CATALYSIS

Hitchcock sure knew how to frame a shot. In

North by Northwest there's a seduction scene

on the train. Cary Grant leans forward to light

Eve-Marie Saint's cigarette. The shot lines up

with the dining car window, we see only

their hands in front. He moves the lighter. She

lights up. He moves slowly back. She moves his hand

toward her again, in the erotic

pavane of flame, hands, frame on frame. Why don't

I remember the scenery (it was

between New York and Chicago) that goes

by outside? If I know Hitchcock, it too

was probably picked as part of the dance.

We were watching North by Northwest in the

choreographer's studio, because that

has the only VCR here. A couple

of mattresses got dragged out, two pillows,

and then six people draped themselves on these

in assorted angles of discomfort.

I thought everyone was very careful

not to touch anyone else, but when one

person moved, so did all the others, thus

relieving the discomfort in a

sinuous concerted shift. Hitchcock would

have shot this from the ceiling, straight down.

Later that night I got to thinking of

this chemistry series we're making for

PBS. In a half-hour on surfaces

we're going to animate the approach

of a diatomic molecule to

the surface of a metal catalyst.

It could come in end on, or maybe

lying down. The first act in catalysis

is that molecules bind to surfaces,

which weakens the internal bonds that hold

them together. This in turn makes it much

easier to react with other molecules.

There's a lot going on down there. We sure

could've used Hitchcock in our series.