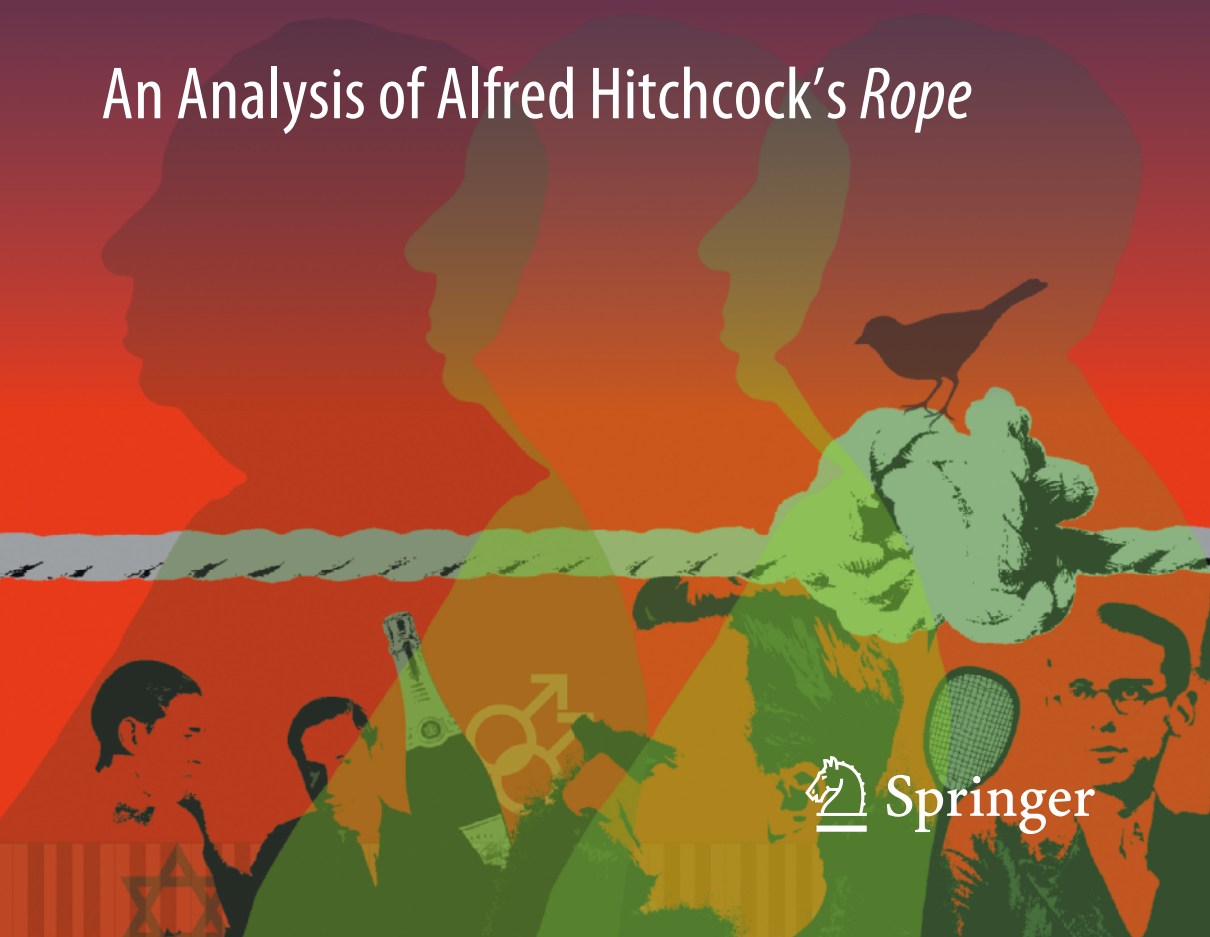
Dario Martinelli

The Intertextual Knot

An Analysis of Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope*



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Preface

This monograph is something I have been itching to write since the very first time I watched *Rope* many years ago. Knowing its reputation as a not-madly-successful movie, and one that was received with mixed reviews, I had postponed watching it for quite a long time, opting instead for the "greatest hits" package of the various *Psycho*, *Rear Window*, *Vertigo* and the likes.

However, as I finally did watch it, I was soon impressed by its richness and variety, especially in terms of research possibilities. I was aware of the connections with the Leopold and Loeb case, and of course I knew that the film was an adaptation from Patrick Hamilton's play. That, alone, was making up for a promising case study, as it contained questions of intertextuality, intermediality, communication, representation, and others, all "natural elements" for someone, like me, who approaches audiovisuality from the points of view of semiotics, communication, and cultural studies. Yet, the density of these connections, and the surprises that they revealed as I moved forward with my inquiry, went beyond my expectations. What I was dealing with were not just the intertextual processes across a movie, a play, and a criminal case. Rather, this was a journey through the nightmares and the hopes that characterized the twentieth century. Nazism and anti-Nazism, antisemitism, homophobia, democracy and totalitarianism, capital punishment and second chances, human rights, World War II, misogyny, tolerance and intolerance, supermanism and humanism.

Most of the ideas I developed throughout the process are nothing new and, if anything, I just take pride in having assembled and systematized them in a single monograph—a pretty rare instance, as we shall see, when it comes to this particular movie. A couple of other ideas, hopefully, show more courage and venture into interpretive possibilities that were not attempted before, at least not in this particular methodological and theoretical configuration.

I feel quite akin to my esteemed colleague Nick Haeffner when, in his own study on Hitchcock, he says that he is "less interested in the concept of the Freudian unconscious or in the torment said to lurk deep inside Hitchcock" (Haeffner 2005: 1). While the complex personality of the director is discussed in more than one passage of the present monograph, I cannot claim, in full honesty, to have done anything deeper than mild references to, and superficial investigation on this topic. Moreover, I did it

only when it was inevitable—e.g., in certain passages of the analysis of Hitchcock's representation of homosexuality or of womanhood—otherwise, I was quite content not to impose any expressions such as "Oedipus' complex", "phallus", or "castration" into my manuscript. In other words, dear reader, this is a happily Lacan-free area.[1] Instead, I opted for a more matter-of-factly, *aliquid pro aliquo* analysis that would be more interested in revealing (or trying to reveal) what and how significations are conveyed, rather than what uncharted territory of the subconscious they come from.

There is a warning though. To perform a "more matter-of-factly analysis" does not entitle me to claim that my interpretation of *Rope*, in all its details and nuances, corresponds to the type of message(s) that Hitchcock, or anybody else involved (Arthur Laurents in particular), *really* and *sincerely* meant to convey while conceiving and directing this movie. It has been claimed that the work of an art scholar—whatever art we talk about, including cinema—can always be exposed to the risk of overinterpretation. This is also a reason why artists often think that critics and scholars are obsessive fanatics who hunt for hidden meanings even if the artist sneezes. On the other hand, we also need to vaccinate ourselves against the "intentional fallacy" virus, and this—as the groundbreaking study by Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946) has taught us—may be a worse crime against the value and the merits of an artwork. "Never trust the teller, trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it." (Lawrence 1971: 8). The famous quote from D. H. Lawrence perfectly embodies the spirit of this monograph. This is a book about a tale called *Rope*, based on another tale called *Rope*, based on a true tale. *En passant*, I also would like to say that I believe that the teller, Sir Alfred Joseph Hitchcock, meant in this tale much more than he ever revealed, but I cannot and will not fight this point too hard, as I have no other evidence than the "tale" itself in support of this claim.

I should also apologize for the rather high amount of script passages quoted, some of them also repeated more than once throughout the text. My intention was to create a very close dialogue between my analysis and what actually happens in the movie, in the hope of providing more clarity and effectiveness.

I have decided not to use expressions such as "American director" or "British director", when in need of a circumlocution for Hitchcock: technically, he was still a British citizen by 1948 and did remain so until 1955, but at the same time, *Rope* is an American movie, and at that point, he had decidedly opted for the American film industry, as outlet for his work. In a sense, thus, he was a bit of both, in this particular period.

Maybe, it is also useful to remark a couple of ethically sensitive issues. In trying to build my argument on Hitchcock's position towards the verdict of the Leopold-Loeb trial, and how he must have probably disapproved of it, I may have occasionally given the impression of endorsing capital punishment. Let me just say loud and clear that

[1] If you think that is too harsh, try my Finnish colleague and excellent philosopher Pärttyli Rinne: "it is my hope that by refuting Lacan's doctrine as nonsensical, I will help hasten its elimination from the academic scene and thus promote the growth and improvement of human knowledge." (2014, 133–4).

I am absolutely against it, in all cases. There is definitely no endorsement, but just an attempt to interpret what Hitchcock's feelings must have been, in this particular occasion.

Similarly, the employment of seemingly derogatory terms like "gay", in reference to the main characters, may appear as homophobic from my part. Again: no way. The LGBTQIA Resource Center approves of the term "gay" and does not consider it offensive. The same way as I am firmly opposed to capital punishment, I am also firmly opposed to any form of LGBTQIA-phobias, so I made sure not to engage into offensive terminology.

Thirdly, in the context of a film that has been amply analyzed through the lens of gender studies, some reader may find that my input in this area is comparatively poor (and maybe find this subtly chauvinistic?). The point is, I see a gender-focused analysis outside my scopes, here. I have read and much appreciated the likes of Tania Modleski and David Greven, and quite honestly, similarly to what I do with Alberto Boschi in the paragraph about Nietzsche, I do not feel I have much to add. The difference, however, was that Boschi's analysis was germane to the central theses of my book, Modleski and Greven were not. And that is mostly because I feel that the questions of gender, representation of women, sexism and misogyny in Hitchcock's work are much more and better covered. Having said that, I am firmly opposed to any form of prejudice or discrimination against women. In fact, one of the reasons why *Rope* is a very interesting research subject for me lies exactly in the fact that Hitchcock's attitude towards certain ethical topics was controversial to say the least.

Finally, I really hope I do not have to specify how convincingly opposed to fascism, Nazism and antisemitism I am. I think this comes across more clearly in the text, also thanks to the fact that, in this case, Hitchcock had similar feelings. I am happy he and I agree on something, at last.

I would like to thank my family (my son Elmis in particular), the publisher, the two anonymous reviewers of this book, and the people who helped with the proof-reading and the language editing. Thanks to Springer, and in particular to editorial assistant Svetlana Kleiner—always a pleasure to work with them. Thanks to my dear friend Carlo Micheletti, who did his best to help me recover some 16,000 words of this monograph one summer day in Bologna when my computer died in quite a Hitchcockian way, and I thought I had lost most of my files stored there.

And special thanks to my students from the various courses where I had the chance to talk about *Rope*. I have used it practically everywhere I had the chance to: an "Introduction to Semiotics" course in University of Lapland; the "Film Studies" and "Media Philosophy" courses at Kaunas University of Technology, and even a specific course on Hitchcock at the University of Helsinki. In each and all of these occasions I could see the students captivated and excited by the story, the analysis and all those intertextual connections. I had to re-watch *Rope* dozens of times, but their reaction and their feedback always made the experience fresh and worthwhile.

Vilnius, Lithuania Dario Martinelli
May 2020

Introduction (With Spoiler Alert)

If, by some mysterious reason, you have not seen *Rope* yet and are planning to read this book first and *then* watch it, you should probably skip the first lines of this introduction. Or, even better, put the book down, watch the movie and then come back to resume your reading.

Brandon Shaw and Phillip Morgan, flat mates and engaged in a homosexual relationship, kill a college mate named David Kentley, by strangling him with a rope. The only reason for the crime is their wish to prove to themselves that they are superior beings who can make an art out of a murder and get away with it with almost no effort. They hide the corpse in a trunk, with the plan to leave town in the evening, dispose of the body in the countryside and take a short vacation. Before they do, they will host a small party inviting David's family, his girlfriend, his former best friend, and their former house master from prep school. They will have the dinner served on the very trunk, all with the unique purpose to make their murder more exciting, more "artistic" and cheekier. From these early sequences, it is very clear that Brandon is the dominant partner of the couple, and the real mastermind of the murder. Phillip, more emotional and insecure, is at the same time charmed and intimidated by Brandon, and while following his lead, shows less confidence in the plan.

With all the evidence hidden away, they receive the housekeeper Mrs. Wilson to help them prepare the dinner. A few minutes later the guests begin showing up: first Kenneth Lawrence, David's former best friend and also ex-boyfriend of David's current girlfriend; then, Henry Kentley with David's aunt, Anita Atwater; then David's girlfriend Janet Walker, and finally Rupert Cadell, Brandon and Phillip's former house master, and an unaware inspirer of the murder, as he passionately taught them the controversial Nietzschean concept of Übermensch—a theory they twisted into a suggestion that they are, indeed, superior beings, not unlike Hitler had done few years before. One more guest is officially expected to arrive, and that is David, who of course lies dead inside the trunk.

After Rupert arrives, the guests sit down to eat and start chatting about this and that. Phillip, who is a professional pianist, often entertains the guests by playing Francis Poulenc's first of the *Trois mouvements perpétuels.* Brandon explains that the party was organized as a small get-together before the couple leaves town for a short rest before an important piano recital of Phillip, but also to show Mr. Kentley,

who is a bibliophile, some rare editions that the couple had purchased. Things get a bit tense when Phillip decides not to eat the chicken. Brandon explains that this is because Phillip was once supposed to strangle a chicken and did not quite manage to do so. Phillip vehemently denies the story to be true, but Rupert, who was there on the occasion, knows that this had really happened.

As the conversation moves on, Rupert, who has a rather cynical sense of humor, begins a sarcastic digression on a number of circumstances where murder should be encouraged to solve "crucial" problems like standing in line for theater tickets or getting seats in popular restaurants. While most guests are amused by Rupert, Mr. Kentley seems quite annoyed by what he calls "morbid humor". Brandon intervenes and brings the conversation on a serious level, declaring his sympathy for the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, and his sincere conviction that "inferior" beings should be gotten rid of. Offended, Mr. Kentley demands an apology, which Brandon quickly obliges to.

As things turn again on the cheerful side, Rupert confidentially asks Brandon if he is planning on really committing a murder, but Brandon blithely deflects his inquiry. Mr. Kentley in the meanwhile becomes more and more concerned about David's unexplained tardiness. The boy's absence is also an opportunity for Brandon—always hungry for some cruel pranks—to manipulate Janet and Kenneth back into a romance. With the same shamelessness, he also goes as far as to tie up a bundle of books for Mr. Kentley with the very rope that killed David. Increasingly anxious, and annoyed by Brandon's impudence, Phillip begins to drink heavily. Rupert notices the unusual behavior of his two former students and becomes a little suspicious that they may have something to do with David's delay. More and more concerned about his son, Mr. Kentley decides to leave, quickly followed by everybody else.

As Mrs. Wilson hands the guests their coats and accessories, Rupert is given the wrong hat, where he notices the initials "D. K." inside. He leaves looking increasingly suspicious.

After everyone leaves, Brandon and Phillip begin to argue. Phillip, at this point very drunk, accuses Brandon that his behavior during the evening will get them caught. They are suddenly interrupted by Rupert's return, with the excuse of having forgotten his cigarette case in the apartment. Brandon, who by now has also become suspicious that Rupert may have guessed something, puts a gun in his pocket and offers his former teacher a drink, still trying to keep his cool.

The atmosphere grows increasingly weird and tense. Rupert makes several digs to David's disappearance, provoking the raged reaction of Phillip, who shouts that Rupert is playing cat and mouse with them. Brandon tries to cover Phillip's cracks by pointing out how drunk his partner is at this point. Rupert says he was not suspecting anything in particular, but now he does as he has just noticed the gun in Brandon's pocket. Brandon nervously laughs this off, putting the gun on the table and explaining that he merely needs it in their country cottage for personal protection. Rupert now casually takes a piece of rope out of his pocket, in the hope of teasing more revealing reactions from the couple. Punctually, Phillip loses his last remaining grip and bursts into a hysterical crisis: "He knows! He knows!". He tries to take the gun, but Rupert stops him in time, and now holds the gun himself. He announces he will now open

Fig. 1 One of Rope's many movie posters. (Image of public domain)[2]

the trunk and, when he does, he discovers David's dead body. In a state of shock, he listens to Brandon's explanation that the murder was inspired by his own teachings. While admitting that he is now ashamed of his thoughts and attitude, Rupert also points out that he would have never put any of those thoughts in action, and that he would have never made his philosophical sympathy for Nietzsche an excuse for such a senseless murder.

Promising the couple that they will be executed, Rupert walks to the window, fires a few gunshots into the air and turns to wait with Brandon and Phillip for the police to arrive.

End of the movie (Fig. 1), and end of this spoiler.

Released in 1948, *Rope* is Alfred Hitchcock's thirteenth Hollywood movie (counting also short films), and his first in full color. It is based on a 1929 theatre play by Patrick Hamilton, which, in turn, is based on the Leopold and Loeb "crime of the century" case. The movie was designed to preserve the "theatrical" dimension

[2] For the usual, idiotic rule by which the author of a work that has exclusively scholarly and educational purposes is still bound to copyright regulations, there is a very limited number of images related to Rope which are in the public domain. Most of these, as you will notice later, are stills from the trailer. This will impair an adequate illustration of most of the significant moments of this film, and will also show the characters (displayed one by one in Sect. 3.2) in overly manneristic portraits, as typical of Hollywood trailers of that period. I sincerely apologize for somebody else's greed.

of the story (long takes, one single indoor location, centrality of dialogues…), and, at the same time, to convey a different narrative, as compared to the real events of the Leopold and Loeb case. In that sense, the movie deals with four different texts[3]: the real events, their representation in the news media, Hamilton's transposition for theatre, and finally, the filmic adaptation as such. Each step of this path is a unique cultural and ideological discourse: Hitchcock's main point of reference is naturally the play, from which he borrows most of the plot, the dialogical structure (plus some specific dialogues), and the central idea of constructing a "moral" out of the episode. Partly because of his personal ideological inclinations and partly because of the historical placing of *Rope* (released after World War II, while the Leopold and Loeb case had taken place in 1924), Hitchcock seems to have a very clear idea of how the story should have ended and what conclusions we should have inferred from it. To this purpose he does not hesitate to manipulate all the four texts and media at his disposal.

This book aims at giving a thorough analytical view of the movie, as both an artistic work and a cultural artefact, but also to discuss the complex intertextuality and intermediality that occur across the various events and texts that forge it. The goal is to produce an exhaustive monograph on this remarkable feature, and to advance a couple of novel hypotheses on its interpretation.

The work is divided in three main chapters, "Preparing the knot", "Other knot types", and "Tying the knot". Chapter 1, "Preparing the knot", will serve as an introduction/background to the book. I will introduce the main theoretical goal of the research, by using a methodological framework stemming from semiotics, communication studies and cultural studies that I have developed for Martinelli 2020. I will offer a background of the movie *Rope*, in terms of general information and significance within the development of Alfred Hitchcock's career. Finally, I will discuss the novelties introduced, both contents- and methodology-wise.

Chapter 2, "Other knot types", will thoroughly describe (and at times analyze theoretically) the main texts of reference for the movie. This will include: the Leopold and Loeb case as such; the development of the aftermath events with particular attention to the mass-media representation of the murder and the trial; and Patrick Hamilton's theatre play *Rope* (the actual direct inspiration for Hitchcock's film). In addition to the latter, I will include some other texts that appeared between the play and the movie, namely a radio broadcast of the play and, more importantly, a TV adaptation of it—this having a minor role in Hitchcock's technical construction of his film. The goal of this chapter is first and foremost that of providing an adequate historical background for the movie, but it will also suggest important theoretical insights that will eventually developed in Chap. 3: elements of continuity and discontinuity between the play and the film; dynamics of the re-elaboration of the real events; political and ethical questions and some more.

[3] Or maybe we should say "four and a half". Between the play and the movie there was a TV adaptation of Hamilton's work, which did not have the same importance as the other texts involved, but still gave Hitchcock an idea or two.

Chapter 3, "Tying the knot", will be entirely centered on the movie as such, trying to depict an all-encompassing picture that would include its aesthetics, its themes, its role within cinema history, and most of all the various philosophical, ethical, ideological issues raised. It makes up by far for the largest chunk of the book, and it therein develops its most elaborate theoretical theses: I hope, thus, that the readers will forgive that the three chapters are far from being balanced in length. The first two chapters, as their titles suggest ("*Preparing* the knot", "*Other* knot types"), have a more framing/propaedeutic function, while the third ("*Tying* the knot") aims at being the real core of this work. In this sense, it must be also pointed out that, while Chap. 1 introduces the methodological aspects of the book, Chap. 2 is mostly descriptive (as opposed to analytical) of the events and the texts (mass-media, theatre, radio, and TV—though particularly the first two of course) preceding the film's production. Chapter 3 is where my theoretical efforts are concentrated. Among others, I will discuss the challenges in the movie's production; the differences and similarities between the movie and the play, including detailed comparisons of the screenplays; the several stylistic characteristics of the film and particularly its innovative aspects; the topoi and the themes, fully including (of course) Hitchcock's own signature-features; the characterization of the nine protagonists; the major challenges faced against the very restrictive Motion Picture Production Code of the time; the theme of homosexuality of the three protagonists,[4] particularly in reference to the social stereotypes of the time, including the "murderous gay" topos/prejudice; the misogynic aspects, partly due to Hitchcock's (in)famous attitude towards women in his movies, and partly to the fact that homosexuality, particularly in those days, tended to be considered a surrogate of a traditional man-woman relation; the connections between this movie and Nazism; the removal of any Jewish reference from the movie (as opposed to the real Leopold and Loeb case, where the two murderers—and the victim himself—were Jews); the role of the music, and more.

In its concluding paragraph, Sect. 3.11, the chapter will elaborate on my personal theses about the movie, which roughly come down to two fairly connected basic statements (a third one, which I will mention in Sect. 1.3, is more related to the methodological way to approach the intertextual sources of the movie). First, despite the recent boom of popularity of the movie within the circles of queer and gender studies, I intend to argue that *Rope* is not just a "murderous gays" story, no matter how important the theme of homosexuality is within it (and it *is* very important). I instead maintain that its primary thematic focus is political, with homosexuality working as a *parallel* text. *Rope* fits into a string of movies that reflect Hitchcock's

[4] The readers who did not have the opportunity to become acquainted with the sociocultural background and the sources of this movie may object that the homosexuality of the three main characters, particularly Rupert's, the fact that Brandon and Phillip are lovers, and even the possibility that Rupert and Brandon may have had a liaison in the past, are not exactly visible on the narrative and thematic surface the movie—and that is certainly true. However, and forgetting for a second the interpretation offered by countless scholars on this subject (including the present monograph), it may be useful to remind that Arthur Laurents, the very screenplay writer of the film, declared unmistakably that "the three central characters in *Rope* are homosexual. Brandon and Phillip are lovers (…). Rupert is a good friend and probably an ex-lover of Brandon's" (Laurents 2000: 130).

passionate anti-Nazi views—a series inaugurated by *The Lady Vanishes* in 1938, and that includes such titles as *Saboteur*, *Shadow of a Doubt,* and others. While *Rope* is of course linked to all of them, I will maintain that its closest relative in this bunch is *Lifeboat* (1944), whose moral *Rope* basically counterbalances, and which is explicitly referenced via aesthetic means (*Lifeboat* is another "claustrophobic" movie) and by the direct quotation of one of Hitchcock's cameo-appearances (the "Reduco" ad). Indeed, whereas *Lifeboat* is a warning on the evil that nests inside the human soul and that easily comes out in moments of difficulty, *Rope*, despite its gloomy appearances, has a slightly more optimistic tone, reminding us that people are fundamentally good-natured and capable of solidarity and cooperation, as long as (to paraphrase the character of Rupert Cadell) they feel "an obligation towards the society they live in". While the ingredient of homosexuality is essential in the characterization of the two murderers and their teacher, and remains of course a direct derivation from Hamilton's play and from the Leopold and Loeb case, I do believe that Hitchcock's drive in making this movie was primarily ideological, and so is the message he delivers to the audience.

Secondly, and somehow by consequence, it is my conviction that, despite his suggestions of the time, Hitchcock was well aware of the Leopold and Loeb case, and he deliberately wanted to construct his story to provide a different ending for it—one that ultimately would depict society as more severe towards crimes like that. To ensure this, Hitchcock did not hesitate to apply a few changes in the adaptation of Hamilton's text that would not only make the film unmistakably Hitchcockian (e.g., the dialogues are distinctively marked by dark humor, a component that is significantly less recurrent in the play, and anyway less effective), but that would also establish a more direct connection with the Leopold and Loeb case almost bypassing the play (e.g., more emphasis on Nietzsche's theory of the Superman).

Having said that, the monograph aims at being an all-encompassing analysis of the movie, and not just a discussion on what are hopefully its most innovative aspects. I mostly left on the background questions that have been amply discussed in the existing literature, but there is no desire to underrate or ignore them, nor to affirm that my personal reflections should take over those that so far have been more popular among scholars. In other words, there is no attempt here at a unified discussion *focusing on* the political/ideological side, but rather at an eclectic one that puts on the table as many interpretive tools for the movie as possible—*including* some that have been perhaps less considered than others.

Contents

Chapter 1
Preparing the Knot

Abstract This chapter is an introduction to the book and an illustration of its theoretical background. I will introduce the main research goals, by employing a methodological framework which stems from semiotics, communication studies and cul-tural studies, and which I have developed in Martinelli 2020. I will also offer gen-eral information about the movie Rope, as well as a reflection on its significance within the development of Alfred Hitchcock's career. Finally, I will discuss the novelties introduced in the monograph, both contents- and methodology-wise.

Keywords *Rope* · Hitchcock's filmography · M.A.P. model · Film's production and release

1.1 Theoretical Framework

Seen from the perspective of my personal scholarly path, this monograph is the first opportunity to test a newly devised model for the analysis of audiovisual arts like indeed cinema, that I have been implementing in Martinelli (2020). That work, meant as a hybrid between a scientific monograph and a course textbook, allowed me to shape and assemble my theoretical reflections on the topic of audiovisuality, gathered during several years, in a way that would show consistence and coherence among the parts. The research for that book led to the construction of a model that I have named with the acronym "M.A.P." (see Fig. 1.1), in reference to the idea of "mapping" audiovisual communication and giving a sense of direction to the various notions assembled. The initials stand for Means, Axes and Properties.

The basic premise is that we can understand audiovisuality through three main criteria:

1. **Means**: the "tools" of audiovisuality, that is, images, sounds and language—what we hear/listen to and what we see/read. The category of sounds includes any type of music, the noises that are audible in the text and the so-called soundscape, that is, the totality of sounds that are naturally or artificially produced in a given environment. The category of images includes anything that is visible, from characters to inanimate objects, from landscapes to abstract representations. The category of language is situated in the middle, as it has both an audible component (the words that are spoken)

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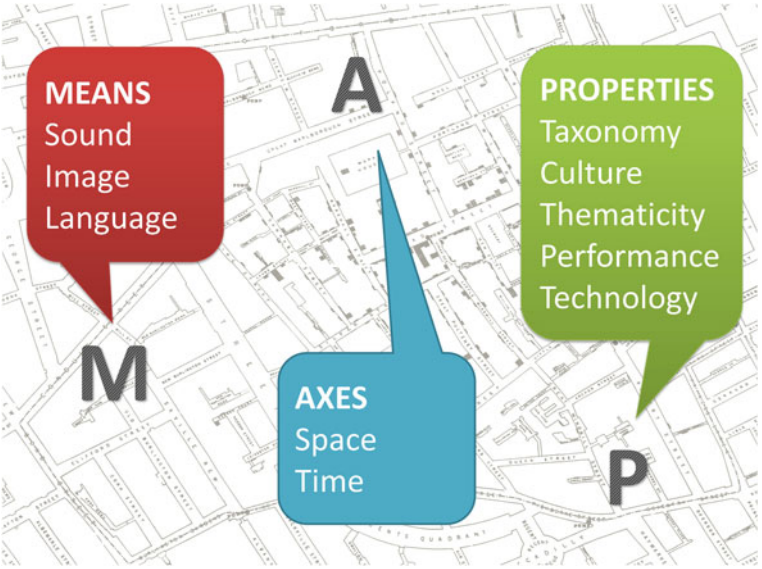

Fig. 1.1 The "M.A.P." model (Image by the author)

and a visible one (the words that are written). In principle, thus, the audiovisual means can be represented as a Venn diagram, with language standing as common area.

In *Rope*, I intend to give extensive attention to all the three means:

- visual aspects will be particularly focused on in Sect. 3.1.1 (where the visual consequences of the long takes are discussed), Sect. 3.1.2 (camera work), Sect. 3.1.3 (color symbolism) colors, and the whole analysis of characters in Sect. 3.2, where aspects such as physical appearance and outfits are addressed);
- acoustic aspects dominate in the whole Sect. 3.8 with the analysis on the music and the soundscape;
- language, finally, is particularly relevant in the whole Sect. 3.4 (dialogues and tones particularly), but of course it recurs often throughout the whole text.

2. **Axes**: the "dimensions" of audiovisuality, that is, time and space. They ideally represent the vertical and horizontal "axes" (hence, the name) of an audiovisual text—roughly overlapping, in both form and contents, with the semiotic concept of syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis (as originally introduced in Saussure 1916 and then developed by numerous linguists and semioticians). The axis of time mostly coincides with the elements of narration, which is indeed an action extended in time units, horizontally, while the axis of space mainly overlaps with the equally crucial concept of montage, which, albeit more metaphorically, is an action that regulates the space of the text in a vertical manner. Additional concepts, such as that of diegetic and non-diegetic space, foreshadowing and side shadowing devices and others are also part of this category. For example, the editing of a sequence's images implies

very much a choice among possible views: a close-up, as opposed to a long shot, means to look at something from near and not from far, and means also a selection of "places" to show: less on the close-up, more on the long shot. Unlike the "means", axes must be always present in full configuration, as indeed a management of the space and of the time at one's disposal is an unavoidable condition. Even the texts that look like having no montage at all do have a montage; and even the ones that look completely alien to any storytelling, do in fact have elements of this.

The position assigned to *Rope* within this category is famously focused on "time": we know, and will discuss, that Hitchcock aimed at creating an illusion of almost no montage at all (Sects. 3.1 and 3.1.1). That, however, is far from resulting in a removal of spatial elements. The director, as he himself admitted, had a sort of "real time montage" going on while filming (Sect. 3.1.2). More importantly, though, I will argue that one of the most important themes of the movie is related to the ideas of outside and inside space (Sect. 3.2.1, plus various references throughout the text). The notion of time, finally, is also central in the discussion of foreshadowing strategies in Sect. 3.9.

3. **Properties**, refer to the way audiovisual texts can operate to convey meanings. Within any communication act senders and readers take "roles" that may also vary depending on the circumstances (e.g., a teacher and a student may keep teacher-student roles in a classroom but then switch into a friend-friend dynamic if they socialize in a bar). In this case, "properties" is the name we give to the possible roles played by the text itself. In Martinelli (2020), I have identified five main properties: taxonomy, culture, thematicity, performance and technology.

By "taxonomy" I mean the various typologies of text that can be created in relation to the media involved (e.g., a fiction meant for TV as distinguished from one meant for cinema), format (e.g., a newscast as distinguished from a talk-show) and genre (e.g., an action-thriller as distinguished from a costume drama). There are numerous do's and don'ts in the communication strategies that are specific of each taxonomical group and that do not apply to others: issues of length, language, structure, purpose, operativity, etc. For example, a series broken down in episodes and seasons requires a certain degree of narrative openness that makes the audience long for the next episode, while a text meant as a standalone will opt for some kind of closure, even if it is an ambiguous/ambivalent one, as in certain thrillers or more artsy movies. In our case, we shall see how *Rope* qualifies for the suspenseful/thrilling stylistic area, but also how it interfaces with the text it is adapted from, i.e., a theatre play (the whole Chap. 2, and the whole Sect. 3.10).

By "culture", I mean the entire social, ideological, moral, political and indeed cultural choices that characterize the contents of a text. For example, whether the same message may be conveyed in a sympathetic or in a hostile manner has a lot to do with how a given culture, at a given historical period, and in a given geographical area, would respond to that message. Native Americans in Hollywood cinema have always been visually and narratively represented as villains for the first half of the twentieth century, and then—as the revisionist wave kicked in—we started having movies like *Soldier Blue*, *Dances with Wolves*, *Little Big Man* and the likes, where

the "Indians" received a much more favorable portrayal. In *Rope*'s case, particularly in the Sects. 3.2 and 3.11, but also elsewhere, there will be plenty of room to identify this kind of questions.

By "thematicity" I mean the way objects, places, characters, and else, are identified as "topics", that is, elements with a thematic value. For example, locations, either real or reproduced in studios, are an essential component in constructing sense, and very often bear the main responsibility for the text's credibility. Choosing a given place instead of another for locating a given text is not just the result of an aesthetic assessment, but it usually implies the assignment of a specific significance and meaningfulness in the overall communicative context. In our case, thorough attention will be devoted to the typically Hitchcockian *topoi* (cameo, dark humor, alcohol, etc.), plus others specifically devised for this movie. Overall, this is the property that dominates in the book, and I would dare suggesting that it pervades the whole text, particularly from Sect. 3.2 onwards.

By "performance", I mean the way contents are delivered: acting, directing, editing… The exact same message may be delivered in a totally different way, depending on who is delivering it. More typically Hitchcockian elements will be underlined in this book (Sects. 3.1, 3.1.1 and 3.1.2), but also, in various points, questions pertaining in particular to the performances of the actors and the camera persons.

By "technology", I mean any property connected to the media and the devices by which the text is produced and delivered. Black and white, color, 2D, 3D, analogical effects, digital effects, high resolution, low resolution, animation, stop-motion, smart TV, valve television set, cinema screen, stereo sound, 5.1 Dolby surround, and so on and so forth. *Rope* presents here numerous topics of interest: from the use of color (the first time, in Hitchcock's filmography) to the technical difficulties of filming in long takes within a rather small area, etc. The whole Sect. 3.1, and partly Sect. 3.8 (in relation to the employment of sound), are especially germane, here.

It is also important to note that properties are not classifiable in any objective sense, but they are simply "anything that an author deems fit to employ in a given text". That is, they are conscious, or sometimes unconscious, designations that any creative force within an audiovisual text selects and applies in order to make that text operate at artistic and communicative level. We do not *quantify* performance: it is a combination of factors and criteria, and for the most part is activated individually by the specific artist. Thematic and cultural properties are virtually endless, and—what is worse—highly nuanced and dependent on several variables (we shall see this being *very much* the case with *Rope*). Anything can be a theme, from huge topics such as love or death to the tiniest like, indeed, a piece of rope or a glass of champagne. Technological and taxonomic properties, too, may be slightly smaller in number but still counted by the hundred, although they are constantly updated and upgraded: for example, new technologies pop up on almost a daily basis, while the reproductive ability of a genre to split into sub-genres, sub-sub-genres, sub-sub-sub-genres, not to mention crossovers, is notorious.

Obviously, thus, there is no point in trying to "define" the actual properties pertaining to taxonomy, culture, thematicity, performance and technology; but one may certainly say a thing or two about the general criteria for actualizing them and