



Newsletter of the Film/Alfred Hitchcock Special Interest Group

# The MacGuffin

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## EDITORIAL

Welcome, reader, to 'The MacGuffin' and its SIG (Special Interest Group) whose stated aim is to provide a forum for people who wish to correspond about aspects of world cinema.

Our members by definition regularly watch films or videos and respect the work of Alfred Hitchcock. Naturally, the actual contents of 'The MacGuffin' must depend on what each of us cares to write in about.

As editor, I hope to see us strike a balance between Hitchcock and non-Hitchcock material. As a Hitchcock buff myself, I look forward to swapping views and receiving feedback from many of you about what is practically my favourite topic. And as a film scholar (part-time), I like to think that we might become a meeting place for informed reviews and opinion.

Informed? I will count any film buff informed who knows some film history, understands what a film director does, and can tell you why Stanley Kubrick's films are superior to Stanley Kramer's. Anything else will be a bonus.

I hope that our SIG will have a feel about it of being a friendly, not-too-formal group, notable for its unity-in-diversity. Already we have readers in three or four countries, some of them still at school, others, well, a whole lot older than that.

Now, about the name, 'The MacGuffin'. The term is Hitchcock's. He used it to describe a part of his films to which the characters - and the audience - give great attention although it actually counts for little within the film's design. It might, for example, be the papers the spies are trying to smuggle out of the country in The 39 Steps. At this point I always think of T.S.Eliot's definition of 'meaning' in poetry: how it is like the bone thrown by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind - while the poem, the burglar, goes about its real business.

In other words, please think of our small newsletter as at best merely a stimulus to the main business of enjoying movies, Hitchcock's included. The French word distraction with its secondary meaning of 'entertainment' rather gives the idea.

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'The MacGuffin' has minimal philosophy. For one thing, when judging a movie I don't set much store by abstract principles. Also, I happen to believe that what traditionally passes as entertainment is often a whole lot more than that - but that words are inadequate to say why. At best, you can say that a great film like the musical Singin' in the Rain has things like vitality and inventiveness and good humour. The latter quality, which the late Leonard Bernstein saw in Mozart, audiences appreciate anyway and don't need critics' circumlocutions to tell them about.

Things are a little different when it comes to explicating philosophy in a film.

That's why I shan't apologise for letting my fascination with the philosopher ~~Arthur~~ Schopenhauer show in this issue. A few years ago Professor Don Cupitt, in his excellent 'Sea of Faith' series (BBC-TV), referred to Schopenhauer's pervasive influence on the modern film. I began to read Schopenhauer and soon noticed some intriguing parallels with Hitchcock. (I also quickly grew to admire Schopenhauer's moody genius, not the least part of which is his contempt for abstract philosophical systems. Some modern film theorists should heed him.)

Indeed, to pursue the personal note for a moment, these days my main lines of inquiry into Hitchcock are just two. The first consists of tracing similarities between Schopenhauer's thought and the increasingly pessimistic films Hitchcock made after he went to America in 1939. (Both men were political conservatives - and both, for what it's worth, liked to read the London 'Times' each day, even though living abroad.) My second main approach to Hitchcock involves noting the countless borrowings in his films: from other movies, from literature, from just looking around. For instance, he seems to have designed and photographed the scene on a ferry boat in I Confess (1953) to resemble anti-Communist shorts of the period. In Marnie (1964) we hear children recite the very counting-out rhyme that the famous book, 'The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren', says represents their emancipation from fear of death - which would seem most pertinent to Marnie herself.

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In this issue of 'The MacGuffin' we watch Hitchcock directing Family Plot, we visit some of the locations of Vertigo, and we share with reader Harold Shuckhart his boyhood memories of growing up in and around a picture house in Minnesota. Films reviewed include Anatole Litvak's All This and Heaven Too (1940) and James Foley's Reckless (1984). There is also a review of the book 'Film As Social Practice'.

To all of you who have supported this pilot-issue of 'The MacGuffin', I say 'Thank you'. I would especially single out for thanks The Old Cinema Bookshop at Hay-on-Wye, Wales. (See 'Letters'.)

To make my gratitude concrete, everyone who receives the current issue - and anyone else who by January 1991 inquires about joining the Film/Hitchcock SIG - will be sent a complimentary copy of the next issue. In return, please note, I will be asking you to thereafter take out an annual subscription costing \$12 Australian (\$8 Australian for people under 18).

Present plans have 'The MacGuffin' appearing quarterly. Still, if enough of us write often enough, anything's possible. What was it that Doris Day sang in The Man Who Knew Too Much? Que sera, sera?

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LETTERS

V(anessa) Sarada Holt (age 17), Bordentown, New Jersey, USA

"Hi! It's about time someone had a film SIG, as it's one of my greatest obsessions and I'd love to be on your mailing list for it. Of course, I have enormous respect and admiration for A.H. films ... my other favourites being A Clockwork Orange, anything by David Lynch, and a number of other cult, foreign and unusual films. I'd be happy to do some submitting as well, once I get a 'feel' of the publication. Thanks!"

\* \* \*

Ronald Conway, Hawthorn, Vic., Australia

"I was watching Jamaica Inn [Hitchcock, 1939] the other night and thinking that the role of Squire Pengallen was probably one of Charles Laughton's most over-the-top performances, but the film still had many good moments. Alas, in those days they could hardly have portrayed Daphne Du Maurier's original smuggling boss as he was in the novel - a coldly demented clergyman still worshipping the old pagan gods! Neither the British censor nor the Hays office would have approved. Hence 'the Squire' provided a major weakness of the script."

\* \* \*

Greg Coombes, Managing Director, Quinto Bookshops (Hay) Ltd, The Old Cinema, Hay-on-Wye, Wales

"Thank you for your recent letter and the kind donation of 'Australian Silent Films.' We are delighted to display your notices about the Alfred Hitchcock Special Interest Group. We have put one in the foyer and another next to the Cinema Book Stock in the depths of the building."

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Chris Marker on 'Vertigo'

(The following is an excerpt from the soundtrack of Sans Soleil/Sunless, made in 1983. The narrator is a French woman who describes her correspondence with a Japanese man, an inveterate globe-trotter. Chris Marker has been called "the cinema's greatest essayist".)

He wrote me that only one film had been capable of portraying impossible memory, insane memory - Alfred Hitchcock's Vertigo.

In the spiral of the titles he saw time covering a field ever wider as it moved away, a cyclone whose present movement contains, motionless, the eye.

In San Francisco he had made his pilgrimage to all the film's locations: the florist Podesta Baldocchi, where James Stewart spies on Kim Novak, he the hunter, she the prey - or was it the other way round? The tiles hadn't changed.

He had driven up and down the hills of San Francisco where Jimmie Stewart/Scottie follows Kim Novak/Madeleine. It seems to be a question of trailing, of enigma, of murder, but in truth it's a question of power and freedom, of melancholy and dazzlement, so carefully coded within the spiral that you could miss it and not discover immediately that this vertigo of space in reality stands for the vertigo of time.

He had followed all the trails, even to the cemetery at Mission Dolores where Madeleine came to pray at the grave of a woman long since dead, whom she should not have known.

He followed Madeleine, as Scottie had done, to the Museum of the Legion of Honour, before the portrait of a dead woman she should not have known. And on the portrait, as in Madeleine's hair, the spiral of time.

The small Victorian hotel where Madeleine disappeared had disappeared itself. Concrete had replaced it, at the corner of Eddy and Gough. On the other hand, the sequoia-cut was still in Muir Woods. On it Madeleine traced the short distance between two of those concentric lines that measured the age of the tree, and said, "Here I was born, and here I died."

He remembered another film in which this passage was quoted. The sequoia was the one in the Jardin aux Plantes (?) in Paris, and the hand pointed to a place outside the tree, outside of time.

The painted horse at San Juan Bautista, his eye that looked like Madeleine's: Hitchcock had invented nothing, it was all there.

He had run under the arches of the promenade in the Mission as Madeleine had run towards her death - or was it hers? From this fake tower - the only thing that Hitchcock had added - he imagined Scottie as time's fool of love, finding it impossible to live with memory without falsifying it, inventing a double for Madeleine in another dimension of time, a zone that would belong only to him and from which he could decipher the undecipherable story that had begun at Golden Gate when he had pulled Madeleine out of San Francisco Bay, when he had saved her from death before casting her back to death - or was it the other way round?

"In San Francisco I made the pilgrimage of a film I had seen 19 times. ..."

(Editor's note. Would anyone know the name of the other film, mentioned by Marker, that refers to the sequoia scene in Vertigo? By the way, there's a second article on Vertigo elsewhere in this issue.)

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#### BEST FILMS

In 1982 'Sight & Sound' polled international critics to obtain the following eleven-best films list. Compare it with film buff Leslie Halliwell's personal list of favourites, printed alongside. (And guess who the middle-brow is!)

- |                           |                               |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Citizen Kane              | Citizen Kane                  |
| La Règle du Jeu           | Trouble in Paradise           |
| Seven Samurai             | The Bride of Frankenstein     |
| Singin' in the Rain       | Le Million                    |
| Eight and a Half          | A Matter of Life and Death    |
| The Battleship Potemkin   | Lost Horizon (1937)           |
| L'Avventura               | Sons of the Desert            |
| The Magnificent Ambersons | The Philadelphia Story        |
| Vertigo (Hitchcock)       | The Maltese Falcon            |
| The General               | The Lady Vanishes (Hitchcock) |
| The Searchers             |                               |

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#### Growing Up in the Movie House

I didn't actually live in the theatre, or movie house as my grandmother called it. My mother worked in the Gopher Theatre, in a small town in Western Minnesota, after my father died in 1945, when I was three. It was easier for her to bring me along than to find a reliable baby sitter. I would watch the feature all the way through and then the second set of previews and the cartoon and the newsreel or travelogue, and sometime after the beginning of the second presentation of the feature I usually fell asleep, curled up in the seat, with my head flopped over the armrest. When my mother was done counting the money and balancing the tickets, she would walk down the aisle to find me, snoring softly in the front row.

Frequently my aunt would work in the concession stand, selling candy and popcorn. Sometimes I would go with my grandmother and help her clean the theatre in the early morning. I am probably one of the few people alive who knows why the theatre floor is not a mosaic of Ju-Jubes, Milk-Buds and Nibs: my grandmother scraped them away with a putty knife, along with the chewing gum.

When I was eleven, I was allowed to help resupply the concession stand. While my mother or my aunt would fill the candy boxes, I would haul a 50 gallon can of lard for the popcorn machine, or perhaps a 25 pound sack of popcorn itself. I know now that the grease and the salt in the popcorn wasn't good for anyone, but I still remember the wonderful way it tasted. In the 1950s the theatre brought in a hot butter machine. After all that, it's a wonder my cholesterol level isn't Alpine high.

To actually work in the theatre, a person was supposed to be sixteen. I started working there when I was fourteen. My older brother graduated from high school at the end of my eighth grade year in school. He had been changing the marquee for a couple of years, and when he left for college the manager said it would be all right for me to change the marquee and posters if I didn't do it at night. I would go with my grandmother in the mornings before school, and while she cleaned I changed the letters on the marquee and the posters in the windows. I particularly loved the little posters. There were two window displays; one was for a full size poster, about three feet by five feet; the other for eight smaller posters, each about ten inches by sixteen inches. I had been changing the posters for several months before I discovered that they were numbered in sequence to match the action of the movie. You can still buy the large posters: my son bought me one of The Day the Earth Stood Still. I wonder what ever became of those marvellous still picture sets. [Have you tried the Larry Edmunds Bookshop in Hollywood? - Ed.]

When I was fully sixteen, I began as a part time projectionist. The theatre had two projectors, each with a capacity of about 25 minutes of film on a reel. When the film was nearly done on one projector, the projectionist would switch to the other projector. On some older films, my eye still catches the timing signals in the upper right hand corner of the film. The first mark indicated when to start the projector and the second mark was for the actual switch to the alternate projector.

As projectionist, I had control over the machines that actually put the picture on the screen and the sound into the air. While I loved the independence of projecting, I usually got stuck with Saturday, the worst night. As projectionist on the last night of a showing, I had to run the film onto the reels supplied from the distributor. All other times, we were able to use our own reels which were in good shape. The reels that came with the film were flimsy and frequently bent out of shape. The film would catch on the reels or the reels would knock and bang in the projector. I also had to load the next film to be shown onto our house reels so that they would be ready for Sunday's matinee. After the previews had been shown for the second time on Saturday night, I had to cut out the preview of Sunday's film and package it for mailing, splice in the preview for the upcoming Sunday's film, and fix the ads.

The ads were short commercial announcements from local businesses. They generally ran about 30 seconds and were made from a generic film with a picture of the local business place spliced in. The voice-over was done by an announcer who was either sickeningly sweet or pep fest bold. The ads were strung together for a run of a week or more. They were changed on Saturdays: some cut out and new ones spliced in. It was fiddly work, done between operating the projectors and winding in the next feature. I also spliced in the theatre's own announcements: popcorn and candy are available at the concession stand, do not spit on the floor, no smoking except in the lobby or smoking lounge, women with crying babies should use the crying room, and so on.

When I was done with all of the above, there was usually about an hour left of the feature. At that point, I would slip downstairs for a few minutes in the middle of each reel and change the marquee, climbing a tall step-ladder with a basket full of masonite letters mounted on heavy wires.

A room to one side of the lobby had one wall covered with pegs, one for each letter of the alphabet, and for all the extra gimmicks: double-feature, also, with, starring, and limited punctuation. Each new marquee was a puzzle: what letters should be left up from the previous feature and what new letters must be carried up? I prided myself on being able to set the marquee in only two trips up the ladder, once to take down the unnecessary letters from the previous feature and once to put up the additional letters required for the next feature.

My last couple of years in high school, I was working three nights a week projecting. It really wasn't that bad. Out of each 20 minute reel, I would be working about five minutes. Between changeovers, I would study or read the racy novels the older projectionist had brought in. On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, I would change the marquee during the second feature, and on the nights I wasn't running the projectors, I would sometimes cover for the manager during the second feature, so that he could go home early and rest for his day job, selling insurance.

Kids today have grown up with television; they are clearly affected by it and in turn have affected it. I grew up with movies. Perhaps they affected me as profoundly as television affects my 20 year old son. The main difference is that I was an unusual case: the kid who had seen every movie show in town, except The Thing, since 1948; most kids my age saw one movie a week or less. Today almost every kid watches some television; high school graduates have spent as much time watching television as they have spent in school; and television with its flash and entertainment value, with its sex and violence, may have made a deeper impression on those students than the educational system has.

The things I have carried away from the movies are interesting. I am still fascinated with old films, and when I write fiction it's like I'm describing a movie that is running in my head. I wonder what today's kids are carrying away from television?

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#### NEWS

#### Peter Ustinov to star as 'The Man Who Loved Hitchcock'

Peter Ustinov flew out of Australia recently after concluding a successful season of his one-man stage show. He was bound first for New York and the special United Nations Children's Week, a cause close to his heart. From there he would head for Hollywood and Beverley Hills where a feature called The Man Who Loved Hitchcock will be filmed.

Ustinov will play Hitchcock in the twilight of his life. Hitch's help is sought by investigators when a series of murders are committed during a retrospective of his films, each one inspired by the previous night's screening. At one point Hitch is actually captured by the murderer and is put on a train handcuffed to the composer Bernard Herrmann who wrote the scores for Vertigo and Psycho. Other scenes will be filmed at places Hitch often visited, such as Chasens Restaurant and the Beverley Hills Hotel.

Ustinov's stage show and television appearances prove him to be a gifted mimic. He can

produce in an instant Hitch's curiously flat-sounding English voice. The film should be a scream.

### 'Fantasia' lovingly restored for its 50th

Preservation fever is spreading in the US film industry. Following last year's restoration of Lawrence of Arabia, Tom Jones, and other blockbusters, brand-new 70-millimetre prints of Ben Hur and The Sound of Music have lately turned up in Los Angeles theatres.

Universal have announced that Stanley Kubrick's 1960 epic Spartacus will undergo an extensive 70-mm restoration for 1991 release. Columbia will follow suit with The Guns of Navarone and The Last Picture Show.

But possibly the best news of all is that Fantasia (1940) is now being re-released in something like its original condition and running time. On its first run outside major cities, Disney's brilliant animation set to classical music flopped with the less sophisticated audiences, and was cut from 135 minutes to 88 minutes. Reports mention restoration to a two-hour running time in 1946. There was another re-issue in 1977.

In 1982 the film's entire musical soundtrack was re-recorded by conductor Irwin Kostal, much to the dismay of Disney purists. Now for its 50th anniversary, Fantasia has been restored once again. Leopold Stokowski's original performance with the Philadelphia Orchestra is being used, and the image refurbished. A special crew have spent the past two years going over the original negative, hand-polishing it frame by frame and using razor-blade microsurgery to remove particles of dust.

### Steinbeck's 'Lifeboat' sunk

Earlier this year there were short-lived plans for the first publication of John Steinbeck's novella of Lifeboat. Researchers found it in the archives of 20th Century Fox and, thinking it was in the public domain, took it to a publisher. Subsequently they learned that the author's widow holds the copyright, and she has refused permission to publish. Steinbeck wrote the novella in the early 1940s at the request of Alfred Hitchcock and producer Kenneth MacGowan, who planned to base a screenplay on it. When the film was released in 1944, Steinbeck claimed that his story had been distorted and asked to have his name removed from it. The studio, however, left him as co-writer. According to Mrs Steinbeck, he didn't want the story published and it probably never will be.

### The 1990 Australian Film Awards

The film Flirting, a sequel to the 1987 winner The Year My Voice Broke, won Best Film at the recent Australian Film Institute Awards. Like its predecessor, Flirting shows what it was like to be an adolescent in rural Australia in the 1960s.

Meanwhile, New Zealand director Jane Campion's mini-series, An Angel At My Table, which has become a widely acclaimed cinema film, goes from strength to strength with a top critics' award at the Toronto Festival of Festivals in Canada.

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## FILM REVIEWS

### 'All This and Heaven Too' (1940) - An Underestimated Classic

Meticulous craftsmanship and fine acting never go amiss in any film regardless of passing vogues in theme and style. The triennium 1939-1941 produced so many famous Hollywood feature films that even some quite distinguished productions never acquired the esteem which was their due. A cardinal example was Anatole Litvak's All This and Heaven Too (1940), based upon the best-selling book by Rachel Field who chronicled in fiction form the remarkable true story of her great-aunt, Henriette Desportes-Field. Jack Warner of Warner Brothers felt so strongly about the film's worth that he named himself as co-producer and he spent more money upon it than any previous Warner production except A Midsummer Night's Dream in 1935. Using nearly sixty indoor sets and finishing with an original footage of just on three hours, it was only 40 minutes shorter than Gone With the Wind. Even the release-cut at 143 minutes makes a long, sombre period-film in the high tragic manner which is not to the taste of every cinema buff. Worse still, it was all but dismissed over the years by the tag 'woman's picture' - which hardly does justice to the profundity of its sentiments.

All This and Heaven Too relates how the fate of a young governess to the household of the Duc and Duchesse de Praslin in 1846 helped to change the history of France. It climaxes in the notorious Praslin murder case where the desperate Duc, presumably in love with the governess, beat his half-insane, slatternly wife to death. This forced the governess, Henriette Deluzy-Desportes, to flee to America after she was released from prison due to insufficient evidence. The film script by the admirable Casey Robinson deals only with the French half of Henriette's story. Anatole Litvak made sure that he got the best available cast to fill several exacting dramatic roles. In two biographies, the late Bette Davis grumbled at her restrictions under the iron control and meticulous planning of Litvak. In truth he curbed brilliantly any inclination to chew the scenery which was sometimes her fault under weaker directors. As the quietly-spoken Henriette, Davis gave easily one of her three greatest performances as one of the screen's most credible noble heroines. She was matched and nearly surpassed by Charles Boyer as the Duc de Praslin: Boyer's real anguish over the imminent Nazi invasion of France was translated into a performance of almost unbearable intensity, culminating in a death-bed scene which still holds up magnificently, even for today's blasé audiences.

The film has, of course, some of the gaucheries of its time. The Praslin children, who play a prominent part in the scenario, are certainly effective but too incongruously American in style. Also the device of treating the main story as a huge flashback from a mid-19th century American schoolroom works less well today than it did then. There is a tendency to become downright mawkish at a couple of points. Even so, the picture is well worth considering on many counts: for the quite superb performances of Boyer and Davis, and that of Barbara O'Neill as the Duchesse (who was forced to rather overplay because she was not permitted to look blowsy enough), for the lavish art direction which recreated the Paris of Louis-Philippe down to the last centimetre of damask, for the moody but sharp black-and-white cinematography of Ernest Haller, and for one of Max Steiner's very best romantic scores.

Curiously enough, All This and Heaven Too may be the only love story of its time where the principal characters never even kiss or embrace. Henriette Desportes and the unhappy Duc may or may not have been sexually intimate. Rachel Field's novel says not, but the lovers really took their secret to the grave. Not the least of the qualities of this one-of-a-kind movie is its capacity to convey mature adult passion without ever mentioning sex - a likely impossibility for a production today.

Ronald Conway



'Reckless' (1984)

My 'Video Movie Guide' lists Reckless (\*\*) right after Rebel Without a Cause (\*\*\*\*\*), which rather puts James Foley's excellent 'angry young man' movie in the shadow of Nicholas Ray's classic.

Which is unfortunate. Admittedly, hardly anything about the plot of Reckless is new, hence the low ratings it gets from the capsule-comment reviewers. The very setting in an unidentified American steelworks town will remind you of countless similar towns you've seen in movies before (The Deer Hunter, Four Friends, etc.).

Foley even courts comparisons with Marlon Brando in The Wild One and James Dean in Rebel. His quizzical, leather-jacketed anti-hero from the wrong side of town (Aidan Quinn) rides a motor-bike and plays a dangerous game of 'chicken' with himself at a lookout near his home. He pursues the staid, blonde cheerleader heroine (Daryl Hannah) that we've already seen in other teen movies about class difference. At times, too, I was reminded of the Brando - Eva Marie-Saint relationship in On the Waterfront.

But plot isn't everything, and Reckless has energy and authenticity on its side. Foley (here making his feature debut) invests every familiar action with a tense, explosive physicality. The sex scenes are very contemporary. I particularly liked the handling of the scene in a school boiler-room (at night, the danger of discovery adding to the tension) and the way the director immediately followed it with more-of-the-same at the girl's place next day when the family is (supposed to be) away. As I said: energy and authenticity stamp themselves on this film.

The scenes between Quinn and his aging steelworker father (Kenneth McMillan) are unsentimental. One small detail had Quinn having to go to the steelworks to fetch his father on the motor-bike - and chaining him with a steel chain and padlock in lieu of a safety-belt.

A pulsing rock score, including several INXS tracks, is expressive throughout. I was first drawn to this film by a recommendation from local teen-movies authority, critic Adrian Martin. So let Adrian have the closing word:

The desire for freedom and love, the yearning to escape a harsh and miserable daily reality - such themes are very familiar, but Foley gives them an urgent, burning expression. Anyone who is resistant to 'youth' movies should find out from this one, once and for all, what youth-on-film is all about.

K.M.

(Also recommended: Ermanno Olmi's Long Live the Lady. A delightful, mischievous, gentle comedy, about a group of catering-school teenagers employed for a banquet at a remote chateau. Filmed somewhat after the satiric manner of Bunuel. Crawl over razor-blades to see it.)

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COMING ATTRACTIONS

The book and the film (e.g. Selwyn Jepson's 'Man Running' and Hitchcock's Stage Fright)

Book reviews (e.g. S.S.Prawer's 'Caligari's Children: The Film as Tale of Terror')

Plus whatever lands on the editor's desk: articles, letters, reviews, clippings, etc.

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## BOOK REVIEW

Turner, Graeme: 'Film As Social Practice' (Routledge: London & New York; paperback)

Here's a book that tells you the sort of things being taught in 'Film 1' at your local tertiary institution. Its main premise is that a movie is more than just a consciously authored work of art, and needs to be understood in a multitude of contexts:

Understanding a movie is not essentially an aesthetic practice; it is a social practice which mobilizes the full range of meaning systems within the culture.

The author, an Australian academic, cites the revealing case of the German silent classic Metropolis (1926). To its Jewish director, Fritz Lang, the film was just a rather "silly" melodrama about a workers' revolution in a city of the future. The revolution turns out to have been instigated by the city's despotic ruler and a mad scientist in order to discredit a (literally) underground liberation movement. Thus neither the sneaky bosses nor the duped workers emerge with much credit. Although the film establishes the oppression of the workers, it ends with everyone merely having a convenient change of heart.

Well, Adolf Hitler loved the film, and offered Lang the post of head of the German film industry and the status of 'honorary Aryan'. (Lang fled to America.) Clearly, the director had not fully understood what he was doing. He had insufficiently grasped the meanings his culture gave his film. According to Graeme Turner:

These included the dominant images of power as patriarchal, fatherly, and the assumption that political unrest was always undesirable ... . The pentangle (five-pointed star) used to represent the evil of the scientist Rotwang, with its close similarity to the star of David, invokes anti-Semitism. The film's view of the people as gullible and to be saved from themselves is probably also traceable to cultural roots.

Turner's book, then, tries to point the lessons of Lang's mistake. To show how wide a field the cinema covers, the book includes chapters on film as an industry, as an academic study, as a structured language; there are also chapters on film audiences and on ideology. Some extended analysis is given of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid and Desperately Seeking Susan.

Turner is very good at spotting and explaining contradictions in films. He shows how John Ford's famous western, The Searchers, is resolved in a way that necessitates its protagonist Ethan (John Wayne) resorting to methods that 'belong' to his opposite number, the Indian called Scar. Ethan's savagery, says Turner, could not serve "as a model for solving disputes, but that is narrative's function - to resolve symbolically what cannot be actually resolved". (Presumably, this observation could apply to Metropolis, too. Fritz Lang was always a woolly thinker about real social issues. As perhaps was Ford. Turner doesn't say whether he thinks this should affect our estimation of their art.)

The author is very fair in the way he reports the limitations of current theoretical positions (for which he is basically an advocate). "The comprehensiveness of theories of ideology has worried many people," Turner says, "so that theories of resistance to the ideological through the pleasures of the body have surfaced". He has doubts whether "our pleasure at a car chase on film or our day-to-day experience of physical pleasure is constructed in ideology". Which makes for refreshing reading after the excesses you come across from some writers on film today.

My position on these matters stems from my respect for possibly the most comprehensive of all theorists about life and perception (which I would guess includes making and watching movies). The thought of Arthur Schopenhauer, (1788-1860) spanned both West and East, both the human and the animal (and vegetable and mineral) domains. He identified 'life' with Kant's supposedly unknowable thing-in-itself, but suggested that it might indeed be knowable through direct bodily experience (which does away with two of the three basic categories of understanding: space and causality, if not time). Although Turner appears to be ready to reach a similar insight, he quickly falls back on a more conventional formulation:

It is difficult to get around the sense that there is some genuine reality out there which ideology prevents us getting at. The trick is to realize that whether that is the case or not is immaterial. Our only access to reality is through its representation. (My emphasis)

Of course, I have no quarrel with this as a generalisation. All images of reality are indeed subjective, coded, limited - for us to make the best of. Similarly, when Turner deals with insights into the nature of film derived from psychoanalysis, I find the clarity of his formulations appealing. At one point he commends film theorist Dudley Andrew for giving us "a thoroughly psychoanalytic description of the desire for the image". Here is Andrew:

Desiring to possess the film, we are confined to merely viewing it. Consequently, the successful film can never ultimately satisfy us ... .

This is pure Schopenhauer! (The description also goes to the heart of a self-reflexive movie like Hitchcock's Vertigo.) Any dissatisfaction I feel with Turner's book, then, relates to the much broader dissatisfaction I often feel when film critics cite some current authority (usually French) as if he or she were holy writ or the only one to have had the knowledge. Those critics seem to me to have egg on their faces. Or, at any rate, in their eyes.

But Turner's book avoids most of the traps, and I recommend it for its sensible, informed introduction to current film studies.

K.M.

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Books, anyone?

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### San Francisco, Hitchcock, and Me

In 1975 I went to Hollywood to interview, if not Alfred Hitchcock (who was in production on Family Plot), some of his noted collaborators. I ended up one evening on the set of Hitchcock's picture, watching Karen Black play a kidnapper in the scene where she collects a ransom diamond.

More about that evening later. My trip to California also allowed me to visit some celebrated Hitchcock locations, among them the city of San Francisco where in 1957 the director shot Vertigo, his masterpiece. This article is largely about that film. If I need to make an occasional philosophical point, well, Vertigo invites no less. I'll try to explain everything as I go.

#### (a) San Francisco and 'Vertigo'

Several feature films have hinted at the special atmosphere of San Francisco. Two I quite like are George Stevens's I Remember Mama (1948) and Delmer Daves's Dark Passage (1947). Before Vertigo, though, perhaps only author Oscar Wilde had noted a singular feature of the city. "It is an odd thing," a character remarks in 'The Picture of Dorian Gray', "but everyone who disappears is said to be seen [there]. It must be a delightful city, and possess all the attractions of the next world." I fancy Hitchcock's film not only gives that passing remark substance, it lends it a profound meaning.

As I see it, Vertigo is about an ordinary man, the detective Scottie (James Stewart), who clings too hard to life and suffers the consequences. That is, he loses the woman Madeleine (Kim Novak) who for him represents 'eternity'. Scottie's clinging is given a literal enactment at the start of the film when he hangs from guttering above a San Francisco street. The scene works beautifully as suspense while managing to show us, with poetic rightness, something of the distant city's majesty. No-one could blame Scottie for hanging on! Nevertheless, his resultant sense of weakness later turns him into an obsessed neurotic, and that is what ultimately defeats him - and tragically destroys Madeleine.

So, my first piece of philosophy is this: San Francisco in Vertigo is a city seen sub specie aeternitatis - Spinoza's famous term for "under the aspect of eternity". Given the beauty of the real San Francisco (especially if you happen to glimpse it from one of its hills, rising from the fog), that was never going to be too hard for Hitchcock and his brilliant cameraman, Robert Burks, to suggest. What I would add is that Madeleine's story in the film points up many of the city's features. San Francisco becomes an archetypal place, its history and people representative of all our histories.

Notice that I am saying two things: Vertigo shows us a city belonging at once to this world and another. On the one hand, the real San Francisco has its famous tourist spots, many of which the film highlights. We visit, for example, Ernie's, the celebrated restaurant. These places invite the label "consumerist" and have been so described by at least one film critic. On the other hand, with its missions, forts, shops, and art galleries, San Francisco may also stand for perennial human concerns. Anyone who knows even a small amount of the city's history - how, for instance, it was

founded by the Spanish, and ceded in turn to Mexico and the United States - will appreciate its colourful cosmopolitanism and why one guide book speaks of it as "a city of contrasts - historic and modern, brash and dignified, ... quiet and clatter and more". These more general aspects are equally the film's concern.

Naturally, the tone of the film is different from any guide book's. It is, I think, a tone of pessimism, but justified by the truth about human nature at the film's core. And if for much of its length Vertigo dwells equally on the possibility of another world - or anyway another order of knowing - as on what is measurable in this world, that is only logical, as I will try to indicate.

#### (b) The Mission Dolores and 'Vertigo'

The above may serve as an introduction. In what follows I will briefly describe how I visited one of San Francisco's famous landmarks, and suggest what it can tell us about a key scene in Vertigo.

The Mission Dolores - originally called the Mission San Francisco de Asis - was founded in the same year (1776) as the city to which it eventually gave its name. That's why, when early in the film Scottie trails Madeleine there, and watches her walk around, we take the hint that her story concerns the city itself. Like Scottie, we soon become intrigued, fascinated. At this early stage, too, the film is already building a motif whereby Madeleine repeatedly leads Scottie from scenes of glare and motion - the city streets - to pockets of shade and stillness, where time seems suspended. It's as if she were promising him an answer to nothing less than what used to be called "the world riddle". (Later I will suggest that it constitutes her power over him.)

To put it another way, Madeleine comes to represent for Scottie the eternal feminine who, in myth or dream, "embodies an experience ... far older than that of the individual". The words are those of psychologist Carl Jung. He adds that such a figure may hold at once a threat and a promise, especially when leading some man (Scottie?) towards "that dark, transpersonal realm ... where things and persons become magical, taboo, dangerous, and yet full of the promise of enrichment and salvation."

So the Mission Dolores is one of several locations in Vertigo that are germane to the film's effect on us. Certainly, when you enter the little church tucked away in a side street, you immediately feel the stillness the film conveys. On the whole, it is a benign feeling. As an official booklet notes: "Within the silent walls of the old mission, time seems to have stopped." The booklet adds that the interior of the church "differs little from its earliest appearance. Decorated redwood ceiling beams are just as created by Indian workmen." There is a slightly sinister note in that, if you care to so interpret the use of Indian labour, but the film does not stress it.

Instead, what happens in the film is that Madeleine goes directly through the church to the cemetery alongside, and Scottie follows at a distance. The ensuing scene is justly famous. By his adroit use of lenses, Robert Burks managed to transform the spot into a hauntingly beautiful maze. Watching the film, you understand how Scottie feels lost as he tries to fathom the truth about Madeleine and her Spanish ancestor who is buried here.

Actually, the real cemetery is much smaller than it looks in the film. Scottie could hardly have spied on Madeleine unobserved. Also, most of the cemetery's plots are neglected, the gravestones crumbling or overturned. An asphalt yard at the back is visible as you walk around.

Let me try to focus what I have been saying by noting another of the film's patterns.

In several scenes like the one at the Mission, Madeleine and Scottie are never entirely alone. Or, at least, there is always some sign of human intercession. Inside the church, an unseen organist is playing. At Muir Woods, the cross-section of a felled tree has been put on display with its explanatory legend (spelling out the tree's extreme age). At the art gallery of the Palace of the Legion of Honour, an attendant hovers, ready to provide Scottie with a catalogue. Once again we feel a connection between Madeleine's story and that of the city and its people. The thing is, the film consistently shows those people as subdued, slow-moving, as if in a dream. Thus San Francisco itself becomes a city of sorrow - and the present name of the Mission Dolores especially significant.

Now, briefly, some more philosophy. To me, the whole of Vertigo speaks with the pessimistic voice of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). Schopenhauer was a philosopher who wrote in the shadow of the Romantic Age and espoused an ethics that ultimately renounces this world. The reason has to do with Schopenhauer's view of the world itself. According to his brilliant if gloomy conception, the world is both Will (life-force or life-energy, often seen in man as an egotistical striving) and Representation (a simulacrum, in which Kant's famous thing-in-itself remains elusive). All of Schopenhauer's works contain passages that bear on Vertigo with sometimes uncanny exactitude, but if I had to choose just one it might be the distinction he draws (in 'The World as Will and Representation', Volume One) between temporal justice, that which is administered by the State, and eternal justice, that which prevails in the long term because of what we are. The passage runs to about six pages. As I've implied, it may remind us inter alia of how the poetic-sounding name 'Dolores' speaks for everyone in Hitchcock's film, even for the nominal villain, Gavin Elster. Fittingly, Schopenhauer quotes at this point the Spanish dramatist Calderón, and his philosophical drama 'Life is a Dream':

For man's greatest offence  
Is that he has been born

"In that verse", says Schopenhauer, "Calderón has merely expressed the Christian dogma of original sin."

(c) 'Vertigo' and 'Family Plot'

Scottie is just an ordinary man, neither saint nor genius nor artist. It follows that Schopenhauer would have foreseen his downfall. Scottie loses Madeleine for the paradoxical reason that he will not let go. Now, Christians speak of the necessity of dying to the world. And Schopenhauer made worldly renunciation the cornerstone of his ethical system, claiming to find confirmation of his views in Buddhist teaching. But if we want to understand the actual mechanics of Scottie's case, Tania Modleski's excellent Hitchcock book, 'The Women Who Knew Too Much', may be the best place to start. Modleski describes how Scottie "oscillates between a passive mode and an active mode, between a ... masochistic fascination with [Madeleine] and a sadistic attempt to gain control over her, to possess her".

In other words, Scottie never arrives at a detached mode of being. His inability to do so, which is poignantly evident in the film's final scenes, constitutes his original sin. But it is ours, too. It is a desire for power. Nearly everyone in Vertigo voices, or displays, such a preoccupation.

To sum up. We identify with Scottie's very human sense of weakness. He, in turn, seeks to identify with something greater than himself: Madeleine, San Francisco, 'eternity'. For both Scottie and Madeleine, such an impulse proves a fatal attraction. And even beauty turns out to be ambiguous, treacherous.

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Ambiguity is also a distinctive feature of Family Plot. But this time the film is a comedy-mystery, a throwback to the delights of British-period Hitchcock (Young and Innocent, say). The only philosophical point I would make about it is one that applies to Hitchcock's films generally: each has moments when what Schopenhauer calls the Will is rendered almost tangible. Such a moment may be a sudden shift in tension, or a scream that rends asunder some structure of logic, or a startling transition (Family Plot has several of these), or a symbol of the Will's pervasive presence (like the eternally restless sea in Vertigo). It may also be an intimation of occult forces or a scene of erotic potency - though in Family Plot the potency has run down, at least as far as the Bruce Dern character is concerned. I mention all this as evidence of the fundamental nature of Hitchcock's art. He always had his finger on his audience's pulse-beat.

When Hitchcock made Family Plot he was 76, and unwell. The evening I watched him at work, filming was scheduled to start after sunset on a back lot at Universal. An airport office, with three or four steps leading up to it, had been built beside a strip of asphalt representing a tarmac. Only the front part of the ground floor was actually standing: the remainder of the building as seen in the film is a small matte painting by the gifted Albert Whitlock.

Whitlock and his team were there early that night, taking measurements and lining up an establishing-shot with cinematographer Leonard South. With dusk came a noticeable drop in temperature. At last, Hitchcock arrived in a chauffeur-driven, heated limousine. He stayed inside it for a good ten minutes, watching with evident approval the preparations for shooting. An assistant director conversed with him through the window. Someone told me that even standing beside the car you might feel hot!

When Hitchcock got out, he moved with assurance, though slowly, to the traditional director's chair. Last-minute activity continued around him. There was no fuss, no raised voices. Hitchcock seemed mentally as alert as ever. It was he who noticed that a defusing scrim on one of the lights had come loose and was casting almost imperceptible shadows on the tarmac. A grip was sent up a ladder to hold the scrim during shooting.

Two police cars serving as props were parked to the left of the scene. Just before the camera was ready to roll, someone went from one car to the other, affixing official-looking number plates. Apparently, some regulation or other prohibited the plates from being brought out until shooting was about to start. In any event, the set and its crew were a model of efficiency.

Two or three takes of the establishing-shot were made. This, I think, was because Whitlock needed some footage to take away with him. The shot involved Karen Black accompanied by an airport security officer (an actor, naturally) walking quickly across the tarmac and entering the office. All of this I watched from a position immediately behind Hitchcock. Between takes, he would tutor Karen in the mysteries of film technique. She seemed happy to feed him leading questions:

"Why do we need this shot at all?", she asked. "Why not just go directly inside the building?"

To which Hitchcock answered in his lugubrious drawl: "You see, Karen, it's like the trombones in the orchestra. We can't just let them blare out in-dis-crim-in-ate-ly, can we?"

\* \* \*

Shooting continued into the night. Another prop, a helicopter, stood nearby. It would be used when Ms Black, carrying the ransom diamond for which she had come, took off holding an airport pilot at gunpoint. I was told that the cockpit of the helicopter would later be filmed on a soundstage.

A ~~scene~~ <sup>to explain</sup> at the start of Family Plot refers to suffering and sorrow. But then it adds a note of reassurance: "From the tears of the past the desert of the heart will bloom." I fancy that Family Plot needed a Vertigo to precede it, and I value them both - one so tragic, the other so genial - in their very different ways.

Ken Mogg

*How did you enjoy writing my terrible script?*

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ODD SPOT: HITCHCOCK LOSES TEMPER

Alfred Hitchcock used to say that he never lost his temper. Giving him the lie, Signora Jean Salvadore has told all. The Signora was formerly a promoter of the Lake Como area of Italy and, in particular, the 400-year-old Hotel Villa d'Este at Cernobbio on the lake.

One of the regular guests at the hotel was Hitchcock, who would make the staff promise not to tell the press or anyone else when he was staying there.

"Once, however, he arrived when a large wedding was being held at the hotel. As soon as he saw all the photographers he stormed into the office and demanded to know who had told the papers.

"I think he was actually a little offended when we told him that they were not there for him but for the wedding."

(Footnote. Did Hitchcock make a joke of the above incident in the scenes with the ballerina and the press photographers in Torn Curtain?)

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