

North by Northwest (1959) Alfred Hitchcock

P Michell, 2014

Alfred Hitchcock – director and uncredited producer.

See previous 'Notorious' for notes on Alfred Hitchcock.

Ernest Lehman – Script (1915-2005) - One of the most critically and commercially successful screenwriters in Hollywood history. Credits include: Executive Suite (1954), Sabrina (1954), Sweet Smell of Success (novella & screenplay (1957), West Side Story (1961), The Prize (1963), Sound of Music (1965), Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf? – also uncredited producer - (1966).

Bernard Herrmann – music – arguably one of the greatest cinema composers – of the mid 20th century.

The man behind the low woodwinds that open [Citizen Kane](#) (1941), the shrieking violins of [Psycho](#) (1960), and the plaintive saxophone of [Taxi Driver](#) (1976) was one of the most original and distinctive composers ever to work in film. He started early, winning a composition prize at the age of 13 and founding his own orchestra at the age of 20. After writing scores for [Orson Welles's](#) radio shows in the 1930s (including the notorious 1938 "The War of the Worlds" broadcast), he was the obvious choice to score Welles's film debut, [Citizen Kane](#) (1941), and, subsequently, [The Magnificent Ambersons](#) (1942), although he removed his name from the latter after additional music was added without his (or Welles's) consent when the film was mutilated by a panic-stricken studio. Herrmann was a prolific film composer, producing some of his most memorable work for [Alfred Hitchcock](#), for whom he wrote nine scores.

A notorious perfectionist and demanding (he once said that most directors didn't have a clue about music, and he blithely ignored their instructions--like Hitchcock's suggestion that [Psycho](#) (1960) have a jazz score and no music in the shower scene). He ended his partnership with Hitchcock after the latter rejected his score for [Torn Curtain](#) (1966) on studio advice. He was also an early experimenter in the sounds used in film scores, most famously [The Day the Earth Stood Still](#) (1951), scored for two Theremins, pianos, and a horn section; and was a consultant on the electronic sounds created by [Oskar Sala](#) on the mixtrautonium for [The Birds](#) (1963). His last score was for [Martin Scorsese's](#) [Taxi Driver](#) (1976) and died just hours after recording it. He also wrote an opera, "Wuthering Heights", and a cantata, "Moby Dick".

Robert Burks (1909-1968) - cinematography –

The favorite cinematographer of famous director [Alfred Hitchcock](#) began working at Warner Brothers when he was 19 years old. He climbed his way up from camera operator to assistant camera man and eventually took over the Special Photographic Effects unit at Warners on Stage 5 in 1944. **He became an expert in forced**

perspective techniques which were widely in use at the time as cost-saving measures, or in B-movies. Burks did special effects work on major productions like [Arsenic and Old Lace](#) (1944), [The Unsuspected](#) (1947) and [Key Largo](#) (1948).

In 1949, Burks graduated to becoming a fully-fledged director of photography. His striking black & white work on [The Fountainhead](#) (1949) was particularly evocative in showcasing the stark, austere architectural lines of the film's chief protagonist, Howard Roark ([Gary Cooper](#)). On the strength of this, and his next film, [The Glass Menagerie](#) (1950), [Alfred Hitchcock](#) hired him to shoot his thriller [Strangers on a Train](#) (1951). From this developed one of Hollywood's most inspired collaborations, as well as a close personal friendship.

When his contract at Warner Brothers ran out in 1953, Burks followed Hitchcock to Paramount and went on to perform an integral part in creating the **brooding, tension-laden atmosphere of the director's best work between 1954 and 1964**. His range varied from the neo-realist, almost semi-documentary black & white look of [The Wrong Man](#) (1956) to the intensely warm and beautiful deep focus VistaVision colour photography of [Vertigo](#) (1958). His muted tones matching the claustrophobic setting of [Rear Window](#) (1954) stood in sharp contrast to the vibrant, full-hued colours used in the expansive outdoor footage of [To Catch a Thief](#) (1955) and [North by Northwest](#) (1959).

The experience Burks had gained in forced perspective miniatures in his early days at Warner Brothers, also stood him in good stead on 'Vertigo' (the mission tower), 'North by Northwest' (the Mount Rushmore scenes) and, later, 'The Birds'. Because of his expertise, Burks was often able to contribute ideas to shooting scenes more effectively. He was also an innovator in the application of both telephoto and wide angle lenses as a means to creating a specific mood. The Hitchcock-Burks partnership ended after [Marnie](#) (1964), and, under less-inspired directors (except for [A Patch of Blue](#) (1965), his later work declined in quality. Robert Burks and his wife, Elysabeth, were tragically killed in a fire at their house in May 1968.

Robert Burks won the 1955 Academy Award for Best Colour Photography for 'To Catch a Thief'. He was also nominated for 'Strangers on a Train', 'Rear Window' and 'A Patch of Blue'.

Notes:

Hitchcock's 'Pure Cinema and the freedom of flight' – from MacGuffin & Labyrinth:

Ken Mogg: "In effect, Hitchcock's characters represent us, his audience. Now, as far back as the 1930s, indeed about the time of the first version of **The Man Who Kew Too Much**, Hitchcock suggested that a reason we go to movies is that we are in danger of becoming 'sluggish and jellified'. We need stimulation and a sense of

connectedness, and the cinema is the best means of giving us those things. Accordingly, Hitchcock's films became increasingly designed to let us for two hours be the *opposite* of sluggish and jellified, to let us feel that we are soaring and free! Recall how in **North by Northwest** (1959) Leonard (Martin Landau) awaits the plane that will fly him and his boss (James Mason) out of the country, and we hear him murmur (almost rhapsodically!), 'ceiling and possibilities unlimited!' I think Hitchcock deliberately planted that line at that point. It tells us something about what he felt his 'pure cinema' could give us - and he could share with us. 'Pure cinema' (editing, etc.) allows an overcoming of time and space! Interestingly, the same film has its iconic image of someone who seems trapped in time and space: Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) at the lowest point in his 'Oedipal trajectory' (as Raymond Bellour calls it), strafed by a plane at the prairie crossroads."

From ...

Senses of Cinema – Alfred Hitchcock & John Buchan: The Art of Creative Transformation. – Tony Williams

May 2007

<http://sensesofcinema.com/2007/43/hitchcock-john-buchan/>

“Thornhill: Do you think I’m going to let you get away with this dirty business?

Professor: *She has to.*

Thornhill: Nobody has to do anything. I don’t like the games you play, Professor.

Professor: War is hell, Mr. Thornhill, even when it’s a Cold one.

Thornhill: *If you fellows can’t lick the Vandamms of this world without asking girls like her to bed down with them and fly away with them and probably never come back, perhaps you ought to start learning to lose a few Cold Wars.*

Thornhill finds himself cheated and victimized by the Professor who represents an ethically bankrupt Western system of little different from its Eastern counterpart. Like Devlin in *Notorious*, Thornhill “breaks cover” and rescues Eve from Phillip Vandamm (James Mason). He also learns that the Professor’s strategy of forcing Eve to continue her espionage activities by accompanying Vandamm behind the Iron Curtain is now redundant since Leonard (Martin Landau) has discovered her real identity. Hitchcock also visually condemns both political systems in one significant shot. Van Dam and the Professor finally appear together for the first and only time in the film. They occupy the left and centre portions of the frame. Hitchcock subtly recognizes them as different sides of the same coin. He also ironically rejects John Buchan’s “great game” philosophy in Vandamm’s final line: “That wasn’t very *sporting* – using real bullets!” (italics mine)”

Robin Wood on Hitchcock:

Remake of *Saboteur* (1942). Commonality with *Rear Window*. Especially beginning shots of NY. Mother is 'like a bloodhound' sniffing his breath. Surface living. A modern city Everyman. After first 10 mins systematic stripping away of Thornhill's protective armour: Isolated in crowds. Man who deprived others of taxi, is imprisoned in a run away car. The heavy drinker given copious amounts of Bourbon. Final plunge into chaos is at UN symbol of potential world order. Note microscopic image after stabbing. At this point explanation occurs with cut away. Note 'Goodbye Mr Thornhill ...' statement. Second phase begins at railway station where he meets Eve. There are various interpretations of Eve character. Crop dusting occurs half way into film. Character now outside – the world is against him. The re-connection with Eve after. Compared to train. This part closes with the auction scene and Vandamm hand on Eve's neck. Next section begins at airport, head of CIA explains. In accepting role of Kaplan is accepting responsibility for Eve. Note illumination of face. Reconciliation with Eve in calm forest. The real Eve emerges. Climax on Mt Rushmore and end train tunnel.

(Lots of) Trivia:

From *Paul - The Prize* (1963) has a direct copy of the auction room sequence (but copied into Stockholm with a meeting of nudists!) where the main character needing to escape the 'baddies' wants the police called. Note - script by the same person Ernest Lehman. Much of the story pays homage to *NBWW*.

Canny Hitchcock - While filming *Vertigo* (1958), [Alfred Hitchcock](#) described some of the plot of *NBWW* to frequent Hitchcock leading man and "Vertigo" star [James Stewart](#), who naturally assumed that Hitchcock meant to cast him in the title role, and was eager to play it. Actually, Hitchcock wanted [Cary Grant](#) to play the role. By the time Hitchcock realized the misunderstanding, Stewart was so anxious to play Thornhill that rejecting him would have caused a great deal of disappointment. So Hitchcock delayed production on this film until Stewart was already safely committed to filming [Otto Preminger's Anatomy of a Murder](#) (1959) before "officially" offering him the [North by Northwest](#) (1959) role. Stewart had no choice; he had to turn down the offer, allowing Hitchcock to cast Grant ..."

Less than eight feet of film was cut from the final release. Eight feet is about 5 seconds. (Paul – thus no material change to film on release. Very impressive.)

[Alfred Hitchcock](#) couldn't get permission to film inside the UN, so footage was made of the interior of the building using a hidden camera, and the rooms were later recreated on a soundstage.

[Jessie Royce Landis](#) was only 7 years older than [Cary Grant](#), who plays her son.

One day, [Martin Landau](#) noticed that [Alfred Hitchcock](#) was giving instructions to

[Cary Grant](#), [James Mason](#) and [Eva Marie Saint](#). When he asked Hitchcock about this, the director basically said if he didn't talk to actors, they were doing fine; when he talked to them, it was because they did something wrong.

Never shot scene. [Alfred Hitchcock](#) planned to shoot a scene in the Ford automobile plant in Dearborn, MI. As Thornhill and a factory worker discussed a particular foreman at the plant, they would walk along the assembly line as a car was put together from the first bolt to the final panel. Then, as the car rolled off the line ready to drive, Thornhill would open the passenger door and out would roll the body of the foreman he had just been discussing. Hitchcock loved the idea of a body appearing out of nowhere, but he and screenwriter [Ernest Lehman](#) couldn't figure out a way to make the scene fit the story, so it never came to fruition.

'Pining Away' (hehe) ... Rather than go to the expense of shooting in a South Dakota woodland, [Alfred Hitchcock](#) planted 100 ponderosa pines on an MGM soundstage.

The day before the scene where Thornhill is hidden in an upper berth was to be filmed, [Cary Grant](#) took a look at the set which had been built and told [Alfred Hitchcock](#) that it had been constructed sloppily and would not do for the film. Hitchcock trusted Grant's judgment so completely that he ordered the set rebuilt to better standards without ever checking the situation for himself.

Roger O. Thornhill claims that the "O" stands for "nothing". This is a reference to [David O. Selznick](#), whose "O" also signified nothing.

Thornhill appears on the left side of the screen for almost the entire movie.

In the DVD documentary, [Eva Marie Saint](#) recounts how [Alfred Hitchcock](#), dissatisfied with the costumes the studio had designed for her, marched her to Bergdorf Goodman and personally picked out clothes for her to wear.

Among the problems that the Production Code found with this film was the effeminacy of the henchman Leonard ([Martin Landau](#)).

It was journalist [Otis L. Guernsey Jr.](#) who suggested to [Alfred Hitchcock](#) the premise of a man mistaken for a nonexistent secret agent. He was inspired, he said, by a real-life case during WW II, known as Operation Mincemeat, in which British intelligence hoped to lure Italian and German forces away from Sicily, a planned invasion site. A cadaver was selected and given an identity and phony papers referring to invasions of Sardinia and Greece. A British film, [The Man Who Never Was](#) (1956), recounted the operation.

[Ernest Lehman](#) became the film's scriptwriter following a lunchtime meeting with [Alfred Hitchcock](#), arranged by their mutual friend, composer [Bernard Herrmann](#). Hitchcock originally wanted him to work on his new project [The Wreck of the Mary Deare](#) (1959) (which was eventually made instead by [Michael Anderson](#)), but

Lehman refused. Hitchcock was so keen to work with him that he suggested they work together on a different film using Mary Deare's budget (without MGM's approval) even though he had only three ideas to set Lehman on his way: mistaken identity, the United Nations building, and a chase scene across the faces of Mt. Rushmore.

Roger Thornhill's mother tells him jokingly, "Pay the two dollars," after he futilely attempts to shed light on his kidnapping and be exonerated from his DWI charge. The line is a reference to a Depression-era [Willie Howard](#) vaudeville sketch written by [Billy K. Wells](#). A man is in court to pay a \$2 fine for spitting on the subway, but his lawyer insists on fighting the case. As the lawyer incurs greater and greater sentences, his defendant keeps pleading, "Pay the two dollars!" This sketch also appeared in [Ziegfeld Follies](#) (1945) with [Edward Arnold](#) portraying the attorney.

When [Martin Landau](#) first sees [Cary Grant](#), he says, "He's a well-tailored one." All of Landau's suits for the film were made by Grant's personal tailor.

[Eva Marie Saint](#) had to re-dub a particular line during post-production, to satisfy censors. The original line was "I never make love on an empty stomach", but was changed to "I never discuss love on an empty stomach".

The song that's playing in the lobby of the hotel before Thornhill enters the Oak Bar is "It's a Most Unusual Day".

[Cary Grant](#) got \$450,000 for this movie - a substantial amount for the time - plus a percentage of the gross profits. He also received \$315,000 in penalty fees for having to stay nine weeks past the time his contract called for.

During their escape, Roger says to Eve, "I see you've got the pumpkin," meaning Vandamm's statue containing microfilm. The line references the 1948 [Alger Hiss](#) case, in which [Whittaker Chambers](#) led federal agents to government microfilms, allegedly supplied to him by Hiss, that Chambers had hidden in a pumpkin on his farm.

In an interview, [Alfred Hitchcock](#)'s daughter, [Patricia Hitchcock](#), reveals that her husband worked at the time of the filming for Magnum Oil. "Magnum Oil" is the name on the fuel truck in the famous crop duster/oil truck scene.

In a TCM interview, according to screenwriter [Ernest Lehman](#) (who worked in close collaboration with [Alfred Hitchcock](#)), the working title was "In A Northwesterly Direction." The head of the Story Department at MGM said, "Why don't you call it 'North by Northwest'?" Lehman says that he and Hitch adopted that as the new working title, always assuming that they'd come up with something better.

Famed art director/special effects artist [Albert Whitlock](#) who worked on several Hitchcock films (not this one) painted a painting of Mount Rushmore and

superimposed the face of [Alfred Hitchcock](#) into the rock sculptures on the mountain as a joke. The painting exists in a private collection.

While waiting for Phillip Vandamm ([James Mason](#)) and Eve Kendall ([Eva Marie Saint](#)) at Mount Rushmore, Roger Thornhill ([Cary Grant](#)) says he doesn't like the way that Teddy Roosevelt is looking at him. In [Arsenic and Old Lace](#) (1944), Grant plays Mortimer Brewster, whose brother thinks he's Teddy Roosevelt.

[Alfred Hitchcock](#) had planned a sequence where Roger Thornhill ([Cary Grant](#)) hid in [Abraham Lincoln](#)'s nose and had a sneezing fit. Park officials would not allow this to be filmed, but Hitchcock tried again and again. Finally, someone asked Hitchcock how he would feel if it were the other way around and Lincoln was having a sneezing fit in Cary Grant's nose. Hitchcock immediately understood and the scene was never filmed. However, "The Man in Lincoln's Nose" was used as a "gag" working title.

The final chase scene was not shot on Mt. Rushmore; [Alfred Hitchcock](#) couldn't gain permission to shoot an attempted murder on a national monument. The scene was shot in the studio on a replica of Mt. Rushmore. Everything is shot carefully, so as to avoid associating the faces of the monument with the violence.

Budget US\$ - 3.1M, Gross \$13.3M, Rentals \$6.7M.

Discussion:

Hitchcock engages viewers on more levels, suggests a recent study

Researchers in a new field called 'neurocinematics' use MRI scans to monitor brain activity while subjects watch films. Recently, subjects were shown 30 minute clips from Sergio Leone's **The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly** (1966), an episode of 'Alfred Hitchcock Presents' ("Bang! You're Dead"), and an episode of the TV comedy series, 'Curb Your Enthusiasm'.

The researchers, from the Computational Neuroimaging Laboratory at New York University, found that the Hitchcock clip provoked the most consistent pattern of brain activity among all subjects studied, 'consistently turning on and switching off responses of different regions in more than 65 percent of the cortex'. By contrast, the Leone clip produced a score of 45%, while 'Curb Your Enthusiasm' scored 18%.

Quote: 'The fact that Hitchcock was able to orchestrate the responses of so many different brain regions, turning them on and off at the same time across all viewers, may provide neuroscientific evidence for his notoriously famous ability to master and manipulate viewers' minds. Hitchcock often liked to tell interviewers that for him "creation is based on an exact science of audience reactions".'

To read more, go here:

<http://scienceblogs.com/neurophilosophy/2008/06/neurocinematics.php>

Note. At the end of the above-listed report (just before 'Comments'), there's a link marked simply PDF. Click on that to read the original report as published in a new online journal called 'Projections: The Journal for Movies and Mind'.

Source - http://www.labyrinth.net.au/%7Emuffin/news-home_c.html

Reviews:

[Smoke and mirrors, without apologies](#)

[Bill Slocum \(bill.slocum@gmail.com\)](mailto:bill.slocum@gmail.com)

10 Nov 2003

The one famous gaffe people point out in this film is when a small boy can be seen plugging his ears just before Eva Marie Saint brings her café conversation with Cary Grant to a sudden end. Another gaffe, just as egregious and apparent but not nearly as commented on, is when Cary and Eva, clutching an incriminating statute, are rock-climbing around a quartet of famous presidential heads until a bad guy suddenly appears and leaps upon him. Whereupon the surprised, backward-falling Cary has the presence of mind to hand the statute to Eva, who takes his from him whilst in mid-scream. Do me a favor and read that last sentence again. What director today would allow such a scene past the editing room?

But it just doesn't matter: IMDB voters at this writing have placed the 44-year-old 'North By Northwest' ahead of all but 18 movies ever made, including 14 which have nothing to do with Frodo Baggins or Darth Vader. That's pretty damn impressive. What the hell were they thinking? The only Hitchcock movie they rate higher is "Rear Window;" I can think of at least seven or eight Hitchcocks I'd rank over "North By Northwest." [None of them are "Rear Window."]

The truth is this film is so popular because it is so good. Not great, but very, very good, in a way that anticipates a lot of the direction of mass entertainment to come and thus speaks to people in a way 'Vertigo' or 'Strangers On A Train' do not. People talk about how forward thinking "Psycho" is, and it is, but more directors took note of the just-as-clever-but-more-mainstream approach of "North By Northwest." The last four decade have been chock full of flicks serving up suspense, sex, changing locales, and plot twists that play with viewers' expectations, all the while keeping the laughs coming. It's not like "North By Northwest" invented this formula, but it perfected and distilled it into an essence that is imitated, with varying success, to this day.

Cary Grant plays slick adman Roger Thornhill, who gets mistaken for a fugitive named Kaplan and finds himself on the run from a slew of bad guys, led by James

Mason at his smug and oily peak as Vandamme. Martin Landau makes his first memorable appearance as Mason's nastiest henchman Leonard (1959 was good to him, as "Plan Nine From Outer Space" premiered that year as well), suspicious, ruthless, and probably gay. Not that there's anything wrong with that, but it was 1959 and that was a little daring.

Daring also is Eva Marie Saint's Eve Kendall, a woman who uses sex, as Thornhill puts it, "the way some people use a flyswatter." Her repartee with Thornhill shows just how erotic two people just talking to each other can be. It also provides further evidence Hitchcock's writers didn't go out on many dates. (Kendall: "I'm a big girl." Thornhill: "Yeah, and in all the right places." And she KISSES him for it!)

The film does chug slowly at the outset, building suspense but also bugging you a bit as the plot gears grind while Thornhill is being pushed through his early paces, right until his moment at the UN. About the time we find ourselves with Thornhill in the cornfield, the picture starts to pick up a serious head of steam, and never loses it all the way to the final, famous tunnel shot. Actually, I like the penultimate scene between Grant and Saint, an elegant and witty way of resolving that most tried-and-true device, the cliffhanger.

As with most of Hitchcock's '50s fare, elegance is behind much of what makes this movie so great. 'North By Northwest' manifests an elegance in dress, decor, language, music, and lighting that represents the best of its era while giving the picture a timeless character all the same. Hitchcock's camera movements are very subtle yet brilliant, as during Mason's entrance and Grant's hide-and-seek game around the train. Everyone has perfect hair, lounges about in gowns and jackets, and you never think it should be otherwise.

Grant isn't my favorite actor, but he's smooth enough for the central role when he's not doing that bad Foster Brooks impression behind the wheel of the car. [I docked the movie one point just for that.] His best scene may be at the auction, though he projects real fear in the cornfield. Saint is simply splendid, nailing every line as she walks a tightrope and plays her character's motives close to her décolletage. Hitchcock seemed to lose his ability to direct female actors, and not merely bask in them, with the advent of color, but Saint is one blonde bombshell that gives us a sense of brains and personality behind her mystery.

There's logic gaps in this movie, and bad process shots, but it's an amazing ride all the same, more amazing because it's done with smoke and mirrors and without apologies. You ask the questions and figure out the loopholes only after you walk away, because the movie doesn't let you up much while you are watching it. Hitchcock made other, more challenging movies that attested to his rare vision as an artist, but this is maybe his purest exercise in the craft of good filmmaking. That's why 'North By Northwest' has remained so high in people's estimations. Whatever the errors, it's hard not feeling good about that.