CASTING A SHADOW

CREATING THE ALFRED HITCHCOCK FILM

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The Last Word: Images in Hitchcock’s Working Method

SCOTT CURTIS

If we listen to Mr. Hitchcock, we get the distinct impression that he is in total control of every aspect of production, that he plans the film completely—down to the last frame—before he even steps on the set, and that once the film is shot (which at that point is apparently boring for him), there is very little for editors to do except glue the pieces together, so efficient is his shooting style. Here are, for example, some excerpts from conversations between Hitchcock and various interviewers:

Q: How much of the scripts do you in fact write yourself?
A: Oh, quite a bit. You see, I used to be a writer myself years ago.3

Q: Is the smallest period involved in production the shooting period?
A: Oh yes. I wish I didn’t have to shoot the picture. When I’ve gone through the script and created the picture on paper, for me the creative job is done and the rest is just a bore.2

Q: Mr. Hitchcock, what about your editing methods? When do you start to edit your films, and are you able to edit them right through to the very end without anyone else interfering with it?
A: Well I—following what I have said—do shoot a precut picture. In other words, every piece of film is designed to perform a function. So therefore, literally, the only type of editing that I do is to tighten up. If a man’s coming through a door, going into the room, then you just pull that together by just snippets. But actual creative work in the cutting, for me, is nonexistent, because it is designed ahead of time—precut, which it should be.3

Q: I had understood that you evaded interference by shooting things out of order.
A: No, I just normally work that way. To me, a picture must be planned on paper. People are always asking me why I don’t improvise on the set, and I always reply, “What for? I’d rather improvise in a room with the writer.” My method is very simple. I work out a treatment with my screenwriter. In order to do this, you’ve got to have a visual sense. I never look through the camera; I think only of that white screen that has to be filled up the way you fill up a canvas. That’s why I draw rough setups for the cameraman.4

Q: Are you saying that when you see the material [the story], you can visualize the entire movement of that film?
A: Yes, definitely.
Q: The whole film?
A: Beginning to end.
Q: Could you do that in 1922?
A: Yes.5
Now, there is certainly a showman in Hitchcock. He was very conscious of his public image, and here we can see that Hitchcock was not above polishing it a bit when given the chance. Of course, there were very good reasons for him to do so, especially since he worked in a town where image is everything. But it was not simply a matter of ego; self-promotion was also a means of job promotion. That is, by demonstrating in interviews and on set that he was able to control or contribute to all aspects of filmmaking, Hitchcock helped to establish himself as someone who could not only direct films but produce them as well. To be able to produce one’s film was highly desirable for any director working within the studio system, because it meant far less studio oversight. Hitchcock had constantly battled with producers (such as C. M. Wooll in Great Britain and David O. Selznick in the United States) for creative control and was finally able to produce his own films starting with *Rope* in 1948.

But reading his interviews could give the impression that Hitchcock is amplifying his authorial role in the film at the expense of others, that he is claiming that he did not need the screenwriter or the production designer except to have them execute his preconceived plans. True enough, Hitchcock had his hand in nearly every stage of production and planned extensively during preproduction. It is also true, as we will see, that he had an amazingly visual sense of storytelling. But if we look closely at his production methods, as this exhibition does, we find that accident, improvisation, and collaboration play a much larger role in a Hitchcock production than he would have us believe. It’s not that he didn’t plan, but film production is so filled with variables that no one, not even Hitchcock, can anticipate them all. Indeed, far from being a nuisance, these variables demanded a technical, problem-solving expertise that Hitchcock not only possessed but thoroughly enjoyed putting to use. But more to the point, a close examination of his production methods reveals that even for Hitchcock, master planner and *auteur extraordinaire*, filmmaking is a fundamentally collaborative enterprise.

The tension between planning and improvisation comes through most clearly when we examine the way Hitchcock and his team used images in the production process. Simply, ideas were *written and drawn* before they were photographed. Hitchcock worked with a screenwriter to come up with a written framework (the script), then he worked with a production designer to come up with a visual framework (sketches, storyboards, etc.). These frames indicate the collaborative nature of filmmaking, certainly, but they also speak to the need for improvisation and problem solving on the set. For, despite claims to the contrary, the relation between the script and storyboards and the finished film is not always exact. Consider the use of storyboards, those drawings that map out action in a given scene, sometimes the entire film. On one hand, we have many technicians, assistants, writers, producers, and others attesting to the importance of storyboards for Hitchcock’s working method. Each testifies confidently that the storyboards played a vital, even paramount, role in the construction of the film. There might have been some room for improvisation, but very little. “Thank God for the storyboard,” assistant editor for *Rear Window* (1954) John Woodcock said. “We even had a copy to assist in the editing.”

Or take, for another example, this testimony from Hitchcock’s longtime assistant, Peggy Robertson, in her oral history with Barbara Hall:

**HALL:** So a lot of factors that he couldn’t have considered in his storyboards he was deciding as you went along?

**ROBERTSON:** Yes, as we went along. Not many though, the important thing was the storyboard of course.

On the other hand, we have the evidence of the films, which, more often than not, vary considerably from the storyboards. Then there is the fact that Hitchcock did not actually use storyboards for every scene in his films. We also have, as Bill Krohn has demonstrated, evidence from the production records that Hitchcock was not nearly as tied to script or storyboard as the legend would have us believe. There was, for example, much
reshooting in *Notorious* (1946), as the story that took shape on the set required retakes of scenes shot at the start of principal photography. In other words, it seems that sometimes the pre-planning was not the end of Hitchcock's creative work on a film.

So what are we to make of this apparent discrepancy in the historical record? We might attribute it to what could be called the “Hitchcock mystique of authorship.” As we have seen, Hitchcock gave the impression that he had already made the movie in his head by the time he walked on set, that he had visualized it in storyboards and then merely hung around during principal photography to make sure everything went his way. This is a more or less constant theme in the publicity surrounding Hitchcock, which emphasizes not only the importance of preplanning (and hence storyboards) for his working method, but also his authority as sole creative force behind each film. We might speculate that, caught up in this mystique and myth, Hitchcock’s fellow crew members simply overemphasized the importance of storyboards for his films.

But there is another possibility. It could be that we see a discrepancy because we—perhaps led on by the master himself—misunderstand the role of drawings in Hitchcock’s method. Maybe when we compare the storyboards with the finished product, expecting one to follow the other, we misunderstand this relationship. I would argue that this is exactly the case: that Hitchcock’s storyboards do not always function as a visual contract between director and crew; they are not always a steadfast guide to the visual execution of the film. Moreover, not all drawings for a film are storyboards, and this may be a point of confusion as well. In fact, it is more accurate to say that the drawn images served *multiple* functions for a film, and often different functions from film to film. And this possibility would explain the importance of these images for the various crew members who have commented on them: they saw the sketches so often, in multiple films, contexts, and functions, that the drawings became a visual emblem of Hitchcock’s method and authority. The crew saw the drawings at different points in the process; like the script, they were a constant feature in the production. But unlike a script, they served a variety of functions.

So this essay will sketch out the various kinds of images found in a Hitchcock production (and, by extension, any studio film), but it will also outline how these images functioned. I find that the drawn images in a Hitchcock film served four overlapping functions:

**Brainstorming**

After acquiring a property, Hitchcock would sometimes send it to a trusted production designer, such as Robert Boyle for *The Birds* (1963), and ask him to make some sketches based on his reading of the story (plate 1). These drawings were not meant to be a detailed rendition of each scene in the film. Instead, they were meant to act as a starting point, something to get the conversation started, as it were. They functioned to get the creative process going between director and production designer.

**Communicating**

Sometimes an image did serve to guide the crew. But we must emphasize that it was only a guide, not a firm contract. Scripts were constantly being revised, and images were being revisualized, which helped everyone know exactly what was going on at that stage in the production. Images served as a means of communicating visually what Hitchcock and his principal collaborators had in mind. They also sometimes functioned as directions for executing a specific task, such as a process shot or an insert.

**Problem solving and executing**

Complex scenes, such as the crop-dusting scene in *North by Northwest* (1959), required shot-by-shot planning (plates 56a-d). Hitchcock and his production designer or cinematographer would sketch out the visual elements of the scene beforehand to try to solve knotty problems of camera movement or placement. These could also help the editing along, since they could be easily shuffled and reordered to try out different shot combinations in an era before offline editing.
Publicizing
Pictures spoke to more than the crew. At least since *Saboteur* (1942), studio publicity departments recognized the value of Hitchcock's images for promoting the films. So along with publicity photos of Hitchcock and his crew working, or of scenes in the films, studios would also often include photos of sketches used in the production.

Generally speaking, then, if we look closely at the drawn images in a Hitchcock production, we will find that his sketches and storyboards, rather than eliminating the need for improvisation, actually allowed Hitchcock to be extremely flexible during shooting.

A Brief Taxonomy

But first we must categorize the kinds of drawn images one would find in the production process. We can start with images that a director approves, even supervises, but which are primarily the domain of department heads. These include *wardrobe sketches, production and set design drawings*, and *architectural plans*.

Wardrobe sketches
Hollywood studios do not buy clothes for their stars "off the rack." They are tailor-made for them. Wardrobe sketches are the designs for these costumes; they are the plans for the character's "look" before the clothes are actually made. Some of the greatest fashion designers—Christian Dior, for example—have contributed wardrobe ideas to feature films. But the best wardrobe designers who worked for the studios—Edith Head, for example, comes immediately to mind—were incredibly versatile in their ability to design costumes for a range of periods and characters (plate 4). In fact, the wardrobe sketch is only nominally created for the tailor and costumer; it also serves to sketch out the character. If "clothes make the man," then we know something more about the nature of the men (and women) in the film by examining the wardrobe sketch. In this respect, these drawings are an important point of collaboration between the wardrobe designer and the director.

Production and set design drawings
The same is true for the production or set design. It is often hard to tell the difference between "production design," "art direction," and "set design"; their domains are certainly blurred. Generally speaking, however, "production design" refers to the overall "look" of a film, while "set design" denotes the plans for individual sets. The art director may be in charge of overall production design, but he or she might also be confined to dressing sets, depending on the individual production and studio convention. During the classical Hollywood period, from the 1920s through the 1950s, the art director oversaw production and set design. Later, however, the tasks were sometimes split and we see credits for both production designer and art director. Production design drawings often give more information about the action than set design drawings. Set design drawings suggest the visual pattern of the film—the era, the mood, even the lighting—while providing the set dresser with guidance for such details as furniture style. These drawings can be highly detailed, even painterly renditions, since such things as color can be an important factor in designing the look of the scene. But if we examine production design drawings such as those for Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), we see that they indicate not only the style and mood of the film but also specific story action (plates 22–30). In this case, production design drawings are doing much of the work that would later be done by storyboards, which focus on action without much concern for lighting or atmosphere.

Architectural plans
But before a room can be dressed or filmed, it must be built. Floor plans are architectural renderings of a set drawn by the production designer. They look very much like blueprints for a house and function in much the same way: as a plan for the construction crew to follow when building the set. There is an important difference, however, as we can see in Henry Bumstead's plans for the sets of *Rebecca* (1940) or Robert Boyle's renderings for the Mount Rushmore house in *North by Northwest*.
Boyle and Bumstead have drawn the entire house, much more than the construction crew actually built. It is very rare for a film production to build an entire house; to save costs they will only build what is needed for any given scene. Why, then, draw such elaborate plans? This points to the multiple functions of even a straightforward blueprint. These plans do more than guide the construction crews; they also map out the “space” of the film. That is, these plans are in some ways architectural fantasies; they are of buildings that will not exist, or exist only “virtually.” But they orient everyone who looks at them to the space of the fiction, or what is sometimes called the diegesis. This is the fictional world that the characters inhabit. It is a constructed space, of course—anyone who has ever been on a film set can attest to the huge discrepancy between the space of filming and the space of the fiction on screen. But the construction of space is both a practical and psychological matter; it is both physically built and psychologically constructed through editing and camera angles. These architectural plans ostensibly function not only in a practical sense—to guide the construction crew—but also to map out the fictional space of the film, in the same way that wardrobe sketches tell us about the character.

Set designs and floor plans are generally executed or supervised by department heads. Hitchcock, however, started his career as an art director, so he was not above making his own set designs. It is said, for example, that he did all the designs for The 39 Steps (1935). But usually the director only approves these items after creating with the department heads the general principles they need to complete the work for that particular production. Other drawn images, however, are more closely tied to the expertise and vision of the director. These include camera placement sketches, sketches by the director, and storyboards.

Camera placement sketches
Sometimes, when the requirements of a particular scene or setting are especially complex, the director and camera person will map out the positions that the camera will occupy as it takes its shots.
from different angles. These are, at first glance, very confusing documents, such as the camera plans for Lifeboat (1944) (plate 54) or for the crop-dusting sequence in North by Northwest (plate 55). The numbers correspond to shot numbers in the continuity script. The angles represent the angle of view each camera will have on the action. These two examples show all the camera positions on one sheet of paper, but it is just as easy to have them on separate pages, as in the camera placement sketches for the kidnapping scene in North by Northwest (plates 51–52). The trick is to be able to visualize the shot before placing the camera, including its angle of view and distance from the scene photographed. This is indeed a very difficult task, best left to those with long experience. Occasionally these sketches indicate work that has already been done, as when Robert Burks premeasured the camera distance and angles for most of the shots in Rear Window. (Since he was shooting across a courtyard, he did not want to have to measure focal distances every time, so he premeasured distances from specific camera placements.) But the sketches are also often just that—a starting point, though not ultimately a blueprint.

**Sketches by the director**

These kinds of images cover much ground. They can be of anything we have considered so far and more. A director can (and often does) draw a set or a costume or an action to convey his ideas to his crew. Generally, the sketches by Hitchcock in this collection are his attempts to visualize a scene by drawing it out, so to speak. Consider, for example, his drawings from Saboteur (plate 50). These are sketches of the Statue of Liberty sequence, in which the two antagonists battle it out on the statue’s torch. Hitchcock here draws the action by sketching figures in successive poses, in an almost chronophotographic rendition of the movement. But note also that he uses those same drawings to mark out within the scene possibilities for analytical editing. That is, within one frame, which might indicate a long shot, he will mark with a dashed line the potential for a cut-in to a medium shot. Rather than drawing successive shots, as in a storyboard, Hitchcock here draws the action from a single vantage point and then marks off the shots within that point of view. In other words, he adopts the chronophotographic style in this sketch (having all the action within one frame) for both the depiction of movement and for the camera distance. This approach works as a kind of efficient shorthand to guide his crew.

**Storyboards**

Storyboards are often the most visually compelling images in a production, not only because of their quality but because they depict action. This is what distinguishes a storyboard from a set design sketch; one depicts the action, the *story*, while the other confines itself to depicting the space alone. While the director might sketch out his ideas for a scene, usually the storyboard is a more detailed rendition from a capable graphic artist. Hitchcock had considerable drawing talent, but he would still leave the task of creating storyboards to others, usually graphic artists or production designers. (Dorothea Holt, John De Cuir, and Harland Frazer were among the talented artists who worked with Hitchcock on storyboards, under the supervision of art department heads, such as Robert Boyle.) But the storyboards were created in close collaboration with Hitchcock and his screenwriter. After reading the script and consulting with the director, the storyboard artist would present a visual interpretation of the scene, sometimes shot by shot. These images were not created for the entire film, however. While Hitchcock is known for his storyboards, he used them only for particular scenes, or for all scenes when the film required special planning, such as the technically challenging Lifeboat. The same is true for studio filmmaking in general: Gone with the Wind (1939) was completely storyboarded, but historically speaking only animated films were consistently boarded from beginning to end. These days more and more directors are opting for the storyboard, not only because the technical complexity of special-effects-laden films requires it, but because it provides more authorial control. But to understand the role of the storyboard, we must examine in detail the way it functions in a Hitchcock production.
The Multiple Functions of Images

Brainstorming

Once Hitchcock acquired a property, he started to visualize how it would look on the screen. Despite his claim above that he could “visualize the entire movement” of the film immediately and all at once, visualization was an ongoing process. It would be more accurate to say that Hitchcock was always visualizing from the time he encountered the story. Preplanning of this sort was not just a Hitchcock quirk, however; he had been trained to do this. Take, for example, this rider on a contract for an early Hitchcock feature, *The Skin Game* (1931):

This Scenario has been agreed by the Director and the Company’s Scenario Editor. No alterations are to be made therein during the shooting, i.e. no scenes not outlined are to be shot.

Should the Director consider that any alteration is necessary before shooting, this should be a subject for discussion, and agreement with the Scenario Editor, and if any alterations are agreed upon they should be noted in detail and on this Scenario and initialed by both Director and Scenario Editor.

Failure by the Director to comply with these regulations will be regarded as a departure from the Company’s express instructions, and therefore, a breach of his contract with the Company.

We do not know how seriously such breaches were taken, but assuming they were taken seriously, we can see the enormous pressure the director was under to get the script in shape before shooting began. This kind of pressure almost required that the director preplan and visualize each scene before it was filmed.

Visualization began, then, right away. For example, in preparation for *The Birds*, Hitchcock gave his production designer, Robert Boyle, a copy of the Daphne du Maurier novella and asked Boyle to draw some sketches from it (plate 1). Boyle crafted some general visual ideas, which were a starting point for conversation between Boyle and Hitchcock about the look and mood of the film. This probably happened even before Hitchcock met with the screenwriter, Evan Hunter, to discuss the story. The sketches themselves indicate that Boyle visualized how an attack might be framed and broken into separate shots—especially how the menace of the birds might be conveyed visually, through shadows and reaction shots. These sketches do not have much resemblance to the finished film, but they were not meant as strict guides for filming. Instead, the sketches were intended as an exercise to begin to articulate the intricacies of this production and what its special features might require.

On the other end of the spectrum, we have Hitchcock’s own sketches, which he made at various points in the production as he grappled with translating the script into visuals. These sketches are much less detailed than Boyle’s drawings, as we might expect. Hitchcock sometimes drew on the back pages of scripts as a way of visualizing scenes or figuring out specific problems as he was reading. The sketches on one of the scripts for *Torn Curtain* (1966) serve as a good example of this type of image (plate 21). Here Hitchcock might be drawing out the action dictated by the script as a way of capturing the corresponding image in his head. But these drawings could also function as a way of comparing the directions contained within the script with his own experience and vision of how it would play out in front of the camera. Or the sketch could also work as a means of communicating to his cameraman even more specifically the framing he wants for this particular shot. Indeed, a sketch such as this one probably works in all of these ways at the same time.

If Boyle’s *Birds* sketches betray a wealth of consideration and graphic skill, they also demonstrate the luxury of time, having been drawn well before principal photography. Even Hitchcock’s *Torn Curtain* sketches were probably drawn before actual filming began. But some visualization takes place at the spur of the moment, even on the set or during production. A good example of this kind of image is Hitchcock’s sketch of the cafeteria scene in *North by Northwest*. Hitchcock himself drew this sketch on the back of a Sheraton Hotel placemat. We do not know exactly where or when this sketch
was made, but we can assume it came at some point during the shooting. Here Hitchcock is trying to visualize a scene in which the character is shot — how will the action be blocked? (That is, how will the actors be placed within the shot?) How does the scene resolve itself? The sketch figure in bold on the right fires the gun (note the movement of the bullet indicated by the dotted line), and Hitchcock indicates the character’s escape with the arrow pointing to the door. The scene seems simple enough — why sketch it out? There are any number of choices that must be made even for a straightforward scene such as this. But we must also keep in mind that the act of sketching is itself a way of thinking in images and solving problems. We do not know the circumstances of the sketch — it might have been made in answer to a specific question his cameraman, say, had about how the scene would move. It might have been drawn to emphasize a particular point in the action that needed someone’s attention. Or it might have been a doodle that Hitchcock made to busy himself while he waited for his steak. But the sketch demonstrates not only how the ambiguity of images allows them to function in a variety of ways, but also how sketching is a way of generating ideas while grasping the action and getting a firm grip on the movement of the film.

**Communicating**

Unless Hitchcock was doodling while waiting for his steak, most images were drawn to communicate something to someone, usually a succinct “it should look like this.” But making these images was always in itself a matter of communication and collaboration. Hitchcock communicated what should be in the image, but there was always some collaboration in the execution of the drawing, an interaction between word and image, between script and storyboard. For example, as *Psycho* (1960) was being rewritten, Hitchcock wrote visual descriptions with each new rewrite of a scene. That is, Hitchcock wrote out in words what he wanted visually in each drawn image. Talking, writing, and drawing are all part of the process of generating visual ideas. The visualization process almost demands the alternation of word and image. On one hand, the ambiguous image sometimes requires words to stabilize its meaning. On the other hand, words cannot compete with the efficiency of the image in conveying information quickly and precisely. This back-and-forth between images and words is inherently collaborative, since Hitchcock cannot describe in words *everything* that goes into an image, even one as schematic as a storyboard. So the artist must make choices about the framing, angle, light-
ing, mood, or any number of variables in his or her construction of the image. These choices, in turn, feed back into the overall visualization of the film as choices to be acted upon. Storyboard images are often not definitive—they rarely match the final shot detail for detail—but they are part of the conversation that creates that final shot.

We can take a closer look at the conversation between Hitchcock and his collaborators by examining his instructions for storyboarding certain sequences in *The Birds*. In the Hitchcock Papers at the Margaret Herrick Library at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, there are two intriguing lists of shots, handwritten by Hitchcock on yellow notepaper, that correspond to storyboard images of the scenes (plates 31–32). The “Tides attack” and the “Crow sequence” are sequences in which birds attack the townspeople of Bodega Bay. These lists were probably created in a meeting with production designer Boyle after Hunter had turned in the final draft of his script. The lists were needed because the Hunter script did not provide—or was it intended to provide—shot-by-shot descriptions of the scenes. From the script Hitchcock and Boyle came up with a first draft, in the form of these notes, of what it actually would look like on screen. Then they gave the list to Harold Michelson to draw into storyboards. Here’s a sample from the “Crow sequence,” in which Melanie (Tippi Hedren) arrives at the schoolhouse playground to find crows massing menacingly on the jungle gym:

18. The play yard full of crows.
20. The play yard.
21. Big profile of Melanie. She turns with back to camera and goes toward the school looking across at crows as she goes away. The camera follows her for a few paces and then it stops so that her image becomes smaller as she goes up the steps into the school.
22. A side-on dolly shot of the crows to cut into the first part of #21. After this, follow existing script for school interiors.
23. A full shot—straight on of all the crows, say, 6 feet long.
24. A nearer shot and another angle of #23. 8 feet long.
25. Closer still and a different angle to #23 and #24. 10 feet.
26. A low angle of 5 or 6 crows filling the screen. 12 feet.
27. A full screen of crows—about 50 or more—the shout off [offscreen]—the feet pattering. Suddenly the crows rise—the camera pans up with them.

It’s beautiful to see how efficiently Hitchcock visualizes a scene. Throughout his papers there are many such examples, from transcripts of conversations between Hitchcock and his team, that demonstrate that he was always thinking first of the way a scene would look on screen. (Sometimes, as in the famous “bird’s-eye view” shot of the attack at the Tides restaurant, Hitchcock’s vision took considerable effort to realize.) But the point is that, first, Hitchcock visualized in conversation with others—either his screenwriter or his production designer, or both. His visual ideas usually came as a result of developing the script and storyboards with others. Hitchcock was good at visualizing a film, but it never happened in a vacuum. He did not think up a film from the beginning to the end once he found a story. Or, if he did, it was only a skeletal construction that filled out and came to life in conversation with others. If he was good at visualizing without a script, he was very good at taking story ideas from writers and making them better. He did not simply dictate his ideas, either, but was happy to use good suggestions. For example, in the attack at the children’s birthday party in *The Birds*, Boyle suggested that the children play “blind man’s bluff” and that the girl is attacked when blindfolded; this suggestion made it into the script and eventually into the film. Hitchcock might give the impression that he dictated the scripts, but the truth is that he needed screenwriters and designers and cameramen every step of the way to sharpen, enhance, and even rework his ideas.

Secondly, this list shows the way in which words and images worked together and demon-
strates that storyboards, and even documents such as this list, had multiple functions. This is not only a list of shots to be storyboarded, but a list of shots to be filmed and edited. Note that Hitchcock makes shooting suggestions at this early stage: one shot of the crows should be “6 feet long” and the last in that set should be “12 feet” to compound the suspense of the scene. But this is not, as some have suggested, a shot list made for the editor, since it clearly suggests movements and angles as if the shots did not exist yet.” Instead, the shot lengths are suggestions for the cameraman, but they also work as a shorthand for Hitchcock to indicate the mood of the scene, the suspense as it builds, which is translated visually by storyboard artist Harold Michelson. But with such an efficient written list of visuals, why storyboard this sequence at all? Hitchcock decides to storyboard crucial, climactic sequences precisely because they are so important to the suspense of the film. Yes, he relies on the expertise of his department heads, and especially of his production designer and director of photography, but storyboards are also important to communicate more accurately to his camera team what Hitchcock wants the image to look like on film.

But storyboards are subject to revision, too. The best example of “revisualization” before production is the Statue of Liberty storyline sequence for Saboteur (plates 44–49). This sequence, the climactic finale of the film, features a struggle between the protagonists on the statue. We have three sets of sketches: two sets by artist John DeCuir and one set by Hitchcock. It is fairly clear that the two DeCuir sets—one set of 14 all on one page, and another set of larger, more detailed images—come one after the other. The larger images appear to be revisions of the smaller images in the other set. The role of Hitchcock’s sketches, however, is not clear. They roughly correspond to some, but not all, of the images. So they could either come before or between the DeCuir sets. That is, they could be initial suggestions for the storyboard images, or they could be suggestions for revision. In any case, the images are obviously being revised at least twice, especially in terms of camera angle. Notice that the last set of DeCuir images emphasizes the alternation of dizzyingly high and low angles, which Hitchcock adopted in the scene as it appears in the film.

Hitchcock communicates his visual ideas in two ways, with words and, as we see in this example, images. But there is always an interplay between the two; in the gap between them, revision and collaboration take place.

Problem solving and executing

Storyboards and sketches are used not only to visualize a scene, but also to identify and solve technical problems related to the filming of the scene. Take, for example, the “Cypress Point” sequence storyboard from Vertigo (1958) (plates 42–43). In this scene Scottie (James Stewart) and Madeleine (Kim Novak) have driven out to Cypress Point to talk things over. The storyboard shows the action in the scene, but in the examples from Hitchcock’s papers, we have additional information: “Sc. 185 EXT. CYPRESS POINT (DAY). MADELINE stands alone silhouetted against the sky. Camera pans over to Scottie in car watching. Location with doubles.” And “Sc. 185A. Scottie sits in car watching her. She does not move. Transp. plus car.” These storyboards indicate the position of body doubles and of the back projection that would be filmed in the studio. So scene 185 requires location shooting with doubles, while scene 185A requires back projection in the studio with a car in the foreground. In this respect the sketches serve as a kind of reminder to the filmmakers of where they are and what will be needed. Storyboard images can be separated and rearranged, like a deck of cards, to accommodate different aspects of production, from principle photography to second-unit work.

Special-effects work often requires a storyboard as an aid to advance planning. We have two examples from Marnie (1964). In the first, storyboards are drawn to indicate the special effects needed: the “racetrack and hunting” sequence requires a shot of “C.U. Marnie—enjoys—ride—Plate X-425 A-Z (rocking horse) Process.” This means that shot 425 is going to require a mechanical
horse for actress Tippi Hedren to ride in the studio, and that the background containing riders and horses will be either back-projected in the studio or matted in during postproduction. Other than the caption, however, we would not know that this is a special-effects shot. In the other example, however, the image itself is a guide for the effect. In “Study for Matte,” Boyle, or a member of his design team, has sketched a scene and then outlined in red ink the part of the frame that will be replaced by a matte painting (plate 12). In this effect, a portion of the setting is filmed (in this case, the house and paths in the foreground) and a matte—cut exactly to fit the rest of the picture—is placed over the other part of the setting to create a blank space on the film. This space will be filled in during postproduction by superimposing a painting (or another photograph) that has been drawn to fit the matte exactly. In this way, filmmakers do not have to settle for locations as they are—they can create their own. But the sketch in this case has a very precise problem-solving and execution function.

Such is also the case with camera placement sketches, which help solve complex logistical problems and serve as a guide to filming the scene. The most famous example here would be the crop-dusting scene from North by Northwest.21 Here the visualization that Hitchcock worked out with his collaborators takes two forms: the continuity, which is a written list of shots (plates 56a–d), as in the example from The Birds above; and a camera placement sketch (plate 55). Unlike a storyboard, which renders each shot as a separate image, this sketch shows all the shots of the sequence at once in an overhead schematic view. The numbers on the sketch correspond to the shot numbers in the continuity, and the angles indicate the camera’s angles of view. The circled T stands for the position of Thornhill, while the other outlined Ts at the top and bottom of the sketch represent the airplane. Planning it in this way not only helps articulate what is needed for the scene, but it also insures that the scene is shot efficiently—shots 20, 22, 24, 26F, and 32, for example, need to be filmed from the same position, according to this scheme.

Dear Dolores:

Please excuse the informality of this letter -- but I don't have a secretary and so have to rough it. I'm sending most of the stills we're ordering from "North by Northwest" -- with a few more to be sent your way as soon as they come up from the lab.

In addition, I'm sending about 13 stills from which I would like Mr. Hitchcock to make the sketches I discussed with him before he left for Europe. As a reminder, they are for Coronet magazine -- and theoretically sketches he made before the scenes were filmed. This is for a layout in which his sketches and the resultant scenes would be compared, to show how he maps out every detail of his productions before the scenes are photographed.

From these stills (the 13) please keep any which you might want to use to illustrate his script, in addition to the others.

Appreciate your help and hope to hear from you soon when Mr. Hitchcock can see us -- anywhere at his convenience -- to do a tape transcription we have written and to discuss "North by Northwest" exploitation.

Rest as ever --

[Signature]

Rick Ingersoll
Publicizing

Regarding the filming of this sequence, Boyle said, “For certain sequences like Mount Rushmore or Phillip Vandamm’s house we did storyboards, but we were moving so fast on that production that we didn’t have time to do them for the crop-dusting sequence.” So how do we explain the storyboards that we do have from the crop-dusting sequence? A letter in the Hitchcock Papers from Rick Ingersoll, a publicist, sheds some light:

In addition, I’m sending about 13 stills from which I would like Mr. Hitchcock to make the sketches I discussed with him before he left for Europe. As a reminder, they are for Coronet magazine—and theoretically sketches he made before the scenes were filmed. This is for a layout in which his sketches and the resultant scenes would be compared, to show how he maps out every detail of his productions before the scenes are photographed.

So it seems that the sketches made for this sequence were part of a sly move to maintain Hitchcock’s image as a master planner, as the sole architect of his films. Yet if we examine these images closely, we see a fundamental irony in the way they are being used. First, even though Hitchcock did not map out every detail of his films before they were photographed, the publicity department is using these storyboards to support that claim, when they actually support the opposite: that they are part of an ongoing visualization process that is both improvisational and collaborative. The publicity department doesn’t really care how these images were actually used, of course—the publicists have their own goals that may or may not coincide with the facts of film history. Yet these *North by Northwest* sketches, surprisingly, do not match the finished film as they were designed to do. It is indeed ironic that images—drawn after the fact—designed to uphold Hitchcock’s control over the film end up looking more like the provisional images that storyboard images really are. They were not even drawn by Hitchcock, further undermining the claims to sole authorship that they were made to support, yet ultimately reflecting the way storyboard images are actually made. So the whole endeavor seems incongruous: it tries to fool us into thinking one thing (Hitchcock as sole creator) and ends up confirming the opposite.

But we must also look at the bigger picture: the publicity department’s efforts in themselves also indicate that making a Hitchcock film was always about making a “Hitchcock” as well. Two images were being constructed: the film and the public persona of the director. Both required collaboration. Storyboards were made to generate a vision of the film, but they were also used to generate a vision of Hitchcock the director. In other words, the entity we know as “Hitchcock” was a construction as well, the superimposition of a variety of different “images,” from his famous profile to his cameos to his interviews to the use of these storyboards in a publicity campaign. And even though Hitchcock was very conscious of his public persona from early in his career, this public image was one that he could not have created entirely on his own; indeed, the nature of that kind of work fits neatly with the expertise of studio publicity departments. So the final irony is that this use of storyboards to give the impression of authorial control—an aspect also latent in the use of storyboards in the production process—only reveals that impression to be ultimately the result of collaboration anyway. Of course, Hitchcock was the director—he was Hitchcock, after all, and as such, he always had the last word. But Hitchcock’s last word—his sketches, his films, his persona—was an image that he couldn’t have created without the help of others.
Notes

Preface
Casting Alfred Hitchcock: An Art Historical Perspective
DAVID ALAN ROBERTSON

1 Larry Gross, “Parallel Lines: Hitchcock the Screenwriter,” Sight and Sound (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 38–44.
4 “Publicity 1958–1959,” folder 544, Alfred Hitchcock Papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (hereafter abbreviated as AMPAS).
6 Wallace, 208.

1 Creating the Alfred Hitchcock Film: An Introduction
WILL SCHMENNER

3 Skin Game working script (S1441), Document Collection, British Film Institute.
5 The exhibition is more in line with André Bazin’s application of la politique des auteurs than with the more hard line Cahiers critics. For instance, Bazin emphasized the importance of Gregg Toland’s contributions to Citizen Kane.
7 In addition to the fluid and constantly refined film canon and la politique des auteurs, the rise of the American auteur in the 1970s was one of the driving forces of this cultural shift and perhaps an essential step in the growing case for movies’ place in the fine arts museum.
8 Although Hitchcock made strong claims about his ability to visualize, the majority of the time he described it as a process that required time and careful development: “I like to have a film complete in my mind before I go on the floor. Sometimes the first idea one has of a film is of a vague pattern, a sort of hazy with a certain shape. There is possibly a colorful opening developing into something more intimate; then, perhaps in the middle, a progression to a chase or some other adventure; and sometimes at the end of the big shape of a climax, or maybe some twist or surprise. You see this hazy pattern, and then you have to find a narrative idea to suit it. Or a story may give you an idea first and you have to develop it into a pattern.”
10 Alfred Hitchcock to Evan Hunter, November 30, 1961, folder 19, Alfred Hitchcock Papers, Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS.
12 Certainly the Hitchcock movie is not just an idea. A Hitchcock movie tends to have a distinctive visual and thematic style. The idea, however, was important to Hitchcock. He went so far as to say that, “it is ideas we want in films far more than stories. Give us the idea and we can turn you out a story any time.” (Hitchcock, “Life Among the Stars,” in Gottlieb, 48).
14 “Mr. Hitchcock’s Original Work Copy of Psycho, November 10, 1959,” folder 566, Alfred Hitchcock Papers, Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS.
15 Alfred Hitchcock to Sidney L. Bernstein, telegram, October 13, 1948, Sidney L. Bernstein Collection, British Film Institute.

2 The Last Word: Images in Hitchcock’s Working Method
SCOTT CURTIS

3 Crawley, Markle, and Pratley, 24.
5 American Film Institute, “Dialogue on Film: Alfred Hitchcock,” in Alfred Hitchcock: Interviews, 90.
7 Peggy Robertson, interview with Barbara Hall, March 31, 1996, oral history, Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS.
3 In and Out of the Frame: Paintings in Hitchcock

TOM GUNNING

I would like to thank my friend Will Schmenner, who asked me to write this essay; and Jan Olsson; and Joel Frykolm who helped me write it, with a nod to John Ferguson (Minas Azioglou).

1 Kerry Brougher and Michael Tarantino, Nocturnal: Alfred Hitchcock and Contemporary Art (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1999); Dominique Paini and Guy Cogeval, Hitchcock et l'art: coincidences fatales (Milan: Mazzotta, 2000); Brigitte Peucker, The Material Image: Art and the Real in Film (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 68-103. I would also have to acknowledge the strong influence of the classic works on Hitchcock of Robin Wood, William Rothman, Tania Modleski, Murray Pomerance, Richard Allen, and others on my approach. However, in contrast to the catalogue essays that deal mainly with the influence of works of art on Hitchcock, or vice versa, my treatment here is more formal and contextual, dealing with painting that appears in Hitchcock's films and whose meaning is defined by its textual roles.

2 Although this certainly overlaps with Peucker's discussion of the relation between "art" and "the real," I think her more psychoanalytical use of the term "the real" differs from my conception of a phenomenal and spatial world of the observer, which does not imply at all the Lacanian concept of the real. Indeed what I call "nothingness" towards the end of this essay seems to me closer to the Lacanian "real," but I try to avoid this frame of reference, preferring a more phenomenological use of these terms. I must add that I find Peucker's use of the Medusa figure especially elegant and revealing.


7 Peucker, 78.

8 For early examples of this see "On the Vision of God" in Nicholas Cusanus, Selected Spiritual Writings (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 233-290, and gothic novels from Varney the Vampire to Trilby.

9 Peucker's analysis of this painting parody as a version of the Medusa and an emergence of the sign of castration seems to me a powerful psychoanalytic reading, especially good in explaining Scottie's reaction. See Peucker, 79-80.


11 Peucker also has a detailed and valuable analysis of these portraits, 75-77.


14 Ibid., 19
15 Ibid., 20.
16 Ibid., 21.
17 Ibid., 24.
18 Peucker is the only critic I know to mention this parallel to the scene from Suspicion, 71.