



# SHADOWS OF DOUBT







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# INTRODUCTION SHADOWS OF DOUBT, A PSYCHOGEOGRAPHICAL JOURNEY THROUGH HITCHCOCK'S EAST END CHILDHOOD

Photography by David George and Spencer Rowell. Curated by Dr. Nicholas Haeffner. Presented in conjunction with the London Metropolitan University's East End Photographic Archive.

## Introduction by Michael Upton

The work in *Shadows of Doubt* relates to the East End of the film director Alfred Hitchcock's London childhood. It uses images of the built environment as a starting point for an exploration of relationships between physical place, memory, psychological development and aesthetic sensibility.

The photographers have each approached the project with one rule- David George has photographed exterior places. Spencer Rowell has focused on interior spaces. This expedient division is consistent with their broader practice and interests; David in the sublime psycho-geographic essence of nocturnal places, Spencer in relationships between photography, psychoanalysis and childhood memory. Yet with Hitchcock as a common catalyst this has resulted in work which shares a sense of fear, apprehension, suspense and mystery appropriate to the director's vision and public persona.

Alfred Hitchcock was so effective in creating a version of his childhood based on a handful of

anecdotes which suited his promotional ends, that it is easy to forget that he spent sixteen years in the east end of London. Hitchcock's biographers have portrayed these years in varying ways to support their interpretations of the director and his texts. Donald Spoto's lonely 'Fred' dwelt in dark and oppressive rooms above a shop, while 'Alfie's' world in Patrick McGilligan's version was brightened somewhat by seaside trips to Cliftonville and family get-togethers in Putney. Many of the actual places which constituted Hitchcock's childhood realm have vanished. A Jet garage occupies the site of the greengrocers shop at 517 Leytonstone High Road where Hitchcock was born; the Green Man pub which the family frequented is now an O'Neills; the Police Station where his 'wrongly accused' motif was inspired is fast becoming commercial premises and much of Limehouse has been razed and regenerated.

Given the scarcity of reliable factual and physical evidence these subjective images, (consciously or subconsciously mediated through Hitchcock's texts), his biographical legend, and the artists' own visions and experiences arguably offer as truthful a representation of Hitchcock's childhood as any objective documentary account.

**Michael Upton 2011**







*'Hitchcock's cinema is permeated by fetish objects, many of which have highly architectural or domestic connotations such as a bunch of keys, a doorknob, a closed door, a darkened window of the top of a staircase....Hitchcock's (neo-) Victorian houses illustrate Benjamin's interpretation of the bourgeois interior perfectly. All objects seem to have put aside their commodity and use value. As fetishes, they seem to put a spell on the characters.'*

*Steven Jacobs*

*'...we do not mean to imply that these terms [knowledge and belief] have a negative relation to each other, that belief is the negative of knowledge, for example. Nor that belief is a flawed cognitive relation to the world and knowledge is a correct one. If we proceed from the understanding that belief is the fundamental attitude that a person has when he or she holds that a proposition is true, and that knowledge is certified true belief (by virtue of evidence), then clearly we need to ask about how any proposition becomes true or false and what constitutes*



*evidence. In this regard, and as has been argued, it is clear that what we hold to be true is not necessarily consistent with what is true at the level of the senses, reason, consciousness and discourse but also with what holds to be true at the level of the unconscious. Hence, we would urge you to approach these documents we present as we do, as 'hysterical symptoms' based not on any one person's actual memories but on cultural fantasies erected from the material of collective memories.'*

*The Atlas Group, Review of Photographic Memory, ed. Jalal Toufic (Beirut: Arab Image Foundation, 2004), 44-45.*





*'virtually all of Hitchcock's films deal with the idea of the home... the family is always involved in the family plot... The theme of the home as a site of disturbance is elaborated and even foregrounded in his American films.'*

*'Fascinated by the house as a place of secrets and concealment, Hitchcock preferred Victorian houses because of their closed and stuffed interiors.'*

*'the narrative of Hitchcock's single set films depends greatly on the tension between inside and outside space. This coincides with the motif of intrusion, which is important in Rope, Dial M for Murder, and Rear Window.'*





*'Leading modern architects were convinced that the old antagonisms between exterior and interior, and private and public, could no longer be repaired but, at the most, only ritualized.'*

*Steven Jacobs*

*'home is a place where you fall ill and risk being murdered or driven insane'*

*Matthew Sweet, from his introduction to The Woman in White by Wilkie Collins*





## NICK HAEFFNER SHADOWS OF DOUBT

A reporter once asked Hitchcock, 'what is the deepest logic of your films?', his answer was 'to put the audience through it'. What is 'it' if not a long journey of fear and uncertainty? This walk on the wild side turns out to be full of unexpected aesthetic pleasures (as well as fearful significance) found in the everyday objects of our experience.

In the films of Alfred Hitchcock, we see that part of his aim was to imbue places with a sense of fear and apprehension. London locations were often central to Hitchcock's work. The producers of *Sabotage* (1936) proudly claimed that it would feature 'more of the real London than any film yet made'. (Krohn 2000: 24) Hitchcock continued to film stories set in London after he had made his home in Hollywood, most notably with *Frenzy*

(1972), where he set the story in the Covent Garden market he visited on a weekly basis as a child with his father. Yet the bustling and apparently cheery world of the market hides a dark underbelly.

In *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock*, Steven Jacobs points out that 'Hitchcock [...] often used narratives with characters that are determined, frightened, or suppressed by their architectural environments.' (Jacobs 2007: 21) Such a scenario is familiar from gothic fiction from the late 18th century onwards but in Hitchcock's films the classic gothic tale is given a more everyday location, as Jacobs notes: 'instead of haunted castles, gruesome events take place in a suburban home, a sanitary motel bathroom or a farm kitchen.' (ibid. 19)





It is not only everyday dwellings that come to be the repository of gothic fears, however. Hitchcock had something of still photographer's eye for objects which were the focus of anxiety. A breadknife, a cigarette lighter, a tie pin, a key, a piece of rope, a necklace – all of these domestic objects have memorable cameos in Hitchcock's films where they come to symbolise fear and sometimes doom for one or more of the characters. Of course, what imbues these fetish objects with fear is largely cinematic: the alternation of closeups of anxious faces with closeups of otherwise banal objects has the effect of charging these everyday objects, mostly of the kind that Hitchcock might have seen around the house as a child, with intense emotion.

NOTES

Nick Haefner  
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## DAVID GEORGE SHADOWS OF DOUBT

Educators and psychologists have long known that childhood environment informs adult behaviour so it is pertinent to argue that the same environment would mould personal aesthetic and artistic sensibilities. For example, George Shaw's paintings of the mundane and melancholic housing estates of his childhood realised in an Airfix paint palette or Ridley Scott's nightmarish opening shots in "Bladerunner", images of a city of the future squarely based on the night time industrial landscapes on the mouth of the River Tees. Both offer compelling evidence of formative geography feeding into adult creativity.

The idea of the "Shadows of Doubt" project was to try, in some small way, to photographically recapture Alfred Hitchcock's childhood East End as one of the elements that shaped his filmmaking. I decided the best way to revisit Hitchcock's childhood London was to walk the areas I understood,

through research and documentation, he inhabited (Wapping, Wanstead Flats, Whipps Cross, Limehouse and Leyton) and photograph pieces of these urban landscapes that were contemporary and familiar to him, places that he would still recognise if he were alive today. It was never an intention to recreate Hitchcock's Edwardian East End, but rather to re-imagine the geographic, topographic, and architectural elements that constituted his childhood environment, elements that were feeding everyday, covertly, into his psyche and expanding aesthetic.

There never any determination on my part to recreate scenes or sets from Hitchcock's films, the images were all taken as a response to my night time encounters with the areas I was walking so any visual references pertaining to the films, though interesting, are purely co-incidental and generated with a retrospective re-reading of the images.

NOTES

David George  
<http://davidgeorge.eu>





Tower Bridge: David George - 2011





## SPENCER ROWELL

### SHADOWS OF DOUBT

*Did Hitchcock offer us an insight into his internal world through his films?*

*Were they a way of showing us his own internal conflicts, of creating a life's work of scripted realisations of his early life experiences?*

'You must know' Hitchcock is reported in saying, 'that when I'm making a movie, the story isn't important to me. What's important is how I tell the story.' Psychodynamic analytical theory would have us believe that the telling of any story, within a certain frame, is indeed, an insight into early life experiences.

Hitchcock was raised as a strict Catholic and within an authoritarian matriarchal family,

the influential males in his life where either priests or policemen. His preoccupation with guilt may have been further developed by his evangelisation and education, from 1908 onwards, at St. Ignatius College, Stamford Hill, London (pictured), where it is said, that the Jesuit fathers dispensed corporal punishment with pious rigor. In the words of Hitchcock, 'It wasn't done casually, you know. It was rather like the execution of a sentence... You spent the whole day waiting for the sentence to be carried out.'

There is a sense that there is a search for spiritual redemption in his work; most of his films display some sense of sin, guilt, atonement and redemption, perhaps this is a response to his Catholic sensibilities.





This project looks at my curiosity of how it may have been for him as a child, a highly subjective and contemporary view of his earliest influences, an understanding of how, psychologically, Hitchcock's ability to respond to these complex and emotional influences, may have surfaced as sublimation and humour, two mature defense mechanisms, where socially unacceptable impulses or idealisations may have been consciously transformed through work; a way of diversion, of modification into a culturally higher or socially more acceptable activity.

Of course, we will never know. Hitchcock's most able talent was to create illusions, this ability to create suspense and of us questioning his (and our) motives, is what he did best.

Were these defenses really concealing a deeper trauma in order to avoid any unpleasant consequences of confronting inner conflicts?

NOTES

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## SUSAN ANDREWS

### SHADOWS OF DOUBT

The work of David George and Spencer Rowell, made specifically for the exhibition and symposium *Shadows of Doubt*, seeks to explore the visual influences on the young Alfred Hitchcock that may have been significant in forming his vision as a filmmaker. The aspects of his filmmaking that can be traced back to his childhood experience are of course a matter for conjecture; little is known that is verifiable about Hitchcock's early life as he was a great showman and publicist, prone to story telling. However, various accounts from his childhood have gained popular status, especially those of his father having had him locked him away in a cell at the local police station and the story of his mother making him stand at the foot of her bed for hours as punishment for bad behaviour. Such experiences are attributed as being the foundation for his portrayal of Norman Bates in the film *Psycho*.

However, what George and Rowell examine through their work are the more day-to-day influences in the form of environments and particularly lighting. Rowell takes the interior as his setting, shooting from the point of view of a young child, using period furniture, looking from obscure spaces at shadows and reflections. The world appears unfamiliar and hard to read, where sections and corners are revealed in a way that suggest a child's perception of the world, where the viewer is required to adjust both his perspective and assumptions. George has taken to the streets of East London, to Leytonstone, Limehouse, Wanstead and Wapping, visiting places and buildings close to where Hitchcock was

brought up and that were almost certainly familiar to him. These photographs have been made at night, where the street lighting reveals imposing structures, doorways and windows, but casts shadows that conceal as much as the light reveals. This play between what is hidden and what is seen creates a space in which the imagination can play.

Hitchcock's long cinematic takes (up to 10 minutes long in the film *Rope*), together with close-up shots and his technique of cutting from faces to objects, are suggestive of aspects of the still photographic image where spaces are permitted to open up that allow viewers to participate in the work. Both Rowell and George make other allusions in their work to techniques employed by Hitchcock through location use, point-of-view shots and lighting that casts strong shadows. Significantly, the quality of lighting would have connected the experience of the interior and exterior environments of the young Hitchcock, as both would have been lit by gas. In addition, home lighting was often supplemented by candles and oil lamps (it was not until after the first world war that electricity became the predominant source of lighting in the home) and consequently strangely shifting shadows and unlit corners would have been a feature in the home as much as in the street.

It may well be that these initial experiences of the world burned themselves into the psyche of the young Hitchcock, although one cannot say with certainty to what extent early experience will shape a person in an explicit







way or why, for some, apparently insignificant details and practices that are widespread throughout society, become so central to the expression of themselves in their adult lives. However, what is suggested through the work of both George and Rowell is that there is an undoubted link between what Hitchcock would have seen as a child and the films that he made in later life; also, much of Hitchcock's subject matter and symbolism, strongly reflects themes from psychoanalysis, which was in the early stages of its development when Hitchcock was born and from which he subsequently drew inspiration.

These two bodies of work, works of the imagination as much as of the documentary and concrete, will be deposited into *The London Metropolitan University East End Archive*, an online digital resource for artists, academics and researchers from a cross-section of disciplines. This archive is comprised of bodies of work, rather than single images, from artists and photographers who have explored the East

End as a geographic or conceptual space, where the East End is a frontier space where resistance, dreams and dissent can co-exist. The deposition of bodies of work into this archive is considered important as a means to understand more fully the working methodology of the artists and to give more context to the work. Audrey Linkman, who was instrumental in building the Documentary Photography Archive in Manchester, said that she sees "framed photographs in exhibitions as...ripped out of the context that endows greater depth of meaning." The body of work shows the photographers working method, "it reveals omissions, reflects obsessions....It tells the story of the photographer's journey."

*The London Metropolitan University East End Archive* is an archive for the future where contemporary photographers and artists are asked to contribute projects or bodies of work to this, not for profit, educational resource, which is in the process of being built by an interdisciplinary team within the University.

NOTES

Susan Andrews



# MICHAEL UPTON

## THE DIRECTOR VANISHES LOOKING FOR HITCHCOCK IN LEYTONSTONE

*“Geographically Leytonstone is just a case of in one end and out the other”. It’s not the end of the road like Whitechapel, nor is it the beginning of the end like Southgate. Leytonstone, if it’s like anything it is the urethra of London.”*

‘Lenny’s Documentary’, Ian Bourn (1978)

My colleague Nicholas Haeffner related an account of a group of film students from the United States who wanted to explore the area of East London where Hitchcock spent his formative years. They were unanimously appalled both by what they discovered - a shabby petrol station where there should have been Victorian greengrocers - and by what they did not discover: any fitting monument or museum for the Master of Suspense.

I thought of ‘Frenzy’ (1972) and the conversation about tourists between the Doctor and Lawyer in the pub.

*“Foreigners somehow expect the squares of London to be fog-wreathed, full of hansom cabs and littered with ripped whores, don’t you think?”*

I am not sure what the Hitchcock academics expected to find. I lived in Leytonstone for five years. For me the place always exuded an ambiguous combination of suburban charm and urban threat. I decided to revisit my old stomping ground, by way of a Hitchcock pilgrimage.

### Going Out

I board a 56 from Islington Green bound for Whipps Cross. It’s a cautious approach, deliberately circum-navigating the East End realm of Hitchcock’s later childhood; Poplar, Stepney, Limehouse. Before he was ‘Cocky’ (loathed school nickname) or ‘Hitch’ (preferred abbreviation), Hitchcock was plain Fred from Leytonstone.

East from Islington the repetitive DNA of the urban high road chromosome repeats itself: Takeaway - Newsagent - Off License -Launderette /Hairdresser), a pattern familiar from any of the city’s outer arterial spokes. I’m on the front seat of the upper deck, a high angle voyeur on the shifting terrain. The huge curved window affords a tracking shot in a widescreen aspect ratio. I keep the frame tight, tilted low, eschewing the contemporary mesas in glass above the horizon, conjecturing a late Victorian East.

The City and its East are difficult to view with any aesthetic distance, so endlessly have they been re - read, re - described, re-imagined and re - packaged by a legacy of historians, poets, flaneurs, artists, visionaries, romantics. A place of poverty, disappearances, honest cockneys, gangsters, Jacks (spring heeled and ripping), creativity, pleasure, depravity, family and solitude, of successive immigration and exodus. The East London Diaspora has spread eastwards and outwards along the A13 and the coast to carrying its myths with it, but leaving physical evidence at the mercy of the developers and planners rewriting the fringes.





Hitchcock appropriated the 'East End' in his films to a limited extent. The Ripper plots and allusions of 'The Lodger' and 'Frenzy' bookend his career, violent murder pervades many of the texts in between. The siege of Sidney Street (1911) inspired and is reproduced in the 1934 version of 'The Man Who Knew Too Much'. Cockney 'salt of the earth' characters feature in his British works. The hecklers in 'The 39 Steps', the droll neighbour in 'Blackmail': 'A good, clean, honest whack over the head with a brick... there's something British about that.' Though hailing from Kent, 'Frenzy's rotten apple, murderous Bob Rusk is the cheeky costermonger gone wrong. The zone further east is absent from his texts in any literal sense.

The sense of a departure from De Quincey's 'Labyrinth of London' is re-asserted. The arteries widen, squat terraced houses and successive parks and marshes expose more of the grey sky. Towards and beyond the River Lea, small businesses give way to commercial premises exiled to the periphery. Breakers yards, white van hire, trade outlets for furniture and interiors. Early sightings of Drive-Thrus and superstores herald my entry to the brandscape of the outer city. I alight at the roundabout where Whipps Cross Road veers right towards Leytonstone. The sense of spaciousness and release, remind me that Hitchcock's life started in an outer enclave still reeling from rapid transition to an urban economy.

### Shrine 1

The Alfred Hitchcock Hotel

The Alfred Hitchcock is an imposing Victorian country hotel overlooking the ragged fringes of Epping Forest a little way past Whipps Cross Hospital. The dirty green horizon it faces is interrupted only by a cameo from a rotund folly- one of the domed towers of Snaresbrook Crown Court. Now sentencing place for many lesser East End 'faces', in Hitchcock's day an infant orphan asylum for the fatherless middle class. In the scrub foreground a clamour of huge rooks loiter in the long grass. In my mental cinema, Fred tiptoes through this field of avian assailants on his way for a peek at the bathers at Hollow Pond Bathing Pool.

This is the place where suburbs kiss the pastoral. I rented a second floor flat not far from the hotel. I recall it as a place of low flying helicopters, police searches and chases, lurkers by dusk and nocturnal screams.

Two detectives once called to eliminate my girlfriend and me from a murder enquiry. We were interviewed in separate rooms. I perched with the rain-coated constable on the end of the bed opposite a mirrored wardrobe. It was hard to avoid eye contact.

Epping Forest is the burial place par excellence for murder victims real and invented. Saskia dispatched by ashtray by villainous Steve Owen; accountant Terry Gooderham who crossed the Adams' family discovered alongside girlfriend Maxine





Arnold; Kingpin Jack Dalton, a hit by Dennis Watts; the 'Babes In The Wood' victims of Ronald Jebson. A montage of the historical and the fictional East End in a shallow grave. 'The Trouble with Harry', without the laughs.

Turning my back on the killing fields I look at the hotel. It is not the grand affair it first appears. A series of Victorian terraces knocked together in eighties, though the scale of housing along this stretch emphasise this was once a prosperous borough. A small collection of Hitchcock relics and curios hangs in the lugubrious bar area; promotional materials, a copy of his birth and marriage certificates, faded newspaper clippings and images of the locale in Edwardian times. The hidey holes and mis-matched furniture including a church pew hint at dark eccentricity.

A rectangular block called 'Alfred's Rock' acts as serving area in the adjoining restaurant. The gaudy fairground stenciling is more 'Hitchcock' than the wall of official detritus. Before his canonisation as auteur by The Cahiers Du Cinema critics, Hitch was a huckster, one of the early vanguard of directors in establishing himself as a sort of human hallmark. His very involvement in a film lent it before the title or plot or image was revealed-expectations of pleasurable, vicarious thrills. He deliberately situated himself as a key part of his films broader 'Narrative image' as John Ellis described it in 'Visible Fictions'.

Taking the corner from Whipps Cross Road to Leytonstone high road requires navigating the vast green man roundabout. I make the mistake of attempting a short cut but end up in a dismal oubliette where a series of concrete steps offer an escape but vanish

into the undergrowth. Another Red Herring. I retrace my steps and use the underpass system. A huge monolith bearing a Tesco logo acts as my beacon.

## Shrine 2

Leytonstone Tube Station Mosaics

I veer right, rounding St Patrick's Church and its verdant yard. Here Leytonstone looks like a village. Inside the Twenties Tube station building, an official commemoration. Seventeen mosaics commissioned in 1999 for the centenary of Hitchcock's birth and completed in 2001 adorn the tunnel walls. The location is apt as Fred was passionate about - and had a technical interest in - trains and timetables, and trains feature famously in the films - 'Strangers on a Train', the chases in 'Number Seventeen' and 'The Lady Vanishes', as sexual metaphor in 'North by Northwest'. His interest in transport is not surprising; horse drawn trams were replaced by electric ones during the period young Hitchcock would have travelled this road on his father's greengrocer's cart.

Several of the mosaic works incorporate Leytonstone landmarks in to reproductions of stills from the films as if to literally cement the locale to the texts and author. For me this paradoxically re asserts his absence and the lack of any genuine connection. The photograph of young Fred on horseback, taken outside the greengrocers on Empire Day is replicated in tesserae. The original image may not be of Hitchcock at all but his brother - a false clue, the wrong boy immortalised.

## Shrine 3

Leytonstone Police Station

Returning to the High Road I nearly miss the red brick municipal slab of a police station.





There is no blue lamp. The place is being renovated for commercial purposes, following the same trajectory as nearby Leyton Town Hall where Fred would have watched his sister dance - now The Legacy Centre.

It was in the cells at this site that the most famous of Hitchcock's defining childhood experiences took (or didn't take) place. Sent by his father to the police station with a note for the duty sergeant, the six year old Fred was incarcerated for five or more minutes. On his release he was told that was what happens to 'naughty little boys' though had no idea what crime had had committed. Rather than some traumatic experience repressed and buried in what Freud called "Infant Amnesia" this was a recurring stock tale in Hitch's repertoire. It sat well in his 'Biographical Legend' segueing the director with the wrongly accused in his texts; Drew, Hannay, Thornhill, Blaney Manny and the rest.

East London has long been linked with crime; the association originating in the abject poverty of the region following the

enforced relocation of the City's poorest from the central slums and rookeries. The Green Man pub (now an O'Neill's) where Fred and family dined occasionally was a coach house patronized by highwayman Dick Turpin. The most infamous Victorian crimes, the Ripper murders have been revisited endlessly in print in films including Hitchcock's. Not far from Leytonstone past Wanstead Flats is The City of London Cemetery. Two of the Ripper's victims Mary Ann Nichols his first and Catherine Eddowes are buried there. I ponder the idea that Fred visited the site on secret jaunts.

While Hitchcock was in Hollywood cementing his reputation for fictional crime, a crop of new 'real' East End villains bound for mythic status emerged. The Krays and associated and rival criminal fraternities played gangland out as spectacle, both feared and revered. Their stories concluded in these eastern margins: Reggie, Ronnie and Charlie are buried at Chingford Mount stones throw from Leytonstone. And of course, like Norman Bates, they loved their Mum.





I visited Leytonstone police station once to report a crime. Someone had used my credit card details to top up a mobile phone. The desk sergeant said no one stole £50 these days, called me a liar and threatened to arrest me. I didn't own a mobile phone.

#### Shrine 4

The Jet Garage

The quiet shudder of discovering the Jet Petrol Station on the site of Hitchcock's birth place and childhood home is undiminished with a repeat viewing. Fuck 24 Hour Psycho, try the 24 Hour Garage. It's an absence beyond the physical— an author concerned with the mother figure and matriarch, symbolically un-homed and un-birthing through urban montage. In a coincidental development all traces of Hitchcock's belly button were removed in his later life as a side effect of surgical procedures. He cheekily flashed his umbilicus-less paunch to Karen Black on the set of 'Family Plot'.

The outer carapace of the station houses a 'Best-one Express' shop and 'Chicks' fast food takeaway. To the left is a car wash where bored workers loiter. Walking on the busy forecourt towards the obligatory blue plaque feels as transgressive as a toilet bowl in the frame or an unreliable flashback. What's he doing there without a car? The plaque is to the right of the attendant's window on a dirty red brick wall. Above and to the left of the plaque, a pair of jutting CCTV cameras gaze across the site; the voyeuristic peccadilloes of Hitchcock's protagonists are now mundane reality, even national pastime.

The contrast between the wall plate and its situation suggests history (hitch-story) as a commodity or cultural capital came too late

to the good burghers of Waltham Forrest.

The purpose is ostensibly to commemorate but the tacit intention of these plaques is to fulfill the broader aegis of tourism 'heritage' marketing. There is no independent sense of 'genius loci'; the relationship to Hitchcock must be consciously forced.

I re-imagine the Jet Garage as a conscious attempt by knowing town planners to monumentalize the gas station attack in 'The Birds'. Channeling Tippi Hedren's reaction to the spreading fire intercut with the fire and resulting explosion, I repose my head three times at appropriate angles, offering a quiet reaction shot to the cheerless petro-temple. This year the late JG Ballard's Shepperton Semi went on the market and fans are attempting to buy it to create a shrine to all things Ballardian. Given his lack of interest in London and its speculative housing -"I'd like to see the whole thing leveled. Or chrome-plated"-and his interests in the auto-defined new urban, he would probably have appreciated a Petrol Station.

The smell of oil, the very blood and lubricant of capitalism (Hitchcock invested some of his wealth in those barrels!) trigger thoughts of contradiction between art and capitalism, author and business man which Hitchcock, his critics and academics have negotiated. Hitchcock's very market and audience -led approach (and specific titles like 'Psycho' and 'The Birds') could be seen as precursors to high concept or 'event' movies of the seventies, eighties and beyond. Yet his themes, concerns and way of seeing have been endlessly appropriated, explored and reinterpreted in films (sometimes in homage) by other artists: Lynch, Chabrol, Truffaut, Rohmer, De Palma, Scorsese, Spielberg,





Carpenter and many more. John Orr (in his essay 'Hitchcock as Matrix Figure') described this as 'transition of vision'. Perhaps the plaques of Hitchcock's 'transistors' could be erected here too - celebrating a Hitch as visionary filling station where auteurs pump reserves of dark inspiration.

Finally I try to picture William Hitchcock's store (the precise location is not identified), the life in the rooms beyond and above the business. We cannot know what Hitchcock's childhood was really like. Donald Spoto's influential biography 'The Dark Side of Genius' sets up his childhood as back-story a series of establishing scenes preparing the reader of biographical for him to become the dirty old man who steered 'Frenzy'. 'Privacy was even rarer than silence or sustained sunshine'. Hitchcock of course carefully timed his biographical revelations: long bedtime talks with mother ('something too intimate' as Spoto puts it) were first described in 1960, the year Psycho was released. And 'Alfie's childhood world in Patrick McGilligan's biography was a far brighter alternative punctuated by seaside trips to Cliftonville and family get-togethers in Putney.

I resolve to continue back stream to Stratford. 'For Sale' and 'To Let' hoardings and plywood boarding sing the familiar refrain of a dwindling retail economy in the shadow of the encroaching superstores.

### **Shrine 5**

The Church of St Francis of Assisi  
I chance upon this final shrine, having elected to complete the full High Road to Stratford. It is a well preserved narrow nineteenth century church in brown brick and white stone. Pointed railings curve

upwards and inwards up to an imposing arched doorway. This is the church where Fred was once an altar server- though he confessed to Truffaut he took the role because he was 'interested in ceremony' and with no idea of 'the script'. Hitchcock's relationship with Catholicism was ambiguous. Asked in later life whether he was a Catholic he replied 'yes and no'. While themes of both private and public guilt permeate his work, most explicitly in 'I Confess' ( 1953) but implicitly in repeated narratives of sin, guilt and retribution, the more morbid trappings of Catholicism suited Hitch's brand image. He employed their minority religion to cast his family as eccentrics in his back-story.

The doors are locked and I contemplate returning for Mass, but quickly discard the idea. There's something satisfying and final about the impenetrability. While there is a vicarious pleasure in conjuring Hitchcock's childhood, tugging at strands of biographical tapestry, any objective 'truth' is impossible. Hans Georg Gadamer contended that the individual possesses a 'historically effected consciousness', embedded in the particular history and culture that shaped them. I am not an objective viewer; I am anchored in a specific historical and cultural moment where the 'Hitchcock', his texts and the 'Hitchcockian' are inexorably embedded in my shared popular consciousness.

I later read that in June 2011 new plans were announced for 'improvements' to Leytonstone High Road. Municipal surgery to tactically widen and constrict the urethra, following the major 'A' Road bypass operation of ten years ago. These plans make reference to 'a board detailing Alfred Hitchcock's links with



Leytonstone close to the site of his birth'. The developments are funded as part of Olympic 'improvement' works across the public realm of east London. The puff is optimistic, but Leytonstone High Roads shop frontages are less so. The larger scale disappearances and banal homogenisation engendered by the Olympic makeover of the adjoining Lea Valley and Stratford areas will send waves of temporary advantage (accommodation, employment, tourists eager to see a the newly information boarded petrol station) but the long term prospects and sustainability of this regenerative investment beyond the main event are unclear.



Its destiny may be uncertain but Leytonstone High Road is not a urethra. It offers the walker on a Hitchcock derive a series of shrines or suburban 'rosary'. Come here seeking empirical Hitchcock and you will not find him. Accept you carry Hitchcock with you; take an open- minded pilgrimage along this grimy chain and free the mind to unexpected associations, connections, and contemplation. I departed musing more about the fate of East London's suburbs than

Hitchcock. Fred was my McGuffin: I invite those disgruntled US scholars to revisit, join me, and chase him again.

*"At the finish, even the cabinet of curiosities will betray us; all we can ever know is the shape the missing object leaves in the dust- and the stories, the lies we assemble to disguise the pain of an absence we cannot define."*

Iain Sinclair, Introduction to London City of Disappearances (2006)

#### NOTES

#### Michael Upton

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Spencer Rowell - 2011





## SIMON USHER

# HITCHCOCK'S CHILDHOOD AND HIS FILMS FROM A DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

*'I'm praying I'm going to wake up and find out we hadn't done it.'*

(Farley Grainger in Rope)

The desire to direct in film or theatre is a sort of illness. That is to say it is not necessarily a healthy endeavor; although it can be, or at least appear to be, momentarily elevating. Its present role as a kind of healthy option for the 'bien pensant young' is a terrible betrayal of its gloomy potential. Where are the great brooding obsessives, some of whom were once upon a time, also its principal entertainers?

Hitchcock was such a man; an obsessive and an entertainer. His directorial drive was formed early and emphatically, making him a kindred spirit for anyone, however minor their star, with the aforementioned illness. Directing nowadays has been largely reduced to a form of management, founded on the question; 'what do you think?' rather than 'what do I see?' This has engendered an entirely delusory sensation of democracy on the set or in the rehearsal room producing results are inert and pointlessly energetic at the same time. Infact , directing as Hitchcock would have understood it, has become a sort of crime; a kind of primal scene over which a veil has been drawn, the province of madmen, fetishists and their undesirables.

'One day I will wake up and find I hadn't done it. What a relief that will be!' And this would most likely be what I had wanted to do, but didn't dare to. I will confess all if you let me

off. I will even tell you where the bodies are! Is this a catholic phenomenon only? Certainly there is a line from Hitchcock to Chabrol. But has Protestantism now won its final victory: the eradication of shame and its replacement by the absolute purgation and persecution of secretiveness in the heart or the mind, the principal tensions, incidentally in most of Hitchcock's best work?

Hitchcock's directorial master light, the scene of his original crimes, is to be found in the East End of his childhood, that partly rural lung of London running from Limehouse to

Epping Forest. The secrets were invested here, Hitchcock admitted to becoming a voyeur early in life, but that is to oversimplify. This project can hope to identify some of the things Hitchcock saw and experienced here, and some he did not, as it is often those experiences we miss or fear to submit to





which recur in our dreams or, in Hitchcock's case, his films. A director revisits the scene of his crimes; difficult nowadays when directing itself is near the top of the charge sheet. This form of self-involvement is the precise opposite of egotism or conceit. It is only those parts of oneself to which shame is attached which are useful to a director. Richard Hannah (Robert Donat) in 'The Thirty Nine Steps' has committed no crimes yet he feels as if he had. 'For all you know I may murder a woman a week.'

How do Hitchcock's childhood crimes, real or imagined, assert themselves in his films?

And they do, repeatedly. We know that an acquaintance of his was hanged when little

more than a girl. The length of domestic rope in the film of that name is rightly threatening because the director believes it to be so. This is the root of cinematic art.



#### NOTES

##### **Simon Usher**

Simon Usher has been a theatre director for thirty years, working extensively in the UK on classics and new plays. He has a particular interest in Shakespeare and the Jacobean and Caroline playwrights, especially John Ford, and the European avant-garde. He has been associate Director at Leicester Haymarket and Artistic Director of the Belgrade Coventry. He has worked at the Royal Court, the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company. He has a longstanding interest in the cinema, especially the films of Robert Bresson, whom he is also writing about at present.





## CHRIS OAKLEY

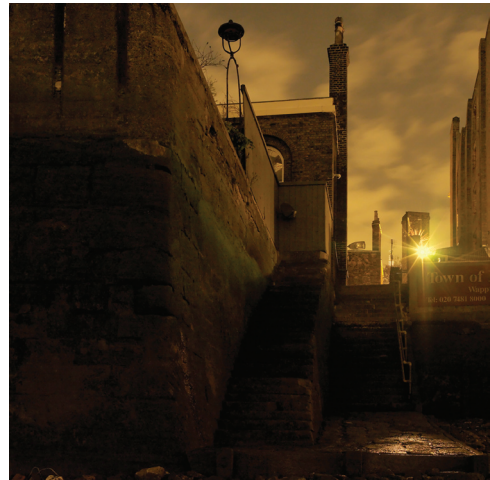
# 'THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH': PSYCHOANALYSIS AND ALFRED HITCHCOCK.

Rather than attempt a psychoanalysis of Hitchcock, where one might engage in an analysis of his characteristic cinematic tropes in an attempt to link these to a set of early childhood experiences (underpinned by the idea of creativity as an attempt to turn trauma into triumph), what is proposed is a reading of Hitchcock as the one who takes up the position of the psychoanalyst.

Following Jacques Lacan this is not so much the man or woman who 'knew too much' (the title of one of Hitchcock's films, which curiously he made two versions of, one in 1934, the other in 1956) but rather the one who 'is supposed to know'. In other words a presupposition of knowledge, less a knowing what to do, more that one is called upon to know what one is doing... and this Hitchcock had in spades. And it is this assumption of knowledge that provokes an effect: one of

numerous psychoanalytic hallmarks, that of transference love. Testimony to this is the sheer weight of critical engagement, congealing around the term 'Hitchcock studies' of which this symposium is merely a further instance.

But whilst so much appears to hinge on this issue of knowledge paradoxically it is not so much knowledge that the one seeking psychoanalysis is after, any more than the one who settles down to watch a Hitchcock film. Rather it is a particular experience. So psychoanalysis is less to do with the generation of meaning, although necessary but not sufficient, more it is crucially involved with issues of influence. And this indeed was Hitchcock's dream, otherwise known as his desire. His stated claim was that he was not primarily concerned with the narrative audio-visual medium (i.e.





meaning production) but more crucially an engagement with a provocation: of arousing a particular set of emotions “directly”. The director as the one who shows the way.

Through a cursory trawl through Hitchcock’s work, utilising Slavoj Žižek’s classificatory system which in turn leans heavily on Frederick Jameson’s triad of ‘realism-modernism-postmodernism’, the aim will be to bring to the fore a number of typical and characteristic concerns of any and all psychoanalytic practices: oedipal insinuations, masculine and feminine insecurities, otherwise held to be hysterical preoccupations, sex and death, all converging on the insistent concern of trauma. Unrelentingly emerging in so many of these films one will find the slow but gradual building up of sustained suspense, all ultimately culminating in a

violent eruption. Of the unspeakable. So in an age that appears to be so concerned with a domestication of such matters it is Hitchcock and psychoanalysis that converge as rare instances that offer the opportunity to access precisely these potentialities.

NOTES

Chris Oakley



## STEVEN JACOBS SHADOWS OF DOUBT

Although the architecture in Hitchcock's films was created by the combined forces of cinematographers, editors, art directors, production designers, interior designers, and set decorators, Hitchcock was renowned for the meticulous supervision he exercised over his sets. In light of this, one should acknowledge that Hitchcock was an art director in his own right. Before he started directing films in 1925, Hitchcock served as a graphic designer of intertitles, assistant director, co-screenwriter, and eventually art director. "As a young man and as an art director I was quite dogmatic," Hitchcock stated. "I mean I would build a set and say to the art director, 'Here's where it's shot from.'" In particular, Hitchcock designed sets for some films directed by Graham Cutts and produced by Michael Balcon. For Cutts' *The*

*Blackguard* (1925) and *The Mountain Eagle* (1926) were largely shot in the Emelka studio near Munich. Numerous commentators have traced back Hitchcock's lifelong interest in production design to his personal experiences in the sophisticated German studios during the 1920s. Undoubtedly, Weimar cinema left its mark on Hitchcock because of its 'architectural' qualities. Hitchcock biographer Patrick McGilligan noted that "German cinema was more architectural, more painstakingly designed, more concerned with atmosphere. The Germans shot the set, not the stars, and when they shot the star they anatomised them into eyes, mouths and hands. The Germans loved shadows and glare, bizarre camera angles, extreme close-ups, and mobile camera work; the floating camera that became a Hitchcock





trademark was first Murnau's." Apart from the importance of the image of the double and a fascination for terrors, Hitchcock presented the physical world as a dark, frightening, violent and unstable place, which is often a projection of a disturbed person shown through striking set designs and lighting effects as well as subjective camera shots. However, in contrast with some trendsetting examples of expressionist cinema, Hitchcock seldom favoured highly artificial environments or stylised sets but immersed his stories in the everyday. Apart from his scenes situated in the environs of famous monuments, he seldom preferred big architecture that dwarfs the characters. Rather than expressionism, the *Kammerspielfilm*, which also developed in German film culture of the 1920s, proved influential for Hitchcock's entire career.

These filmed chamber plays focused, with a meticulous attention to details, on the life of individuals in everyday claustrophobic environments. The combination of intimacy, careful exploration of domestic interiors, use of highly charged objects and mobile camera work, which are typical of the *Kammerspielfilm*, also characterise several of Hitchcock's films such as *The Lodger*, *Notorious*, *Rope*, *Under Capricorn*, or *Dial M for Murder*.

NOTES

Steven Jacobs

Steven Jacobs, from *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock*, Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2007





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