

AUDIOVISUAL ESSAYS

Opening choices: *Notorious*

This audiovisual essay looks at the first sequence of *Notorious* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1946) in the light of Bill Krohn's research into the film's production history (2000). It was intriguing to discover, after many years of teaching the opening in close analysis seminars, that the first sequence was re-shot and considerably re-modeled when the film was already in post-production. This was the most significant of a range of new material that Hitchcock shot after principal photography was completed – a freedom he would almost certainly not have enjoyed under David O Selznick's obsessive supervision but which came about as a consequence of Selznick selling the movie to RKO. On *Notorious*, as Krohn puts it, Hitchcock was effectively able to act as his own producer.

We set out to trace the major decisions Hitchcock took in the revised opening and to explore some of their far-reaching effects. We argue that in changing the first sequence when the whole tapestry of the film was becoming clear, Hitchcock was able to introduce and begin to interweave subjects, motifs and ways of seeing that had evolved as he shot the rest the film.

As originally shot, the first sequence began inside the courtroom where John Huberman (Fred Nurney) is found guilty of treason; Alicia (Ingrid Bergman) was revealed as she stood up, and the camera pulled back with her as she left

the court and ran the gauntlet of the reporters, who would have been glimpsed rather than clearly seen (Krohn 2000: 94); finally, the camera left Alicia to disclose two watching agents.

The main dramatic material of the sequence is retained but its handling is transformed. The essay begins by following Hitchcock's revised choices in some detail; in three further sections it then examines relationships between the opening and the rest of the film. The first of these ('Male Groups') deals with developments from the all-male gathering that awaits Alicia as she leaves the court, and from her position as the daughter of a convicted Nazi spy – notably the implications for Alicia of being trapped in-between in both love and spy stories. The second and third look at how Hitchcock's decisions in staging and shooting the first sequence initiate key ways of understanding the film's relationships to its characters and their world. The second ('Ways of Seeing') examines the film's extensive and very varied use of the point of view figure and also outlines ways in which Alicia is from the outset the object of others' looks. In the third section ('Acts of Looking') we think about the film's varied ways of shaping our access to the action and the alertness these encourage to the implications of our own spectatorship. We look particularly at evaluative dimensions of looking, from differential relationships between alignment and engagement with the characters in the point of view figure, to the effects of the most independent of Hitchcock's camera movements.

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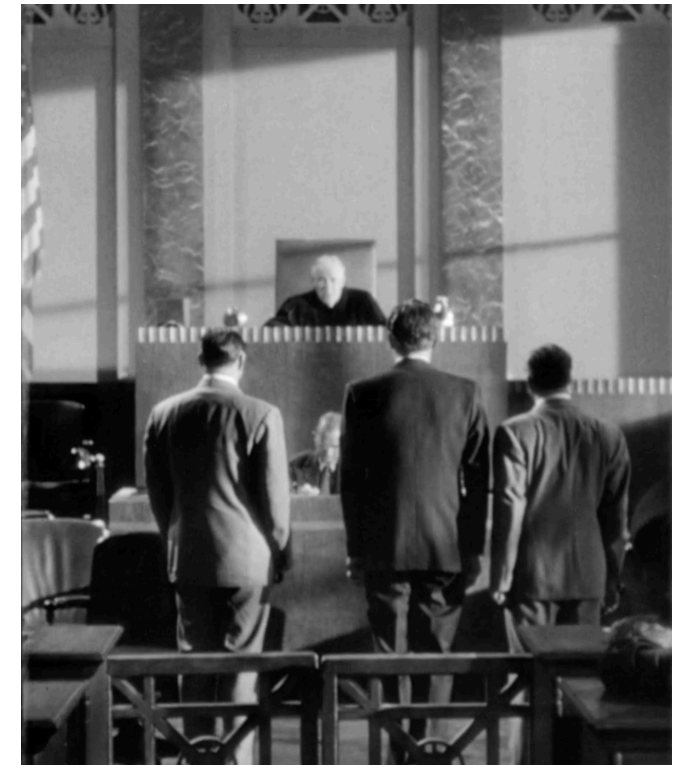
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Works cited

Krohn, Bill (2000) *Hitchcock at Work*. New York / London: Phaidon.

Watch the audiovisual essay here:

<https://vimeo.com/185350060>



ABOVE Detail from the opening sequence of *Notorious* (1946).