entire filmed world into a lived dream.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, in *North by Northwest* the self-citation regarding this technical device is such that the screen at times seems to have no depth whatsoever, bringing the transparent projections to the very surface of the film image. Unlike *The 39 Steps* and *Saboteur*, the suspense is also more transparent, given that from the start both the audience *and* the Intelligence



Fig. 10. *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958).

23 See Lesley Brill, *The Hitchcock Romance: Love and Irony in Hitchcock's Films* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1991), esp. pp. 4, 21.

Agency know that the public is mistaken in thinking Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) to be a murderer. The series of life-threatening episodes he must survive as he flees from the foreign agents who mistake him for George Kaplan (a spy who does not exist) thrive on the theatricality typical of Hitchcock's romantic fictions, while stylization and emotional intensity both increase as the film moves to its climax in front of the Mount Rushmore monument.<sup>23</sup>

*North by Northwest* not only reassembles citations from previous narratives of the falsely accused man caught in a political conspiracy, it also recalls Hitchcock's earlier romantic daydream narratives in which the world transforms into a stage for an escape from the ordinary (as in *39 Steps* and *Saboteur*). Roger, one might surmise, needs the dangerous adventure in order to finally find a wife who will not divorce him for living too dull a life. The consistent deployment of rear projection indicates that he is moving in an illusory space, while explicitly recycling similar shots from other Hitchcock films (including *To Catch a Thief* and *Vertigo*). Whenever Roger gets into a cab, the streets of New York appear as rear projections in both the back and front windows. What in the opening sequence is nothing more than a technical convention, however, becomes more ominous once he has been kidnapped by two foreign agents who drive him to the Townsend mansion. Even when the car is at a standstill and Roger tries to escape, the world beyond is an illusory screened one. Furthermore, his drunken driving that night explicitly recalls the ride Devlin took with Alicia at the beginning of *Notorious*, and Hitchcock takes the ludic self-reference to an extreme when he shows a police car coming at his hero in a rear projection only to drive into his car in a location shot. In a manner that might seem overdetermined, the film is haunted by its predecessors.

Similarly the American landscape through which Roger passes on a train with his new love interest, Eve (Eva Marie Saint), is screened in rear projection, while the crop duster scene in the vast midwestern expanse of cornfields intricately matches location shots of the aeroplane, flying overhead, and Roger, cautiously waiting then frantically ducking in front of a rear projection as his assailant comes perilously close. Both he and the crop duster are in the open landscape, yet their dangerous contact is exposed both as a projection of the hero's subjective enjoyment of being on the run and as a cinematic illusion which fabricates suspense on screen. As Roger's (and the audience's) anxiety grows, so too does the discernible separation between the foreground of the image (in which he is fighting for his life in a studio) and the backdrop from which the attacking plane repeatedly emerges.

Desperate to escape from this trap, Roger finally runs into a location shot, hoping to stop an approaching oil truck. While the vehicle is on an actual road, the country road behind him – dangerous because it is the site from which the crop duster is relentlessly encroaching – is an obvious rear projection. In yet another moment of self-citation, Hitchcock has Roger press both hands forward as though against a glass window, recalling a similar gesture on the part of the assassin in *Foreign Correspondent* just before he falls to his death. Roger's deft sliding under the Magnum oil truck,

its collision with the crop duster and the subsequent explosion are once more on location. The danger emerges as an extension of his subjective fantasy even while it produces actual damage in a world that approximates the verisimilitude of fictional reality.

Most striking, of course, is the chase scene on Mount Rushmore, during which Roger and Eve run against a nocturnal sky, whose two differently shaded blue strips recall both the minimalist painting style of the 1950s and the fact that the two film stars are in fact located in a studio. For a few moments the pure blue obliterates even the semblance of an illusory background, emphasizing that Grant and Saint are running along nothing other than a blue screen. Interpolated into the suspense sequence is a pure cinematic image. The disjunction afforded by the subsequent rear projection of the monument has as much to do with disquieting the viewer by foregrounding the theatricality of their flight as it does with making us aware of yet another self-citation. Once Roger and Eve begin climbing down the enormous sculpted head of Jefferson, Hitchcock reassembles two scenes from *Saboteur*, matching the fatal chase on top of the Statue of Liberty with the discussion of the two lovers in the Seaton Mansion. In contrast to the earlier film, however, the confession between the two protagonists does not render public a political threat to which others are oblivious, but instead allows Roger finally to propose marriage to Eve – while suspended above a further rear projection of an illusory abyss, holding onto a stone ledge reconstructed in a studio.

The conspicuous artifice is there to assure us that at this momentous turning point in his Cold War spy romance, Hitchcock has everything under control. We need not worry because there is no real danger. It is all a fantasy, and a recycled one at that. Our enjoyment of the final moment of peril, as Roger holds Eve by the wrist and she hangs beneath the stern faces of four former presidents, is dependent above all on the ludic fun Hitchcock has with a declared excessive artifice. The blue screen from which, for a brief moment, both the rear projection of Mount Rushmore and its studio reconstruction have completely disappeared, turns seamlessly into the blue background of a berth in the train the lovers are taking back to New York. ‘Roger this is silly’, Eve explains, as her future husband pulls her up into his arms. Blithely he replies, ‘I know, but I’m sentimental’, just as their embrace visually bleeds into a shot of the train rushing into the darkness of a tunnel on location. The spatio-temporal doubling, along with all the other technical artifice of their adventure, has come to an end. The rest lies in darkness.

Hitchcock’s use of rear projection consistently controls our response to the world on screen by appealing to our willingness not so much to suspend our disbelief as to indulge in an attitude of disavowal: ‘I know that this is only a cinematic fiction but all the same I am viscerally involved’. The transparent artificiality produces a mood of instability that draws our attention to something beyond the fictional world fabricated on screen, to a real that remains unrepresentable yet haunts the film image – be it the personal

trauma of the characters or the political trauma of global warfare. The spatial-temporal doubling brings with it a distance to the illusion on which the suspense narrative thrives, and thus provides a second, privileged insight. As part of the overall control Hitchcock has over the optical magic he creates, rear projection is one of his privileged technical devices that, by foregrounding the selfconscious awareness that necessarily inhabits suspense, discloses the way his cinematic effect is the result of a complex game. When explicitly discernible, rear projection involves the layering of visual surfaces, the juxtaposition of two different localities in one frame and, once genre memory is at work, implicitly overlaps the film sequence we see with those from previous films.

What is at issue is a form of haunting, not only when Scorsese cites Hitchcock but also when Hitchcock recycles himself. The visual instability produced by rear projection indicates that something in excess of the cinematic representation of the otherwise unrepresentable is at play: foregrounding the artificiality of the film image also makes for its effect. We are attracted by the double game Hitchcock plays by placing his characters in a conspicuously illusory space, not least because this allows us to take pleasure in the complex and multiple positioning of fantasy in regard both to them and to the film narration as a whole. Hitchcock's pact with his audience is that the disavowal produced with the help of rear projection blends a longing for an involvement in the lives of his characters with an enjoyment of the visual trickery that make this vicarious satisfaction possible.