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Creating the Brand: The Hitchcock Touch

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When Alfred Hitchcock moved to the United States in March 1939 to work for producer David O. Selznick, the U.S. magazines and newspapers continued the celebrity journalism they had employed for Hitchcock's two previous vacations. Following him around all day and night and probing his attitudes, working habits, and leisure choices (especially in drink and cuisine), profiles and interviews ensured that any film fan had plenty of access to the authentic "Hitch."¹ The response to his arrival was not unusual: it was normal, and it displays the "frenzy of renown" for celebrities that Leo Braudy has described.² The response also makes apparent that Hitchcock's image, his brand, is already firmly in place. While his subsequent work in film and television would make him one of the most recognizable directors in the history of cinema, *he* is already present in every sense of what scholars and the public might immediately conjure up. The creation of that brand by the time of his arrival in the United States is the subject of this essay.

Of course, the press was not the only profession that recognized the value of cultivating a recognizable brand. Scholars have already pointed out that Hitchcock early and aggressively was aware that promoting himself might improve his career opportunities. A key proof of this is Hitchcock's declaration at a mid-1920s London Film Society meeting that directors were what counted in making movies. According to Donald Spoto's version, Hitchcock pronounced: "We make a film succeed.... The name of the director should be associated in the public's mind with a quality product. Actors come and go, but the name of the director should stay clearly in the mind of the audience."³ As Robert Kapsis details in his excellent study of Hitchcock's reputation, Hitchcock's actions also indicate a concerted effort to follow that theoretical statement about linking the director's name with quality films through his own behavior of marketing himself – for example, writing a letter in 1927 to the *London Evening News* about himself and about what directors do to make films. Hitchcock also readily participated in studio-produced publicity, his 1930 production company was named

Hitchcock-Baker Productions, and, as he hoped to be hired by Selznick, he "accelerated his promotional activities during the mid-to-late 1930s. The personal idiosyncrasy which he seemed most anxious to exploit at this time was his obesity."⁴

Hitchcock's conduct is not surprising; it makes sense. Moreover, prior to his employment in film, he worked in sales and advertising, so he was primed to think about these matters. However, it is the larger economic context that is also at stake. Capitalist film industries operate in a tension between standardizing product for mass production and differentiating it to create reasons for audiences to return to theaters. This tension for profit maximization encourages workers to be innovative within the bounds of the industry's product. Moreover, individuals negotiate within these bounds to learn how they will create successfully within the system. During the classical Hollywood era, for directors, avoiding unwarranted expressivity was often rewarded, but within some circumstances (such as the genres of musicals, comedies, and the melodramatic film noirs), certain visible stylizations were praised. Other cinema industries have formed their own boundaries and variants (e.g., German expressionism, the French new wave, and Bollywood). As the classical Hollywood system changed during the 1960s into a package-unit mode of production, places for marking individual authorship increased. Furthermore, directors and other workers realized that displays of authorship might further careers as long as the films made profits (e.g., the new Hollywood of 1967 to about 1980 and, later, indie cinema and action-adventure blockbusters). Thus, workers "self-fashioned" their authorship to try to maximize professional and personal benefits such as prestige, power, and money.⁵

Moreover, a much wider culture encouraged this authorial display. Scholars of fame point out that for centuries the elite have exhibited their images on buildings, statuary, and coins as signs of their power, and biographers have conveyed to the masses explanations of what made the elite the elite. By the 1800s, as democratic cultures spread, individuals used the older principles to mark themselves out in their fields. Braudy describes Byron, Disraeli, and Baudelaire as cultivating "fans" to solidify their prominence. Loren Glass points to the author Samuel Clemens as creating a "cultural performance of authorial personality," which included his distinctive pseudonym, Mark Twain. A few people engaged in "ostentatious costuming" to promote an appearance of distinction and individuality (for example, Oscar Wilde). Glass notes that between 1880 and 1920 the number of authors who published their autobiographies increased dramatically. During the same period, the hiring of press agents by "big-city theater owners" spread to other occupations.⁶

Several phenomena encouraged these self-generated articulations: the cultivation of consumerism for its own pleasures, the fashion industry, but particularly mass-circulation newspapers and journals. Historians see the William Randolph Hearst/Joseph Pulitzer battles post-1895 as transitional, with the Hearst papers' "blend of crime, large-scale disasters, small-scale human tragedies, [and] a modicum of national and international political news" as critical in the transition.⁷ Press photography complements the printed information. Charles Ponce de Leon wisely counsels that the appearance from the mid-1700s of the printing press for preserving oral gossip and *chroniques scandaleuses* as an underground literature in France foreshadows the modern gossip column, but he also argues that, with the nineteenth-century culture of democratic equality and every person supposedly being a "commoner," the compulsion to find truth and authenticity accelerates, feeding into the proliferation of human-interest stories, interviews, and personal revelations.⁸

For my purposes here, considering what are the typical aspects of an image for someone in the entertainment business by the mid-1920s, when Hitchcock begins his career, will indicate how conventional the building of his brand becomes. It is common in star and celebrity theory to describe people as having several often conflicting facets to their image. Although various schema have been proposed, I split these into four parts under the umbrella term of *image*. The four parts are (1) the *character persona* that is created as an amalgam of clearly asserted performances and roles in films and other media; (2) the *performer* that is "acting ability" or how roles are played; (3) the *worker/laborer* that develops from information about "professional life" and how work situations are negotiated; and (4) the *private persona* that is the "so-called off-camera life."⁹ In the development of Hitchcock's brand, by the 1920s all four parts of his image are in play for press coverage or self-revelation. Moreover, the ubiquitous media to disseminate the image are all actively engaged in this.

These publicity media include *biographies* that, according to Leo Lowenthal, shift after World War I to a formula about "idols of consumption" (which certainly benefits Hitchcock!) and increasingly cover people in the entertainment field. Lowenthal's early 1940s content analysis indicates that standard biographies would focus on sociology: the person's "relations to other people, the pattern of his daily life, his relation to the world in which he lives"; psychology: "what the nature of his development has been and the structure of his personality"; history: what she has done and her successes and failures; and evaluation: what the author's conclusion about the person is. Lowenthal writes that biographies describe parents,

friends, marriages, hobbies, food preferences, routines of the life, and party preferences, and, surprisingly, one-third mention the person's eyes.¹⁰

These biographies appear as books but also as short *profiles* in magazines, newspaper articles, and Sunday supplements. Ponce de Leon writes that in this period, to establish credibility, biographers and celebrity profilers needed to create complexity to a character portrait because of the public's skepticism about hagiographical approaches. Thus, making distinctions between public and private lives facilitated more ambiguity in a representation. Additionally, by the 1920s, writers tended to assume that it was in the private life that a person found self-fulfillment.¹¹ People were often interviewed at home so the reader could supposedly see the authentic person. Celebrity profile visits were "described in laborious detail," and sometimes the writer and celebrity did things together. Unlike in biographies, the profile writer was present in the narrative.

The images of celebrities were also their corporeal *likeness*. While the elite could splatter their visages across an empire, and their successors could spend a great deal of money destroying those, printing and copper engravings were possible from the 1500s, expanding depictions of individualizing physical features further down the economic ladder. Ponce de Leon's research indicates that up to about 1900, a drawing often accompanied a profile. Then photographs became technologically inexpensive to print. By the 1920s, mass-circulation media did photo spreads, and images moved from posed to supposedly candid.

Consequently, in the mid-1920s, when Hitchcock was entering the film industry, how to create an image and a reputation was readily apparent to both him and the public. Documents in the press indicate four phases in the development of the brand of Hitchcock between the early 1920s to 1940.

The Best British Director and His "Touches": From 1926 On

Although Hitchcock directed films for several years prior to the British release of *The Lodger* in February 1927, his third feature-length film was very well reviewed in Britain. The earlier *The Mountain Eagle* (1925) had been described as having "at times brilliant direction," but *The Lodger* drew accolades, including *Bioscope's* declaration that "it is possible that this film is the finest British production ever made.... Mr. Hitchcock's sense of dramatic values is magnificent... [It is] a directorial triumph."¹²

This early praise is substantial, and I detail more of it as Hitchcock continues to make films. However, prior to *The Lodger's* release, his production company's publicity machine was busy. Gainsborough's press agent, Cedric

Belfrage, provided a profile of Hitchcock entitled "Alfred the Great" to a British fan magazine, *The Picturegoer*, in March 1926. The profile describes Hitchcock's childhood family as working class and, with the death of his father, "practically penniless," and his early jobs as earning low wages ("He was grateful for the chance of making good, and in spite of the hardships which the small pay entailed he took the job"). But in Horatio Alger style, "his own grit and endeavour had opened for him, at 19, the magic doors of movie-land, but it was certainly a stroke of good fortune that landed him in such a studio as the Famous [Players] in Poole Street." There, Hitchcock watched important U.S. directors and worked all of the film jobs, learning the craft. Belfrage stresses in the subtitle that Hitchcock is "the youngest director in the world," yet "all who have seen [his first two features] declare [them] to be almost perfect in their technical and artistic perfection." Beyond the studio publicity, Hitchcock is also establishing friendships with the influential people at the London Film Society.¹³

Bioscope's review of *The Lodger* notes what will become distinctive about discussion of Hitchcock's work at this point: "There are numerous shots of a distinctly interesting and original character, and not once is one of these shots used purely for its own sake – on every occasion there is a definite point at issue."¹⁴ Deviating from conventional camerawork and editing, Hitchcock innovated, marking out his authorship for the knowledgeable viewer without (usually) declining into formalism. Subsequent reviews repeat this pattern of describing his work as fresh and mature. *Bioscope* explains that the selling points for *Downhill* (1927) include "the name and clever direction of Alfred Hitchcock"; for *Easy Virtue* (1927), "the established reputation of the author, Noel Coward, and of Alfred Hitchcock, the producer"; and for *The Ring* (1927), "the reputation of the director." *Bioscope* continues to assert that while technique is visible, it is also functional: *The Ring* is a "truthful picture," and "it is presented with an economy of means, a richness of essential detail and the skillful use of every artistic and technical device that makes a picture of outstanding merit" but with no "grotesque trickeries of the camera." *The Ring* earns from *Bioscope* an editorial message addressed "To Alfred Hitchcock, Greatest British Film Director" and the acclamation that *The Ring* has "established beyond doubt your claim to be regarded as one of the greatest directors of films in this or any other country."¹⁵

The young British film art journal, *Close Up*, is more skeptical about Hitchcock. In reviewing *The Ring*, Robert Herring points out that while people are describing the film as a "masterpiece," perhaps yearning for a British cinema's dominance against its other national competitors, he believes that the techniques praised by some writers are expressionist (read

"German") and uneconomical: "Mr. Hitchcock's method is to depict one simple fact, that a sub-title could have got over, by a long sequence or a number of elaborate tricks. This is worse than a photographic rendering of a story, for it is pretentious." But Hitchcock's work is recognizable: "Mr. Hitchcock's touches and angles misled the public, which had noticed them in German films. And German films are good. Look for the trademark. Yes, Look – don't have someone else's thrust at you. And if you have followed me, you will have found Mr. Hitchcock's trade mark."¹⁶

"Touches" as trademark: this rhetoric at this historical moment may surprise scholars, but it seems it was somewhat common expressive terminology by the late 1920s in both Britain and the United States for describing characteristics of film directors. I have found this vocabulary in early 1930s U.S. high school manuals educating youth about how to watch films intelligently. Writer Edgar Dale even lists twelve directors, with their photographs, whose "touch" should be easy to spot and includes Frank Borzage, Frank Capra, Ernst Lubitsch, Josef von Sternberg, and eight more of the most well-known American and European directors of the period (but not Hitchcock).¹⁷ In studying what might constitute "the Lubitsch touch," Kristin Thompson locates the application of the language to Lubitsch as early as 1921 and notes that by the mid-1920s it is used in the plural,¹⁸ as it is for Hitchcock in Herring's 1928 essay. The term for Hitchcock is used sporadically thereafter (in singular and plural forms) but is linked usually fairly generally to visual and aural technique. John Grierson summarizes in 1931, "You will have heard before now of 'the Hitchcock touch.' This consists in his great ability to give a novel twist to his sketch of an episode."¹⁹ Helen Brown Norden writes in *Vanity Fair* in 1935 about *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934):

For touches like the click of the first bullet on the hotel window-pane and that stunned instant of hesitation before Louis realizes that he has been fatally shot; for someone's cough, clearing the throat just before the choral sequence at the concert; for the opening of the scene in the hotel dining-room, with that stupendous view of the mountains, fading in, through the window panes, to the dance floor; for the moment when the rescued child, hysterical with fear, instinctively shrinks back from her mother ... for these touches alone, I say, Mr. Hitchcock should be awarded all the directorial palms of the year.²⁰

Or *News-Week's* praise in 1936 for "the same skillful touches of humor, subtlety, and suspense" in both *The 39 Steps* (1935) and *Secret Agent* (1936).²¹

Thus, Hitchcock's touches generally refer to great noticeable moments of cinematic skill and eventually to affective experiences associated with the outcome for his techniques. Although some films excited reviewers more than others, from *The Lodger* on, expectations were that audiences were

watching the best British director working, and he displayed specific touches as his trademark. Even *Close Up* comes around occasionally, remarking for *Blackmail* (1929) that it exhibits the "most intelligent mixture of sound and silence we have yet seen," "Hitchcock's Cockney humour adds to its appeal," and while "not a masterpiece" or "an artistic triumph," "it is a first [sound film] effort of which the British industry has every reason to be proud."²²

Experimenter or Realist? From 1928 On

A major dichotomy in evaluating films is apparent in Herring's initial criticisms of *The Lodger*. Cinematic skill was expected, but the norms for both British and U.S. fictional filmmaking emphasized transparency rather than reflexivity for most movies. Symbolism or flash had its place, but "realism" was also treasured. Embedded within realism for the British reviewers – at least for the criticism of Hitchcock's work – was an assumption of a humanistic display of people's tribulations. When a director worked in genres more associated with drama, the technical bravado could disrupt, but this distraction could also occur in lighter fare. At times, Hitchcock succeeded in providing both innovations and realism; at other times, reviewers believed he had failed. For the romantic comedy/drama *The Farmer's Wife* (1928), *Bioscope* complains that Hitchcock is "led away by his tendency to fantastic angles of photography," but it lauds the very dramatic *The Manxman* (1929) for its "unflinching realism" and characters who are "real and human."²³

The reviews for *Murder!* (1930) display the mixed critical consequences for emphasizing only the experimental half of this tension. The British paper *Spectator* claims no "amount of intelligence" could have "made a good film of this story" and concludes that it is neither cinematic nor realistic: "none of the characters in this production had any resemblance to real people." *Close Up* decides it is "quite the best thing this country has done," for Hitchcock can "think cinema." The *New York Times* notes that "Mr. Hitchcock rather likes to experiment, but in doing so he is often inconsistent."²⁴

In fact, Hitchcock seems to be planting the image of the innovator. According to Spoto, in 1930 Hitchcock hired a publicist to keep "his name before the public." Although profiles and Hitchcock's own authored articles had previously been published, Oswald Blackeston interviews him for *Close Up* about the inventive sound techniques in *Murder!*. Blackeston does little actual interviewing, at least in the published article; mostly he just quotes Hitchcock, who is ready to talk. Hitchcock describes his theory of "advance monologue" and describes several unusual shots he created. Hitchcock claims, "such touches, of course, can only be added to a good story." The article carries on, "'Potemkin,'" he continued with a twinkle in

his eye, 'is the only Russian film I have seen.'"²⁵ As though his eye reveals his playful soul, the interview reinforces Hitchcock's image of cultivating an experimental side.

The other side of the tension is realism, not a characteristic normally considered an aspect of Hitchcock's brand. However, at this point, his work occasionally earns that description, partially as the studios for which he is working assign him films in genres that demand it. The *Spectator* thinks that Hitchcock likes the challenge: "There are few British directors with his pictorial sense, but he is not one of those screen pastrycooks who are at their happiest when human realism makes no demand on them." Yet, such a depiction for Hitchcock is rare as British film critics attempt to analyze where he goes wrong. C. A. Lejeune believes that Hitchcock lacks "human understanding"; he is an "observer" of people. Grierson opines, "He knows people but not things; situations and episodes, but not events."²⁶ This image of personal distance from his characters will also persist into Hitchcock's later career.

At times Hitchcock will assert that he wants realistic representations in his films, but it seems to be that he envisions producing them through situations (as Grierson observes). Although it is a couple of years later, Barbara J. Buchanan begins a 1935 interview with "I asked Alfred Hitchcock point-blank, 'Why do you hate women?'" Hitchcock's publicity people may not have prepared him well. He replies: "I don't exactly hate them," he protested. "But I certainly don't think they are as good actors as men." He then goes on to argue that he does not want glamour and beauty from females; "'Glamour,' he told me defiantly, 'has nothing to do with reality, and I maintain that reality is the most important factor in the making of a successful film.'"²⁷ He justifies the stories of his handling of female stars as attempts to make them behave more naturally.

Hitchcock's concern to argue that he is seeking realism is not necessarily at odds with his desire to be known as an experimenter. The tension can be negotiated if realism is found in some aspects of a film, say character development; experiments, applied elsewhere. It is doubtful, however, that Hitchcock's move to thrillers and screwball comedy provided opportunity for extensive exploration of complex characters.

The Artist of Suspense and Comedy: From 1934 On

Scholars concur that Hitchcock's move in 1934 to British Gaumont and a team of writers with whom he worked well resulted in an outpouring of films that were not only highly praised but better distributed (and reviewed) in the United States.²⁸ Moreover, these melodramatic thrillers²⁹ consistently used a subplot with qualities of the screwball comedy, a genre described by Steve Neale as "an energetic mix of slapstick, wisecracks, intricately plotted

farce and the comedy of manners combined with vividly eccentric characterization and a disavowable undercurrent of sexual innuendo."³⁰ This shift in genres and their concentration produced review after review that associated Hitchcock with the affective pleasures of suspense and comedy.

For instance, for *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), *Film Daily's* subheading for its review states: "Swell melodrama with plenty of exciting action plus human interest and comedy touches." Andre Sennwald of the *New York Times* writes that, with one exception, "it is the swiftest screen melodrama this column can recall," is "distinctly Mr. Hitchcock's picture," and is "the raciest melodrama of the new year." Norden of *Vanity Fair* liked the "light banter ... [presented] in a smart and natural way." "It is not only exciting melodrama; it is, in its way, a work of art."³¹ *The 39 Steps* (1935) fared the same. Sennwald of the *New York Times* is again impressed: "A master of shock and suspense, of cold horror and slyly incongruous wit, he uses his camera the way a painter uses his brush, stylizing his story and giving it value which the scenarists could hardly have suspected.... [It has] sinister delicacy and urbane understatement." After comparing Hitchcock to Anatole France, Sennwald describes the movie as a "blend of unexpected comedy and breathless terror."³²

Again, the Hitchcock publicity machine attempts to reinforce the public response. Aside from the interview with Buchanan in the fall of 1935 about his authentic attitudes toward women, Hitchcock engages in a series of articles explaining his methods. For *The Picturegoer*, he expounds on "Why 'Thrillers' Thrive." He provides a five-part autobiography for *Film Weekly*, an account that has become the source for many stories about Hitchcock's life. For New York City readers in the summer of 1936, in an essay entitled "Close Your Eyes and Visualize!," he reviews his career and expounds on "the 'Hitchcock touch,'" the importance of stories being told visually even though sound is now available, the mistaken notion that he loathes women when in fact his desire is for "reality" first and comedy next, and the function of the comedy "to relieve the tension."³³ Because his films do provide both suspense and humor, thereafter these two terms are almost joined at the hip.

His Body and Ours: From 1935 On

As the U.S. mass media began paying attention to Hitchcock's films and publicity generated attention to him and his work, it is typical for this era that articles would start not only trying to describe and define his public and private image but providing readers the sort of background that would personalize the man into a celebrity. Even when Hitchcock is an assistant working for Famous Players, a London film magazine includes him in its profile on the



Figure 2.1. A sketch of Alfred Hitchcock in 1923. *The Motion Picture Studio* [journal], London, 1923.

company, providing both words and drawings depicting the men and women working at the studio. The sketch for Hitchcock is remarkably prescient of his future iconic image in its brief outline from the side and a body stance of his stomach thrust forward, hands in his pocket (Figure 2.1).³⁴

His own attention to his visual form appears in the choice in 1927 to send Christmas cards that were a jigsaw puzzle of an "eight-stroke profile caricature." By the mid-1930s Hitchcock was becoming sufficiently physically identifiable that the *Sunday London Times* reviewer of *The 39 Steps* mentions seeing Hitchcock in his cameo role in the movie. Likely supplied by his studio, an image accompanying a 1938 interview is his film appearance in *Young and Innocent* (1937).³⁵

It was not just Hitchcock's body, of course; it was its size. By *Secret Agent* (1936), Hitchcock weighed more than 300 pounds, according to Spoto. Kapsis claims that "Hitchcock accelerated his promotional activities during

the mid-to-late 1930s. The personal idiosyncrasy which he seemed most anxious to exploit at this time was his obesity."³⁶

Although it may have occurred earlier, the first article mentioning the escalating size of Hitchcock's body appears to be *McCall's* review in September 1935 of *The 39 Steps*, written by Pare Lorentz who refers to him as "the chubby Cockney." In a British interview, Norah Baring jokingly writes, "in more ways than one he is an outstanding figure in British films. A big man, his height is dwarfed by his huge girth," and when he replies, it is "with a twinkle in his eye." Another U.S. periodical produces the next reference. *Time* writes in June 1936 that "England's pudgy master of melodrama, Alfred Hitchcock" directed *Secret Agent*.³⁷

This descriptive practice begins to become routine in reviews and often includes not only his weight but his eyes: "Alfred Hitchcock, England's jovial and rotund master of melodrama"; "England's roly-poly, impish-eyed Director." When Hitchcock visits the United States in August 1937, the *New York Times* headlines the news story "Falstaff in Manhattan: Alfred Hitchcock Tests Our Kitchens and Our Tastes in Melodrama" and engages in detailed description of him in physical terms, including "eyes that peek elfishly."³⁸

Not only were Hitchcock's physique and eyes becoming of significance as of 1935; so were ours. Undoubtedly an upshot of the sort of films he was directing, language in the reviews begins more routinely to describe the movies' affective and *physical* effects on the audience. Hitchcock is "a master of shock and suspense" and produces "breathless terror." "Mr. Hitchcock has an amazing and almost unanalyzable [sic] gift for creating and prolonging suspense." *Young and Innocent* "will have [audiences] sitting on the edge of their seats" with its "nerve-tingling suspense." *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) is "exciting" and the "audience is sitting breathless."³⁹

Again, Hitchcock's publicity feeds this. His explanation of why thrillers thrive for *The Picturegoer* emphasizes that in contrast to the theater where the audience members are mere spectators, in movies "we participate." In "Close Your Eyes," he states that he wants to "jolt cinemagoers in their seats with stories that move – with unexpected thrills, with comedy, with reality." He clearly wants to provoke, and as celebrity journalism devoted to him increases, he has opportunities to do so outside of the films themselves. The interviews themselves become entertainment.⁴⁰

Hitchcock and the "Cineastes"

The profiles and articles published in the United States as a result of his visits in 1937 and 1938 and then his move to Los Angeles in 1939 solidify these image facets of character, performer, worker, and private individual

to create Hitchcock's brand. As I described about the celebrity context, the conventions for these human-interest and gossip stories required emphasizing personal facts while constructing and evaluating the public biography. The second paragraph of the *New York Times* essay, "Falstaff in Manhattan," about his first U.S. visit, fulfills this duty:

Mr. Hitchcock is a walking monument to the principle of uninhibited addiction to sack and capon, prime beef and flowing ale, and double helpings of ice cream. His free-floating, unconfined waistline is a triumph in embonpoint, and he scrutinizes the world, catching its moods and manners and filing them away for future availability, through bright, piercing eyes that peek elfishly out of a rubicund face. When he smiles, his chins all smile with him, one after another. . . . It is reassuring to be able to report that the future of melodrama, as long as it remains in his expansive custody, will never suffer for lack of attention.⁴¹

This article individualizes him physically and focuses on both his private and his public lives. It marks out what he contributes artistically to filmmaking and describes his work behaviors. When Hitchcock returns in June 1938, Eileen Creelman of the *New York Sun* dutifully begins with her experience of dining with him at Twenty-One when he is describing to a waiter the sort of lamb chop he can have on his new diet.⁴²

Yet, the fall 1938 four-page *New Yorker* profile by Russell Maloney indicates how developed the reputation is becoming while reinforcing it. Mahoney begins the essay: "The vogue for Alfred Hitchcock's cinema melodramas is mainly a local phenomenon. 'The 39 Steps,' his best-known job of direction, has, in the past three years, been revived thirty-one times by various theatres on Manhattan Island." Mahoney continues that some people would rather re-watch a Hitchcock movie than take a chance with a new film. So a small cult is developing. (Other writers mention these Hitchcock "fans" and are becoming so familiar with him that Frank S. Nugent of the *New York Times* often refers to him in reviews simply as "Hitch.")⁴³

Maloney runs through standard biographical information such as Hitchcock's amusing escape in Zurich without enough money while filming one of his early movies, his Catholic background, the two-month writing conferences, the "editing" of a film before shooting, the manipulation of the actors, the habit of throwing his cup over his shoulder when he finishes drinking his afternoon tea, his marriage and "small flat in London," his love of horticulture. Hitchcock's promotion of what is occurring is marked by Mahoney recounting that "Hitchcock is the soul of amiability and has been known to begin an interview, after offering the reporters a drink, with 'I suppose you want something grotesque.'" The essay is nearly three-quarters complete before Maloney addresses the weight (and diet): "His fatness seems to buoy him up. Spiritually and physically, he might be a kin to a

Macy balloon. His large, close-set ears, bright-blue eyes, scrubby black hair, and double chin give him the air of one of his own likable cinematic villains." A line-drawing of Hitchcock accompanies the "Profile."⁴⁴

With Hitchcock's move to Los Angeles in 1939, profiles in mass-market magazines proliferate. These articles continue the trends already described and begin to include photographs of Hitchcock in his pajama robe and at play with his dogs. The only new thematic angle, which has been slightly set up previously, is the beginning of the *chroniques scandaleux* twist of Hitchcock's behavior as impish into something more akin to cruelty. For *Life*, Geoffrey Hellman opines: "the director ... is never happier than when seeing someone writhe" and a favorite target is "fair-haired girls."⁴⁵

When *Rebecca* (1940) is released, U.S. reviews consistently describe it as Hitchcock's picture due to its "masterly" and "superb" direction while also usually mentioning Selznick as a producer who will provide good production values and a faithful adaptation of the original source.⁴⁶ From the perspective of celebrity journalism and creating Hitchcock's brand, it is valuable to note that the reviewers were sensitive to matters of authorship, attributing specific features of the film to each man while describing the total result as outstanding.

Moreover, the reviewers determine that Hitchcock has succeeded in maintaining his brand while meeting up alongside another powerful Hollywood author. Nugent exclaims:

Hitch has it ... the English master of movie melodramas, rounder than John Bull, twice as fond of beef ... The question being batted around by the cineastes (hybrid for cinema-esthetes) was whether his peculiarly British, yet peculiarly personal, style could survive Hollywood, the David O. Selznick of "Gone with the Wind."⁴⁷

Nugent's evaluation is yes, "his famous and widely publicized 'touch' seems to have developed into a firm, enveloping grasp" to produce "a brilliant film."

Certainly this cineaste sensitivity to fine details of authorship is something not apparent to average moviegoers, but the reviewers are glad to help them see it. Thus, by 1940, authoring behaviors in the films directed by Hitchcock, publicity activities, and celebrity journalism have established the brand of "Hitchcock" so that cineastes could speculate on and evaluate sources and results of authorship. "He" existed.

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NOTES

- 1 "Alfred Hitchcock: England's Best Director Starts Work in Hollywood," *Life*, 19 June 1939, 66; Katharine Roberts, "Mystery Man," *Colliers*, 5 August 1939, 22; Geoffrey Hellman, "Alfred Hitchcock: England's Best and Biggest Director Goes to Hollywood," *Life*, 20 November 1939, 33-43.
- 2 Leo Braudy, *Frenzy of Renown: Fame & Its History*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- 3 Emphasis in the original; Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1983), p. 73. Spoto dates the event as occurring in 1925. Patrick McGilligan provides a similar account and cites Ivor Montagu's memoirs that date the remark to early 1927; *Alfred Hitchcock: A Life in Darkness and Light* (New York: Regan Books, 2003), pp. 86-87 and 799. Also see Robert Kapsis, *Hitchcock: The Making of a Reputation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 16.
- 4 Kapsis, *Hitchcock*, 18-23. The quotation is from p. 23.
- 5 Janet Staiger in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 108-110; Janet Staiger, "Authorship Studies and Gus Van Sant," *Film Criticism* 29, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 1-22; Janet Staiger, "Analysing Self-Fashioning in Authoring and Reception," in *Ingmar Bergman Revisited: Performance, Cinema, and the Arts*, ed. Maaret Koskinen (London: Wallflower, 2008), pp. 89-106; Janet Staiger, "Because I Am a Woman": Thinking Identity and Agency for Historiography," *Film History* 25, nos. 1-2 (2013): 205-214.
- 6 Braudy, *Frenzy*, 481-83; Loren Glass, *Authors Inc.: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880-1980* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), pp. 57-60.
- 7 Richard Schickel, *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1985), p. 30.
- 8 Charles Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), pp. 15-18, 33-36.
- 9 Janet Staiger, *Media Reception Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), pp. 115-124.
- 10 Leo Lowenthal, "The Triumph of Mass Idols" [1944], rpt. in *Literature, Popular Culture, and Society*, ed. Leo Lowenthal (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1961), pp. 109-140.
- 11 Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure*, 33-40, 57-58; also see Richard deCordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), pp. 119-120.
- 12 "The Mountain Eagle," *Bioscope* [U.K.], 7 October 1925, 48; "The Lodger," *Bioscope*, 16 September 1926, 39.

- 13 McGilligan, *Alfred Hitchcock*, pp. 85–86; Cedric Belfrage, “Alfred the Great,” *The Picturegoer* [U.K.], 11, no. 63 (March 1926), 60.
- 14 “The Lodger,” *Bioscope*, 39.
- 15 “Downhill,” *Bioscope*, 26 May 1927, 43; “Easy Virtue,” *Bioscope*, 1 September 1927, 67; “The Ring,” *Bioscope*, 6 October 1927, 43; “Without Prejudice,” *Bioscope*, 6 October 1927, 27.
- 16 Robert Herring, “The Latest British Masterpiece,” *Close Up* 2, no. 1 (January 1928), 35–36.
- 17 Janet Staiger, “The Revenge of the Film Education Movement: Cult Movies and Fan Interpretive Behaviors,” *Reception: Texts, Readers, Audiences, History* 1 (Fall 2008), <http://receptionstudy.org/files/Staiger.pdf>.
- 18 Kristin Thompson, *Herr Lubitsch Goes to Hollywood: German and American Film after World War I* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), pp. 127–131.
- 19 John Grierson, “Rich and Strange,” *Everyman*, 31 December 1931, rpt. in *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. Forsyth Hardy (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1947), 51.
- 20 Helen Brown Norden, “Hollywood on Parade,” *Vanity Fair*, 44 (May 1935), 45.
- 21 “Secret Agent,” *News-Week*, 13 June 1936, 41.
- 22 Hugh Castle, “Elstree’s First ‘Talkie,’” *Close Up* 5, no. 2 (August 1929), 133. Beyond his “touches,” Hitchcock has a formula by 1938; see “The Hitchcock Formula,” *New York Times*, 13 February 1938, 158.
- 23 “The Farmer’s Wife,” *Bioscope*, 8 March 1928, 75; “The Manxman,” *Bioscope*, 23 January 1929, 38. U.S. reviewers were not impressed with *The Manxman*, nor did they consider the issue of realism.
- 24 Celia Simpson, “The Cinema,” *Spectator* [U.K.], 11 October 1930, 489; Hugh Castle, “Attitude and Interlude,” *Close Up* 7, no. 3 (September 1930), 184–189; Mordaunt Hall, “A Grandeur Production,” *New York Times*, 2 November 1930, 8: 5.
- 25 Spoto, *Dark Side*, 123; Oswell Blackeston, *Close Up* 7, no. 2 (August 1930), 146.
- 26 Stephen Watts, “Alfred Hitchcock on Music in Films,” *Cinema Quarterly* [Edinburgh], 2, no. 2 (Winter 1933), 80; Charles Davis, “The Cinema,” *Spectator*, 9 March 1931, 370; Caroline Alice Lejeune, *Cinema* (London: Alexander Maclehose, 1931), p. 11; Grierson, “Rich and Strange,” 50.
- 27 Barbara J. Buchanan, “Alfred Hitchcock Tells a Woman That Women Are a Nuisance,” *Film Weekly* [London], 20 September 1935, 10. For earlier remarks by Hitchcock about female stars, see Alfred Hitchcock, “How I Choose My Heroines,” in *Who’s Who in Filmiland*, ed. Langford Reed and Hetty Spiers (London: Chapman & Hall, 1931), pp. xxi–xxiii.
- 28 Ryall, *Alfred Hitchcock*, pp. 102–105; McGilligan, *Hitchcock*, p. 167; Kapsis, *Hitchcock*, pp. 21–22.
- 29 As Steve Neale has shown, the term “melodrama” in this period is used to describe action films (Westerns, suspense, detective, gangster movies) rather than social or family dynamics. “‘Melo’ Talk: On the Meaning and Use of the Term ‘Melodrama’ in the American Trade Press,” *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 32 (1993): 66–89. In the reviews to follow, Hitchcock is as often labeled the master of melodrama as of suspense. The words should be considered interchangeable at this historical moment.
- 30 Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 70.
- 31 “The Man Who Knew Too Much,” *Film Daily* [U.S.], 22 March 1935, 7; Andre Sennwald, “The Screen,” *The New York Times*, 23 March 1935, 11; Andre Sennwald, “Peter Lorre, Poet of the Damned,” *The New York Times*, 31 March 1935, 11: 3; Norden, “Hollywood on Parade,” 45.
- 32 Andre Sennwald, “The Screen,” *The New York Times*, 14 September 1935, 8.
- 33 Alfred Hitchcock, “Why ‘Thrillers’ Thrive,” *The Picturegoer*, 18 January 1936, 15; Alfred Hitchcock with John K. Newnham, “Screen Memories,” *Film Weekly*, 2 May 1936, 16–18; 9 May 1936, 7; 16 May 1936, 28–29; 23 May 1936, 28–29; 30 May 1936, 27; Alfred Hitchcock, “Close Your Eyes and Visualize!” *Stage* [New York], 13, no. 10 (July 1936), 52–53.
- 34 “Paris in Poole Street: Graham Cutts Busy at Famous Players – Lasky Studios,” *The Motion Picture Studio* [London], 28 April 1923, 6.
- 35 Spoto, *Dark Side*, 103–104; Ryall, *Alfred Hitchcock*, 105–106; Leslie Perkoff, “The Censor and Sydney Street,” *World Film News* [London], 2, no. 12 (March 1938), 4.
- 36 Spoto, *Dark Side*, 154; Kapsis, *Hitchcock*, 22. Also see McGilligan, *Alfred Hitchcock*, 204.
- 37 Pare Lorentz, “Movies,” *McCalls* [U.S.], 63 (September 1935), 17; Norah Baring, “The Man Who Made *The 39 Steps*: Pen Portrait of Alfred Hitchcock,” *Film Pictorial*, 23 November 1935, 14–15, rpt. in *Alfred Hitchcock: Interviews*, ed. Sidney Gottlieb (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), p. 10; “The New Pictures,” *Time*, 15 June 1936, 56.
- 38 Frank S. Nugent, “The Screen,” *New York Times*, 11 February 1938, 27; “The Girl Was Young,” *Time*, 14 February 1938, 32; “Falstaff in Manhattan,” *New York Times*, 5 September 1937, 122. The analogies for Hitchcock’s body became amusing. See later in the chapter for Russell Maloney’s equation of him to a Macy balloon. Also see Frank S. Nugent’s “rotund spider” in “The Screen in Review,” *New York Times*, 26 December 1938, 29.
- 39 “The New Pictures,” *Time*, 15 June 1936, 56; Andre Sennwald, “The Screen,” *New York Times*, 14 September 1935, 8; Frank S. Nugent, “There’s Always a Topic,” *New York Times*, 28 February 1937, 167; “The Girl Was Young,” *Film Daily*, 19 January 1938, 6; “The Lady Vanishes,” *Film Daily*, 5 October 1938, 6.
- 40 Hitchcock, “Why ‘Thrillers’ Thrive,” 15; Hitchcock, “Close Your Eyes,” 53.
- 41 “Falstaff in Manhattan,” 122.
- 42 Eileen Creelman, “Picture Plays and Players: Alfred Hitchcock, English Director, to Take a Look at Hollywood,” *New York Sun*, 15 June 1938, 26.
- 43 Russell Maloney, “Profiles: What Happens After That,” *New Yorker*, 10 September 1938, 25. “Steady revivals” are mentioned in “The Lady Vanishes,” *Time*, 21 November 1938, 53. *Time* writes about “fans of Director Alfred Hitchcock” in “The New Pictures,” 30 October 1934, 49, as does Katharine Roberts, “Mystery Man,” *Colliers*, 5 August 1939, 22. Frank S. Nugent, “The Screen in Review,” *New York Times*, 26 December 1938, 29; Frank S. Nugent, “The Screen in Review,” *New York Times*, 12 October 1939, 33.
- 44 Maloney, “Profiles,” 24–28.
- 45 “Alfred Hitchcock: England’s Best Director Starts Work in Hollywood,” *Life*, 19 June 1939, 66; Katharine Roberts, “Mystery Man,” *Colliers*, 5 August 1939, 22; Hellman, “Alfred Hitchcock,” 33–43.

- 46 "Reviews," *Film Daily*, 26 March 1940, 6; Frank S. Nugent, "The Screen," *New York Times*, 29 March 1940, 28; John Mosher, "The Current Cinema: From Rebecca to Ellie May," *New Yorker*, 30 March 1940, 63-64; "Entertainment," *Newsweek*, 8 April 1940, 34-35; Otto Ferguson, "Sight Cases of Marriage," *The New Republic*, 102, no. 15 (8 April 1940), 474-475; Philip T. Hartung, "The Stage & Screen," *The Commonwealth*, 31, no. 25 (12 April 1940), 534; "The New Picture," *Time*, 15 April 1940, 96 and 98.
- 47 Frank S. Nugent, "The Screen," *New York Times*, 29 March 1940, 28.

3

SARA BLAIR

Hitchcock on Location: America, Icons, and the Place of Illusion

Of all the effects that make movies uniquely powerful as a form of illusion, none is so foundational as its uses of space. From its very beginnings as a mass medium, cinema self-consciously explored its twinned powers of indexicality – capture of the traces left behind by actual bodies and objects in actual spaces at a given instant – and of iconicity – conjuring fantastic beings of light and shadow made, through the magic of cinematic technique, to appear lifelike, as if real, before our very eyes. These two modes of film point to a critical, if relatively unexplored, issue: What role does location – actual material place – play in the making of cinematic illusion? How does the design of cinematic space – the illusory, nonexistent world of the film and its sites, into which the viewer imaginatively enters – make use of, and even reanimate, actual space? What *makes up* the relationship between cinematic space and social space, governed in real time by myths and special effects and illusions of its own? Oddly enough, however, the effects of location have rarely been considered in the annals of film theory, apart from their resonance in specific film texts or diegetics; and standard encyclopedias and histories of film practice tend to omit discussion of location altogether.¹ So what place might place have in understanding the effects of film as a form of illusion, or of critical apprehension?

No director gives us more room to maneuver on these grounds than Hitchcock does. Noted from his earliest ventures as a proponent of location shooting, yet legendary for his frame-by-frame construction of the world and look of his films, Hitchcock was keenly attuned both to actual spaces as sources of cinematic suggestion and to film as a site of entry into their cultural and psychic resonances. Given the defining themes of his work and the tenor of his *auteur*-ial pronouncements about them, Hitchcock's films are often celebrated as experiments with narrative genres, or as stagings of psychosexual drives and desires. But actual sites turn out to play a critical role in their own right in Hitchcock's work, particularly in key American films concerned with American icons and American identities.² In what follows,