

- Hitchcock and psychoanalysis



Some Hitchcock films with a clear nod to psychoanalysis

- *The Pleasure Garden* – a murderer has expressionistic visions of his victim
- *The Lodger* – insane serial killer stalks London
- *Strangers on a Train* - Clearly insane villain with mother fixation plots his father's death
- *Spellbound* – features dream analysis
- *The Wrong Man* – Accusations of guilt lead to a mental breakdown
- *Psycho* – well, duh!
- *Marnie* – childhood trauma leads to damaged adult
- *Frenzy* - insane serial killer stalks London

Psychiatrists in Hitchcock's movies



Dr. Brulov (clearly resembling Freud) in *Spellbound*. The heroine, played by Ingrid Bergman, is also a psychoanalyst.



The psychiatrist in *The Wrong Man*. Hitchcock rarely shoots his psychiatrist characters in close-ups, keeping them distanced from the audience.

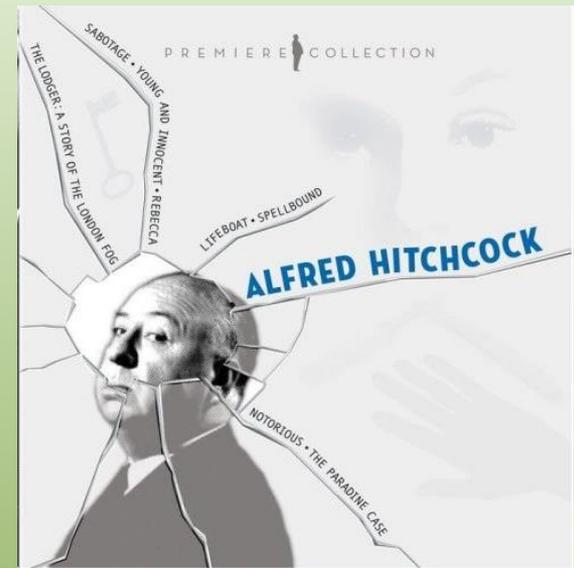
Vertigo: "He's suffering from acute melancholia complicated by a guilt complex."



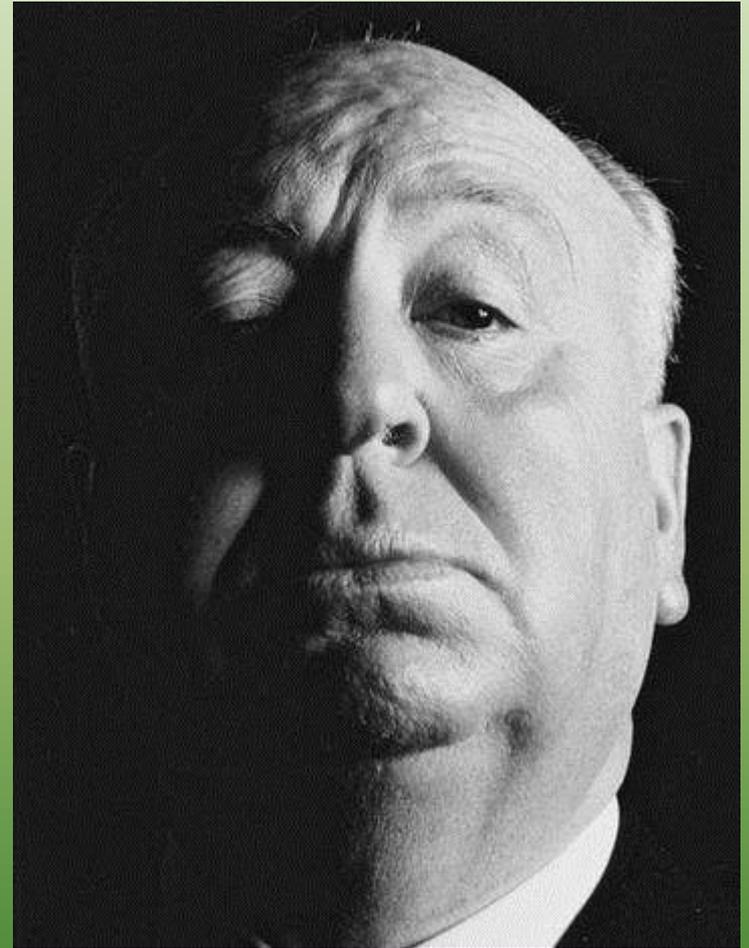
The pompous psychiatrist in *Psycho*. (This is a detail of a wider shot.) "A psychiatrist . . . merely tries to explain."

In 1983 Donald Spoto claimed that Hitchcock was a man in the grip of uncontrollable impulses. According to Spoto, Hitchcock's pathological urges included:

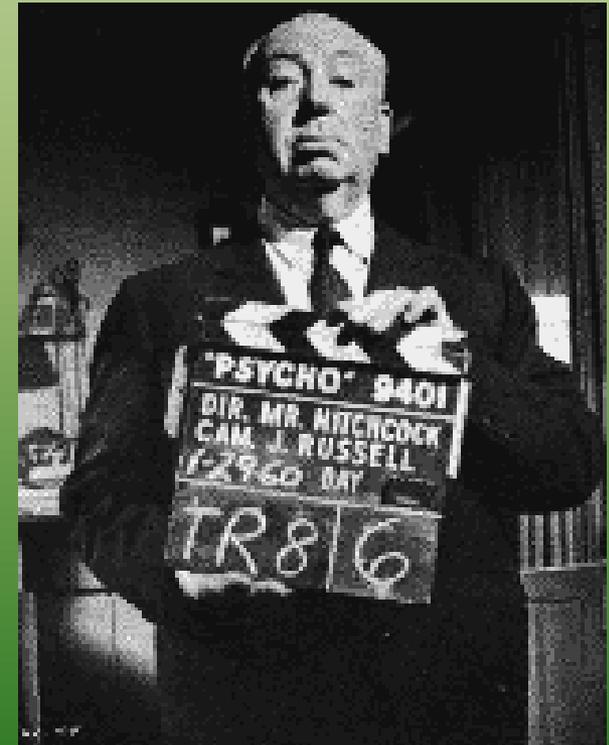
- misogyny,
- sadistic tendencies,
- and fantasies of rape;
- bathroom and various other fetishes about sex and the body;
- overwhelming guilt,
- anxiety, and
- a mother fixation;
- phobias toward women, people in general, and the world at large.



Without considering this psychological profile, Spoto wrote, it is not possible to make sense of the Hitchcock oeuvre or of the sources of Hitchcock's creativity.



- Certainly, these are recurring ideas in the films and suggests that we can only properly understand Hitchcock's films if we understand Hitchcock himself.
- In other words, the films are an insight into the man.
- There's a clear link to an auteurist approach here.



- *North by Northwest* is one of the films in which — as Spoto underlined — Hitchcock takes an elegant leading man and gives him Hitchcock's own personal hang-ups. (e.g. an unhealthy attachment to a domineering mother)
- Spoto emphasized how Hitchcock expresses his own anxieties vicariously through his handsome leading men.



Like this:



Donald Spoto's *The Dark Side of Genius*, sees Scottie parallels in the director's mania for making over actresses as the blonde ideal he found in Grace Kelly, who stopped making his movies to become a princess.

Spoto views Hitchcock as a sick, obese puppy who lived chastely with his wife in his last 30 years and worked out his sexual kinks on film.



The Dark Side of Genius revealed that Hitchcock had harassed actor Tippi Hedren on the set of *The Birds* (1963) to the point of physical and psychological collapse.



- Hedren claimed that during the filming of *Marnie*, a year later, Hitch also “made an overt sexual proposition” and when she resisted “became threatening”, saying he would ruin her career.



- He never forgave her for turning him down, and refused thereafter to call her anything but “that girl”. This seemed to be the most extreme example of a pattern: he had controlling obsessions with many of his leading ladies, including Madeleine Carroll, Grace Kelly, Ingrid Bergman, Eva Marie Saint and Vera Miles.



Shooting the bird attack scene

On the final day, a bird attacked Hedren's left eye, leaving a deep cut in the lower lid. She broke down and had to be taken home. Filming was held up while she recovered, under medical care and partly under sedation.

Hitch was, "terribly upset by all this," Hedren told Spoto. Screenwriter Evan Hunter concurred: "He wanted to shoot it, but something in him didn't want to shoot it, and everybody could hear how nervous he was."



“I always believe in following the advice of the playwright [Victorien] Sardou,” said the real Hitchcock at the time. “He said: ‘Torture the women!’ ... The trouble today is that we don’t torture women enough.”

As Spoto, quoting this comment, rightly points out, the director often made provocative remarks for effect. If this was a joke, though, it was one that his behaviour on *The Birds* rendered unfunny.



Should we then read *Vertigo* as an expression of Hitchcock's own repressed desire to manipulate an attractive woman into a personalised fantasy object – a desire that Spoto claims Hitchcock reveals more and more in his representation of women over his late crop of films and his alleged behaviour towards Tippi Hedren?



Mother/Lover/Murder themes in Hitchcock films after *Vertigo*

- *Psycho* (1960) – Norman Bates murders his mother and recreates her through taxidermy. Marion Crane is also brutally murdered in a shower by a transvestite Norman, whose personality has been overtaken by his fantasy ‘Mother’.
- *The Birds* (1963) – A town is attacked by birds when Hedren’s character Melanie arrives in romantic pursuit of a young man called Mitch. His oppressive mother blames Melanie.
- *Marnie* (1964) – Hedren again. Her character Marnie suffers from a repressed childhood trauma linked to her cold and distant mother. She is sexually frigid. Sean Connery’s Mark bullies her into marriage in order to ‘cure’ her. They eventually discover her mother’s suppressed past.
- *Frenzy* (1972) – The likeable and charming Bob Rusk is revealed as an insane serial rapist and murderer. He loves his mother.



Note the use of portraits again in a still from *Frenzy*

Let's go a little deeper:

Sigmund Freud, who discovered and theorized the unconscious, believed that **human life is dominated by the need to repress our tendencies toward gratification of basic desires and drives (the pleasure principle) in favour or delayed and more socially acceptable means of gratification (the reality principle).**



Vertigo is A 'filmed dream' (Francois Truffaut)

Dreams, according to Freud, are an expression of our unconscious desires



This links to cinema because...

“Symbols, in their initial formation, are charged with desire.”

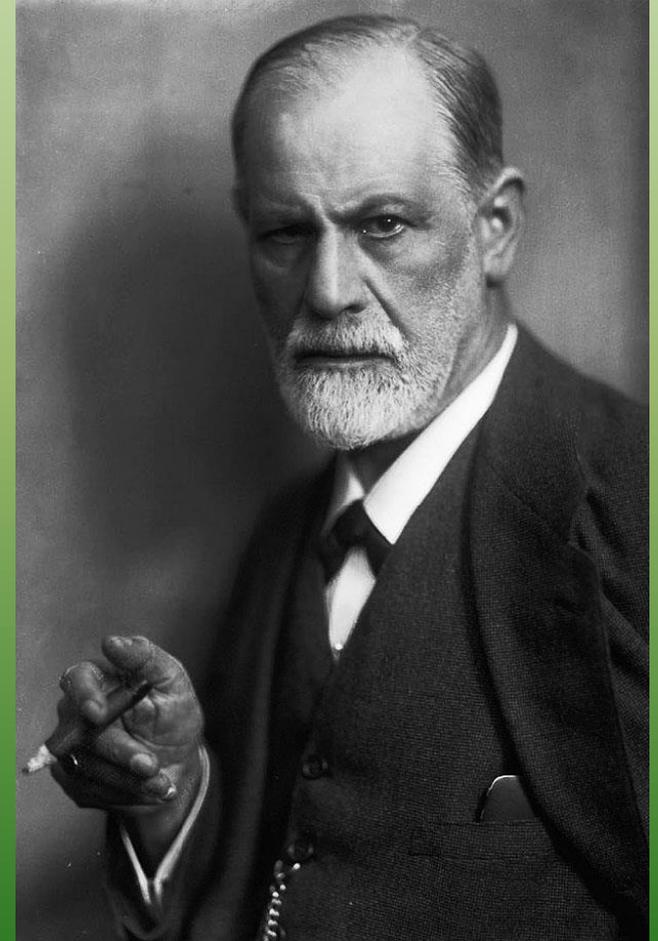
What is cinema, if not symbolic?

Hitchcock certainly understood symbolism



Freud DID NOT analyse *Vertigo*

Freud died well before the film was made but a Freudian reading has been applied to the film by critics, including Spoto



So what unconscious (or repressed) desires and fears are explored in Vertigo?



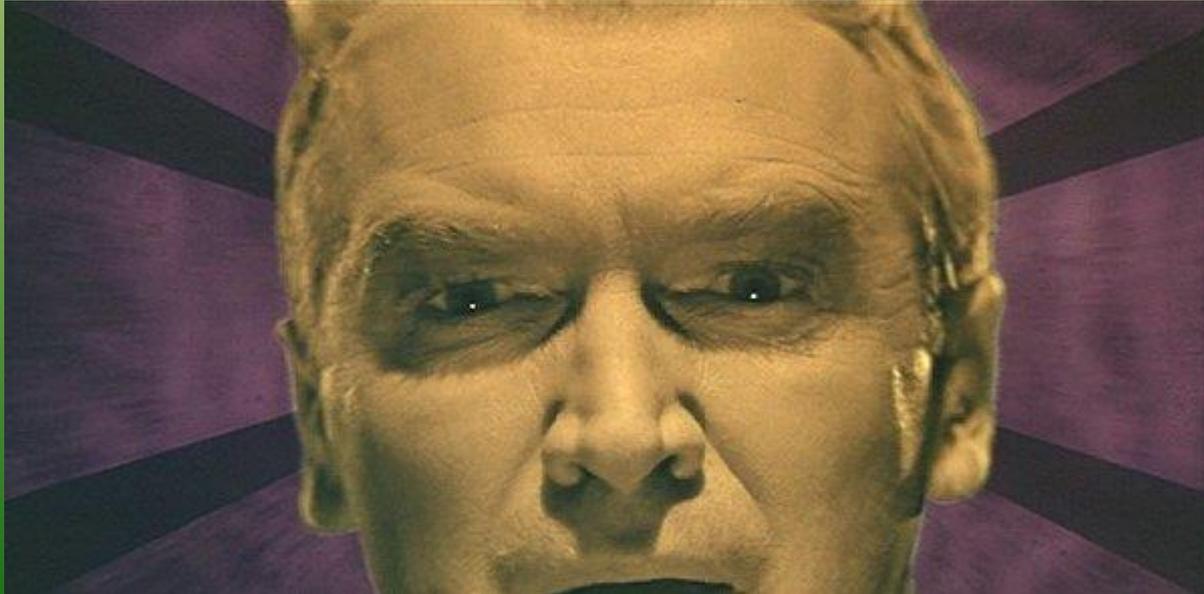
Explore some of the ways in which placing your chosen film within a broader critical framework has helped to develop your appreciation and understanding of *specific sequences*.

- Donald Spoto's Freudian reading of *Vertigo* as 'revealing' suppressed controlling and violent sexual desires
- Feminist readings by Mulvey and Modleski
- Auteur readings of the film by Truffaut, etc

- However, we should consider the wider implications of cinema going as an activity and link it to psychoanalysis – and therefore analyse audiences, not just Hitchcock.



- **Psychoanalysis and Film Studies**
- **What makes watching feel so good:**
- When we watch a film it is as if we were somehow dreaming it as well; our unconscious desires work in tandem with those that generated the film-dream.
- So, the director 'steers us' through a dream



Dreams = unconscious fears and desires

- Acrophobia = fear/desire of falling
- The 'headless' dream = fear/desire of castration/self image



- **J. L. Baudrey on Psychoanalysis and Film Studies**
- **The split-spectator:**
- This is not true, but I'm acting as if it is true. The play between the border of the conscious/unconscious.
- **Viewer as artificial construct:**
- "The spectator is discussed as a "space" that is both 'productive" (as in the production of dream-work) and 'empty" (anyone can occupy it); the cinema in some sense constructs its spectators through what is called **the fiction effect**.
- "Three factors go into the psychoanalytic construction of the viewer: 1) regression; 2) primary identification; and 3) concealment of those "marks of enunciation" that stamp the film with authorship."

Three factors go into the psychoanalytic construction of the viewer:

- 1) regression
- 2) primary identification
- 3) concealment of those "marks of enunciation" that stamp the film with authorship."



That's all a bit dense!

To make things simple:

- Yes, analysing a film can tell us a lot about its creator's state of mind.
- But, we should consider how the apparatus of cinema (film form, narrative construction, themes, etc) affect the spectator – we 'give in' to the film's diegesis, allowing it to carry us away.
- Consider the use we make of cinema as an escape into repressed desires.
- Is this what *Vertigo* is unconsciously expressing or is this what *Vertigo* is about?

- To dispute what Donald Spoto said about Hitchcock's obsessions, it is possible to argue that in fact, Hitchcock was fully aware of and confronting us with our obsessions and fears.
- He therefore used the medium of cinema to 'take us on a ride' of human fears, desires, etc.



- J. L. Baudry says that the cinema situation reproduces the hallucinatory power of a dream because it turns perception into something that looks like a hallucination:

"film offers an artificial psychosis without offering the dreamer the possibility of exercising any kind of immediate control."



Jaques Lacan and Mirrors

- Lacan theorised the idea of identification based on a childhood 'mirror stage'.
- We 'recognise' the protagonist on screen as an aspect of ourselves and identify with his actions
- Here's where we slip into feminist film criticism – that identification is primarily male orientated. Women are usually coded with 'to be looked-at-ness' (Laura Mulvey).



Lacan? Mirrors? Vertigo?

- Slavoj Zizek
- According to Lacan, as Zizek explains in *Looking Awry*, the human drives determine the way in which people generate their everyday relation to the world.
- Desire and the object of desire determine the subject's view of the world. However, the relation of the subject to the object of desire is by nature unfulfilled.

Whaaaaaat.....?





Slavoj Žižek: ““A subject is a partial something, a face, something we see. Behind it, there is a void, a nothingness. And of course, we spontaneously tend to fill in that nothingness with our fantasies about the wealth of human personality and so on, and so on. To see what is lacking in reality, to see it as that, there you see subjectivity. To confront subjectivity means to confront femininity. Woman is the subject. Masculinity is a fake.”

Vertigo, an exploration of:

- **Delusion**
- **Fetishization**
- **Sado-masochism**
- **Mother fixation**
- **Guilt complex**
- **Loss of control**
- **Mourning and melancholia**
- **Death instinct and phobias**
- **Castration anxiety and scopophilia**
- **Obsession, fixation on primal scene and compulsion to repeat**
- **Loss of identity**
- **Necrophilia**



Consider:

- Framing of the characters, particularly where mirrors are involved
- The dreamlike structure
- Fantasy element & wish fulfilment (in casting, costume, etc)
- Scottie's melancholia & sadism
- Judy's masochism
- The coding of red & green
- The 'creation' of character
- The mother/son/lover relationships
- Characters haunted by loss (Carlotta/Madeleine)
- The past affecting the present
- The unsettling soundtrack
- Subjective narrative structure
- Subjective cinematography
- The dream sequence



The dream sequence









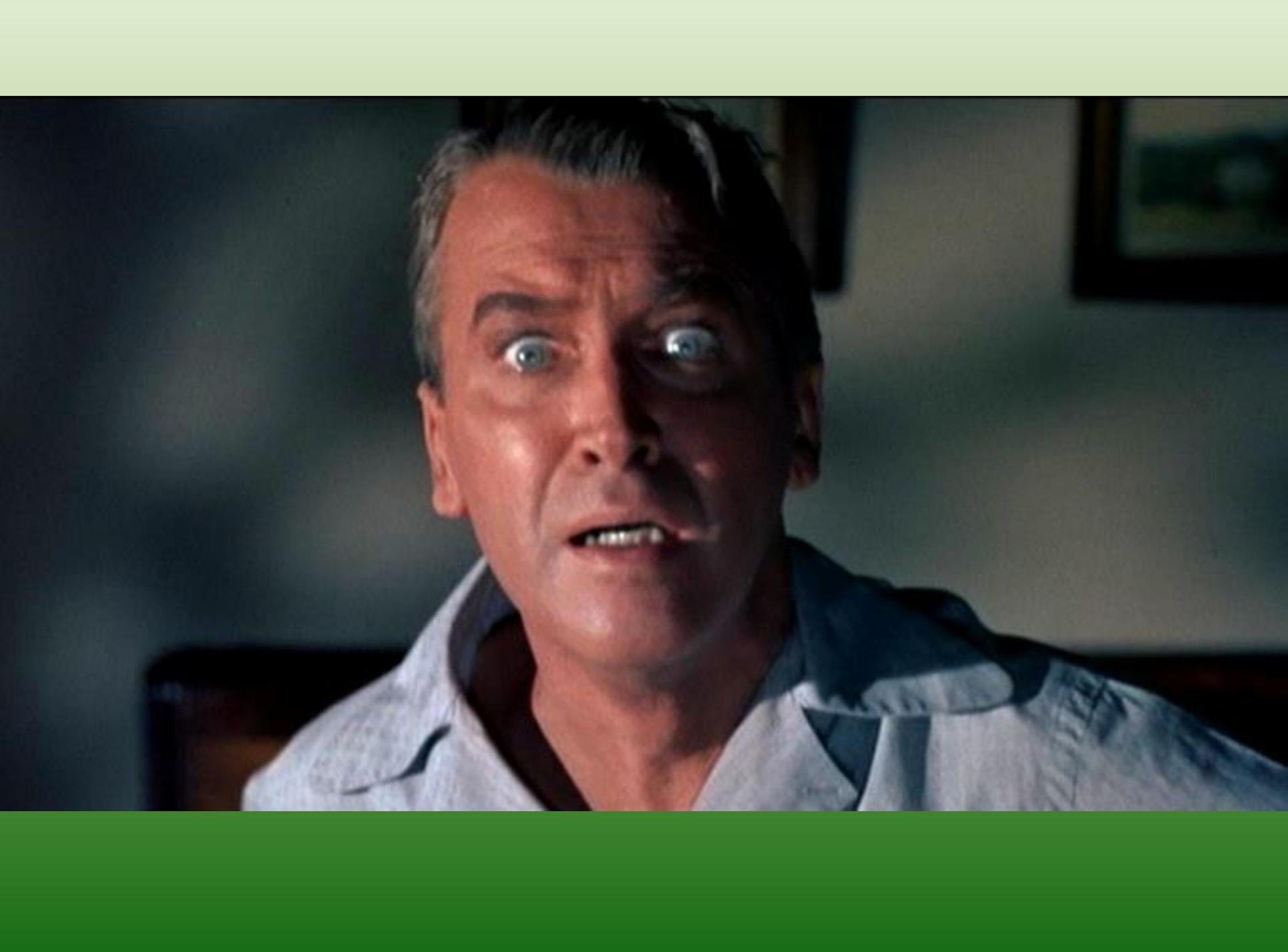














- What can we read into that final image?