

2: Ernie's to Scottie's Apartment (16:49-45:53)

Holding back the image of Madeleine from the already image-intensive experiences Scottie got in Elster's office pays off. The rich red interior of the well-known restaurant provides a perfect jewel box from which Kim Novak, playing Madeleine and Judy, emerges as an emerald goddess. Scottie's anonymity is protected by his location and restrained observation. As our point of view character, he peeks at Madeleine out the corner of her eye. She doesn't return his gaze, although at one point this was planned. Hitchcock edited it out because it threatened to give away the secret that we don't learn until much later ... that Scottie is being cultivated as a voyeur, a professional voyeur, which is to say the perfect witness who later will be called to testify. Everything he sees and believes is being set out for him, just as in any film, the director and writers set out everything for us, the audience. In Scottie, we see how things might go if we never asked questions, if we endured the traps and traumas set out to catch us.

The movie is divided into two main parts, with a margin in between and an intense finish. In the first part Scottie follows Madeleine, mad Madeleine, Madeleine who seems to be haunted by the idea that she is the reincarnation of her tragic ancestor, Carlotta Valdez. Do we believe in ghosts? We don't have to. We have two skeptics on board, Elster and Scottie, who hold the thesis that Madeleine is crazy, plain and simple. There are a few moments when we think that it doesn't matter, but generally we discount the supernatural thesis and regard Madeleine's obsession as something that could happen to anyone, through simple powers of suggestion.

Realism, or naturalism, is essential for the logic of detective fiction. If supernatural forces are allowed, then there's no way to solve a crime, and no point. Empiricism and logic have their hero in the detective, who emerged with Edgar Allan Poe's inspector Dupin, the ultimate "cool detective." The coolness of the detective dominated until the *film noire* period, when the detective became vulnerable to the double or twist plot. By planting false evidence, hot detectives such as Sam Spade or Mike Hammer could be set up by their adversaries. They started to carry guns and use them. Before that, the cool detective preferred to solve crimes from a distance that allowed for pure theory. The hero of G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown mysteries was the ultimate detached figure, perhaps, a priest forbidden by his profession to intervene except to give last rites. Sherlock Holmes became the cool detective *par excellence*, with his insistence on reading clues and strict deduction. The little gray cells of Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot did all the work. The Belgian detective dressed immaculately and wore white gloves. He couldn't get his hands dirty even if he had wanted to.

Whatever happened to the cool detective? Hitchcock rescued the idea of coolness by showing us how a cool detective could be warmed up by clever villains who knew how to push the hot buttons. The audience of *Vertigo* can remain detached as long as Scottie keeps his cool, but that's not going to last very long.

The cool-hot issue takes us back to a film Hitchcock made four years earlier, in 1954, *Rear Window*. Here we also have a professional observer taken out of action, this time a photographer with a broken leg. The injury forces him to sit in the permanent chiaroscuro of his studio apartment and watch his Greenwich Village neighbors, who throw open their curtains and windows because of a summer heat wave. Like "Scottie," whose real name is John Ferguson, we have the case of a character who does not use his real name, "L. B. Jefferies." We never learn what L. B. stand for; we call him "Jeff." What does Hitchcock mean by these negotiated names? Even when a character gives his full and legal name, as does Roger O. Thornhill in *North by Northwest*, there's something wrong. When questioned, he admits that the "O." "stands for nothing." This might have been a swipe against David O. Selznick, the contentious director who brought Hitchcock to the U. S. to do *Rebecca* and later films done until 1948 (*The Paradine Case*), after when the two parted ways. Selznick's O. was really for "Oliver," but the story is still told.

Hero's always have an identity problem, which Hitchcock works by showing them at a point when they are removed from the symbolic systems that give them their identities. Jefferies is taken away from his exciting photography job, Scottie isn't chasing criminals across rooftops any more. Even the high society cat burglar John Robie in *To Catch a Thief* is retired. Hitchcock heroes tend to be out of work or retired, and their names are sometimes a part of this identity problem.

When Scottie begins to follow Madeleine, shown driving a sleek green Mark 8 Jaguar, he seems to be slinking around. In the flower shop for example, both of them park in the alley but Scottie seems out of place. He cracks open the door to watch Madeleine order flowers. The door has a mirror on it, and in one of those brilliantly composed frames we see the logic of this part of the film. Madeleine is prepared to appear within a frame, a perfect reflection of the illusion that Elster wishes to develop. We, the audience, don't realize this yet. We are seeing her as a rich society wife with all the trimmings that wealth can provide. It's natural to see her in the flower shop and later a museum.

When we go to the Mission Dolores, we get reliable forensic evidence about Carlotta, the tombstone, dated 1831-1857, putting her age at death at 26, the anniversary date of which Elster later tells Scottie is coming up, setting a "ticking clock" device going that the audience can now anticipate.

When Scottie follows her to the Palace of the Legion of Honor building, a museum in Lincoln Park, we get a correlation between the red-and-pink bouquet she had ordered and the identical one shown in a painting of Carlotta Valdez. We also notice that her hair has the same spiral curl as Carlotta's. Madeleine seems mesmerized. Scottie gets some more disinterested exposition from the museum guard, which builds the credibility of Elster's case.

There is a strange moment when Scottie is shown in front of a painting, which is really located in that museum, an allegory of architecture. Three boy figures are shown holding an architectural plan. It's a painting of the façade of Madame de Pompadour's *Chateau de Bellevue* at Meudon by Charles-André Van Loo — what Steven Jacobs claims is a purposeful emblem planted to underline the theme of mistaken identities. Possibly, but at least we know that Hitchcock didn't hold the camera there by accident. His use of paintings in films — particularly portraits — was famous. Think of the husband's portrait in *The Paradine Case* or Rebecca's haunting portrait in that movie.

After some more stitching of an imaginary San Francisco streetscape, we are surprised when the Mark 8 is parked outside of McKittrick's Hotel, a somewhat shabby looking Italianate wooden building. She's slipped in and shown herself at the window — another frame for Scottie to see — and the clerk has missed her entry. We can explain this when we ourselves don't see the clerk at the desk until Scottie makes some noises, and the clerk appears with a pastry in hand; possibly she is not the best guardian of the gates. Still, it is her kind of evidence that builds the case the way Elster wants it to appear. Madeleine seems drawn to this hotel, which we learn later on was the family home of her great-grandmother's family. The room has nothing that draws out attention, but Madeleine's appearance and disappearance makes us think she has something of a ghost about her.

The use of windows, mirrors, and purposefully framed spaces shows how chiaroscuro can operate in an "orthogonal," or "right-angle" mode. In the museum, Scottie is watching Madeleine take in a painting. The line connecting her with the representation of Carlotta. His point of view is at an angle to this. We use the idea of it being a right angle because in mathematical graphs the 90° angle keeps the vectors independent of each other, and it is Scottie's desire to go undetected, in a dimension that does not interfere with Madeleine's. Scottie's role as a private investigator tailing Madeleine requires a permanent chiaroscuro, and it's important to examine this concept a bit.

Like Jeff Jefferies' apartment, the spectator sits in a shadow. In a live performance, this shadow is a disciplined space where we are commanded not to make noise or move around too much. In a movie, we do this to avoid disturbing other audience members. In front of a painting, we can move and the painting can't, but we observe the same logic. We practice a certain kind of immobility and silence. Chiaroscuro takes this audience effect into the representation itself. The earliest forms were simply shading and shadowing techniques, to indicate the three-dimensionality of objects, but also through this heightened illusion, our point of view was implicated. As chiaroscuro became a way of putting a frame inside a representation that framed another representation, it was more ideologically identified with the action and politics of watching. In this case, Scottie's surveillance has a moral dimension. If a real Madeleine knew she was being watched, she would naturally complain. Similarly, in *Rear Window*, although the neighbors don't seem to care if they're being watched, Jeff's nurse

Stella warns him not to overstep the fragile boundary between casual looking and prying into his neighbors' private lives. In *Vertigo*, Scottie seems to be the voyeur, the victimizer, but we learn later that all the scenes are constructed to manipulate him, so the watcher is really the watched, the unwitting victim.

The chiaroscuro diagrams come in two varieties: one to show how the frame-within-the-frame works, a frontal form of chiaroscuro; another to show how an independent viewer can watch someone viewing a representation, "from the side." The idea of independence built into the 90° angle between the two vectors in the second form of chiaroscuro is also present in the first, or "frontal" form. The dark space around the view in the distance is supposed to be indifferent from it, and the view to it. Chiaroscuro is the space of exposition, that part of a play or movie where characters tell each other what is happening so that the audience can overhear. *Vertigo* had a difficult problem when it began to convert the French novel, *D'Entre les Morts*, to a script. There was not enough exposition to let the audience consider what kind of story was going on. It was hard to determine Scottie's state of mind, and since Scottie is, for all intents and purposes, the POV of the audience, something more was needed.

One screenwriter, Alec Coppel, a playwright by trade, was an excellent constructionist, but it took Samuel Taylor, who came in during a period when Hitchcock was occupied by a hernia and then a gall-bladder operation, to realize that a new character was needed. Taylor invented Midge, the old chum who quizzes Scottie about his recovery and then follows him skeptically when he gets involved with Elster's assignment. She would like Scottie to propose, but he's a confirmed bachelor at the beginning of the film. When he starts to melt in the heat of Madeleine's beauty, Midge registers the audience's need to reserve some distance from this romance. She helps him uncover key evidence at the Argosy Book store, where "Pop Leibel" (spelled more like "libel"), whose name is related to *The Argonaut*, the paper that Ambrose Bierce edited in the early part of the century. "Pop" Leibel is another added exposition device. He gives the audience and Scottie the kind of disinterested background information that Elster knows he will find to prove the truth of Madeleine's insanity.

Midge is solicitous and maternal. What she lacks in sex appeal is contrasted with Kim Novak's more seething offerings, and her chummy apartment and casual clothes are a contrast to Novak's fancy apartment, Mark 8, and elegant clothes designed by Edith Head. We are allowed to hope, along with Scottie, that there is a goddess who knows his real name, John, not the stupid nickname Midge uses, Scottie-O. With elegance as a lure, Scottie himself becomes haunted, and this is where another theme of the uncanny is introduced.

There are three main sources for the theory of the uncanny. The first comes from Ernst Jentsch, the German psychologist whose 1906 essay influenced Freud to give some thought subject in his own essay, written in 1919. Jentsch gave us a very useful formula for the uncanny. It is most present, he claimed, in cases where a living person or being seems to

contain some kernel of the dead, or death. This would be like the famous "Appointment in Samarra," a story retold by Somerset Maugham about a servant living in Bagdad who, hearing that death was looking for him, fled to the nearby town of Samarra. His master gets a visit from Death shortly after, looking for the servant. Being told that the servant has gone to Samarra, Death says, "Very good, that's where we have an appointment tomorrow!" In other words, this is the idea of mechanism or fate, something that we accomplish inadvertently, often by trying to do the very opposite.

The second case of the uncanny, according to Jentsch, is the reverse situation, where something dead nonetheless has a kernel of life in it. This can be the model for Carlotta Valdez, who, although she has been dead for over 100 years, survives to haunt her great-granddaughter Madeleine. This can also be the formula for Lacan's famous "partial objects," things that seem to have a life of their own, a kind of "mind in the machine." This can be comic, as in the case of an appliance that refuses to work according to the rules, or any system of blind chance that seems to work against us, as when we catch all the red lights only when we're specifically in a hurry. We can abbreviate the first case, the live person with the element of compulsion planted inside, like some computer chip, as Ad . The second can be DA . Taken together these have an uncanny relationship to the logic of film. Hitchcock claimed that there were only two "correct" kinds of shots, an "objective shot of a subject" and a "subjective shot of an object." We can see things as some other character sees it, but not in any independent objective way. Conversely, we can see subjects objectively, taking into account some limitation of their point of view. Thus, when Scottie watches Madeleine in the museum, he is objectively taking in her subjective obsession with Carlotta's image. Going further, we can see Madeleine as a kind of zombie, Ad , possessed with the spirit of Carlotta. Scottie's objective subjectivity, DA , should be objective but it detects the defect, the 'A' element that makes the subject who she is, an Ad . The two work in tandem with each other, and Hitchcock's two allowed shots frequently alternate in close editing sequences.

Chiaroscuro is the technique for shadowing the smaller element within the larger. A picture on the wall of an ordinary room can give a sense of strange premonition, or our surveillance of someone looking at something the way we are looking at them, the "orthogonal chiaroscuro" situation, couples Ad with DA to produce something concrete: a metonymical condition. That is, without this coupling, we wouldn't have anything material to look at. Once it's materialized, we have both a logical condition and a perceivable scene. Chiaroscuro and the uncanny do the work for us.

By the time we get to the San Francisco Bay Bridge, where Madeleine will attempt suicide following Elster's prediction that Madeleine, we have both a literal case of city chiaroscuro, the space beneath the bridge, and a literal case of an "Appointment at Samarra," where it is Scottie rather than Madeleine who has an appointment with death. Scottie won't realize it for several more scenes, however. It will take his conversion from a cool detective to a hot one,

which will take place in the next sequence of scenes, to wean him from Midge and make him as obsessed with Madeleine as Madeleine appears to be with Carlotta. The temperature changes, thanks to the chiaroscuro that converts his neutral metonymical drop-out position as a pure POV character into the zone of metaphor, that is, into the story he was trying to hold at a distance, an objective shot of a subject. Now, he's a subject for us, the gaze is reversed.

Appropriately, Scottie has made a fire, undressed his ice queen, and begun to thaw out a relationship that will heat up romantically as well as dramatically. We have moved from exposition and the cool shadow provided by the two types of chiaroscuro into the action space where he and Madeleine will be drawn to the architectural dimension that opened up the story, a high place where, all of a sudden, the earth will be taken away from beneath the feet.