

National College of Art and Design

Critical Culture Research Project

North by Northwest- America, the Atomic age and the Anthropocene.

James McLoughlin

**School of Fine Art. Print Department.
BA Fine Art (hons) 2023**

NCAD DUBLIN

National College of Art and Design
A Recognised College of University College Dublin

North by Northwest- America, the Atomic age and the Anthropocene.

James McLoughlin

**Submitted to the School of Visual Culture in Candidacy for the Degree of BA in
Fine Art Print 2023**



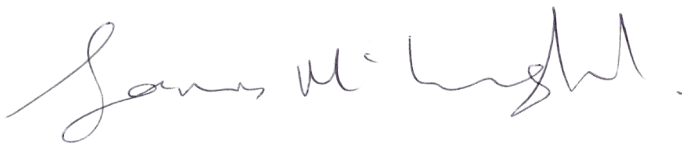
National College of Art and Design
A Recognised College of University College Dublin



National College of Art and Design
A Recognised College of University College Dublin

School of Visual Culture

I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

Signed: 

Programme / department: Fine Art. Print.

Date: 25/01/2023

Table of Contents

List of illustrations

Introduction

Chapter 1: Making the Movie

Chapter 2: Aesthetics

Chapter 3: The Great Acceleration - Consumerism and Militarism

Conclusion

Bibliography

List of illustrations

| | |
|---|-------|
| Fig 1. The Great Acceleration in graphs (Thunberg 2022 Pg.34)..... | Pg.3 |
| Fig 2: United Nations building Still from <i>North by Northwest</i> (1959) MGM | Pg.11 |
| Fig 3: Letter from Otis Guernsey Jr. (1957) the.hitchcock.zone/wiki | Pg.12 |
| Fig 4: Hitchcock movie posters for <i>Vertigo</i> , <i>North by Northwest</i> and <i>To Catch a Thief</i> . Images from Etsy.com | Pg.16 |
| Fig 5: Still from <i>North by Northwest</i> (1959) MGM | Pg.17 |
| Fig 6: Still from <i>North by Northwest</i> (1959) MGM..... | Pg.18 |
| Fig 7: Still from <i>North by Northwest</i> (1959) MGM..... | Pg.19 |
| Fig 8: Image of Robert Longo's 'Men in the Cities' copyright © 2020 ROBERT LONGO taken from Artnet.com..... | Pg.19 |
| Fig 9: Still from <i>North by Northwest</i> (1959) MGM..... | Pg.20 |
| Fig 10: 'St crosses Ave' (2000) Ruscha. © Edward J. Ruscha IV. edruscha.com..... | Pg.20 |
| Fig 11: Still from <i>North by Northwest</i> (1959) MGM | Pg.22 |
| Fig. 12: 'Norman Rockwell visits a country Agent' (1948) Copyright © 2023 Norman Rockwell Museum. All Rights Reserved. nrm.org..... | Pg.22 |

Introduction

We need things consumed, burned, worn out, replaced and discarded at an ever-increasing rate.'

Victor Lebow (Lebow 1955 Pg 3)

Victor Lebow predicted the consumer age we live in. You can be an ardent ecologist and be vividly environmentally aware, but your phone will still need updating every couple of years, and the lithium required for electric devices and vehicles will continue to be mined for many decades to come. Obsolescence is a business strategy and we are living in a consumerist age with the stock price of a barrel of oil, the most important marker for any economy.

When the Anthropocene actually began seems to have multiple starting points with no definitive time or date to point to, rather it is recognised that there are several moments or inventions that established or sparked the era of humans.

In '*Against the Anthropocene*', T. J. Demos discusses and references the accumulated starting points of the Anthropocene, from the dawn of agriculture, the conquest of the Americas in 1492, the industrial revolution and on to the nuclear age (Demos 2017 Pg8).

When the anthropocene began, exactly, is not universally agreed but it is the period of the late 1950's to the early 1960's that we see the slow increase of carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere, which began in the industrial boom of the 19th century, take off at an alarming rate of increase to the present day. This period is more widely referred to as 'The Great Acceleration.' (see Fig.1)

The 'Great Acceleration'

Earth system trends since 1750

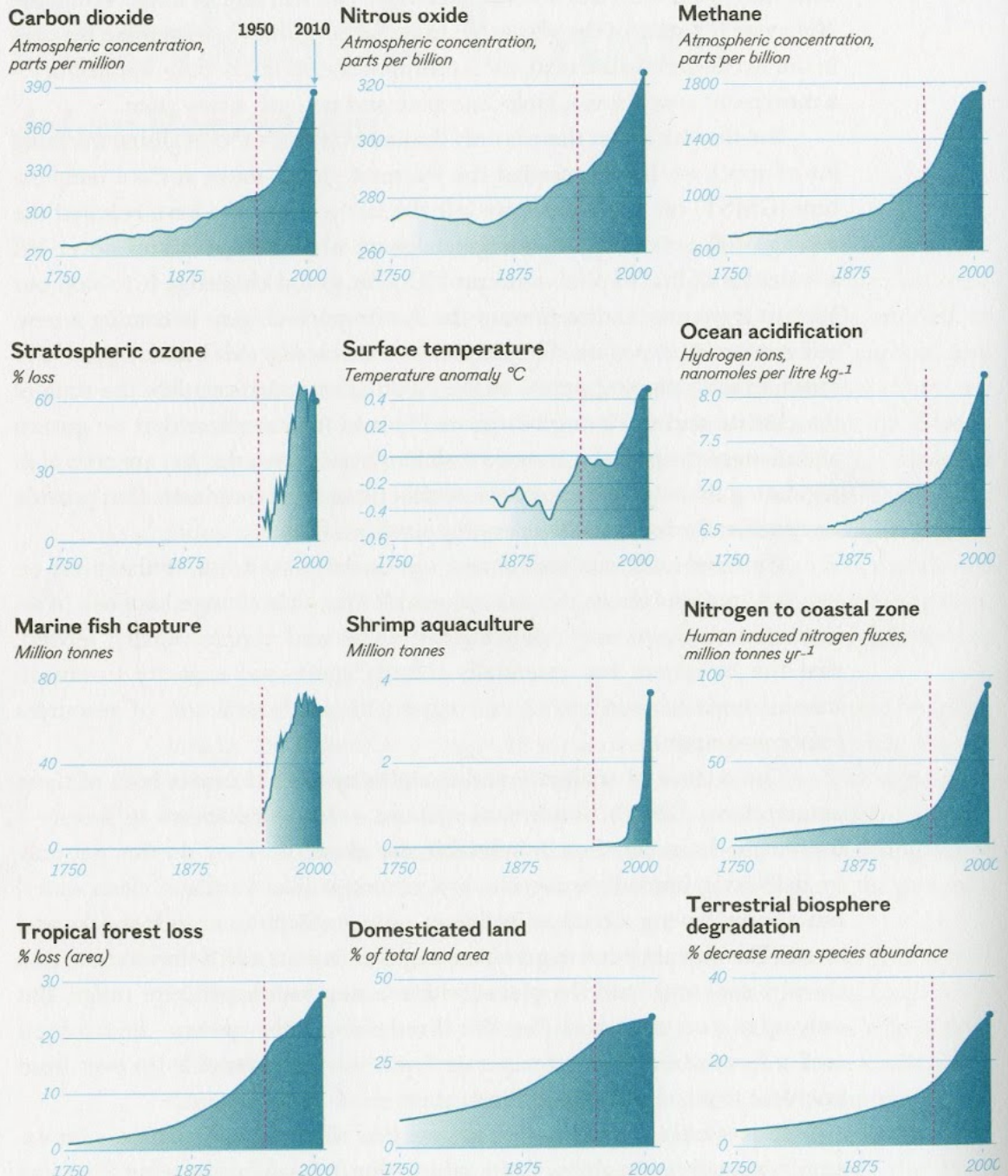


Fig 1. The Great Acceleration in graphs (Thunberg 2022 Pg.34)

'In the world of advertising, there's no such thing as a lie. There's only "the expedient exaggeration."
 Roger Thornhill (*North by Northwest* 1959)

Cary Grant's character, Roger Thornhill in Alfred Hitchcock's 1959 film, '*North by Northwest*', is the and the main protagonist in this film and a Manhattan advertising executive, which insinuates that he is a master craftsman of consumerism. The story revolves around spies, international espionage and mistaken identities but the movie also says something about America at this moment in time, at the starting blocks of the Great Acceleration. It is, of course being Hitchcock, a beautifully made film but is produced at a moment in time when human activity and consumerism goes into overdrive and is reflected, in many ways, in this film.

Much has been written about '*North by Northwest*' and there have been many readings of the film from projecting Hamlet on to Thornhill in his decline into madness, but also his efforts to establish his true identity within the context of an Oedipal anxiety (Cavell 1981 Pg 767) Another is Thornhill's maturing into a fully functioning adult male, as he goes from being too self concerned and immature for a proper relationship, with two divorces behind him, to ending in marriage to Eve Kendal in the closing scene. A woman he has shared an affecting life experience with on equal terms which in turn also suggests America's maturation and the safety and stability it now provides. (Morris 1997 Pg.43)

There are sexual themes to *North by Northwest* which culminate in the very Freudian image of a train speeding into a tunnel at the 'The end' credit. Hitchcock later regarded this as "one of the most impudent shots I ever made". (Hitchcock 1963 Pg150)

Regardless of these many interpretations, I would like to explore the aesthetics of the movie and the relation the movie has to America and consumerism, the atomic age and ultimately the Anthropocene. Beginning with the origins of the film I would like, in the following chapters, to discuss how Hitchcock understood what it was to be American, instinctively, in both the spirit of the American psyche in its art and marking its place in the world, at that period in time of the late 1950's and into the 60's. It was not alone in the explosion of consumerism, or in the accumulation and testing of nuclear weapons but it was probably the most conspicuous and dominant. America set a course the rest of the world would follow, that has left an impact on the planet that continues at a pace to the present day.

Chapter One - Making the Movie

NOrth by Northwest is a much admired and popular movie that has become iconic in many ways, from the crop dusting scene, to the chase across Mount Rushmore.

'*North by Northwest*' was selected in 1995 for preservation in the United States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress as being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant" (Fandom.com 2023). In 2022 Time Out Magazine rated it as its number one film in '100 Best thriller movies of all time' (Semlyen and Rothkopf 2022). and it continues to appear in numerous lists of best ever movies.

On release the movie was well received and seen generally as a very 'Hitchcockian' movie. Whitney Balliot's review for the New Yorker magazine said that '*North by Northwest*' is Hitchcock's

"..brilliant realization of a feat he has unintentionally been moving toward for more than a decade.... a perfect parody of his own work." (Balliot 1959)

The movie cost US\$4 million to make (Releasedetails.com 2022) and went on to gross US\$433.10 million in adjusted worldwide box office. Not quite as much as his most successful box office movie *Psycho*, which generated US\$611.00 million in adjusted worldwide box office. (Ultimate movierankings.com)

Alfred Hitchcock directed over fifty movies throughout his career which began with *Number Thirteen* in 1922, to his final movie *Family Plot* in 1976 (Truffaut 1984 Pg351 & 363). *North by Northwest* was released in 1959 and sits between *Vertigo* released in 1958 and *Psycho* released in 1960 and it could be argued that he was at the height of his creative powers in this period.

The plot is ostensibly a cold-war thriller that centres around a case of mistaken identity when Cary Grant's character, Roger Thornhill, is mistaken for a spy called George Kaplan.

The story begins with our hero Roger Thornhill, an advertising man in Manhattan, mistaken for Kaplan and kidnapped by 'foreign' spies, who attempt to kill him when they believe that he won't give them what they want, in the way of Government secrets. Thornhill escapes their clutches but ends up being framed by these spies for the murder of a United Nations delegate and thus begins a journey of trying to prove his innocence and identity that takes him across America in pursuit of the truth and at the same time, being pursued by the authorities for murder. Along the way, he discovers that George Kaplan is the fake identity of a non-existent agent used as a decoy to mislead enemy agents created by a secretive Government security agency, led by Leo G Carroll's character, 'The Professor'. During this pursuit, Thornhill falls in love with a woman, Eve Kaplan, that he meets on a train. Eve turns out to be an undercover agent of this secret government agency and she is posing as the girlfriend of the leader of the foreign agents, Phillip Vandamm.

In order to continue with this government mission to uncover and arrest the enemy agents, Thornhill is convinced to continue in his role as Kaplan in order to foil the enemy, rescue the girl and save the day. Whew! Sounds exhausting.

The screenplay of '*North by Northwest*' was, unusually for its time, not a screenplay developed from a stage play or a book which was the norm for Hollywood movies.

The story was written in an unorthodox and 'on the hoof' manner as it was still being written while simultaneously being filmed without an ending (Lehman 2009). Cary Grant, at one point took, Hitchcock aside and told him

"It's a terrible script. We've already done a third of the picture and I still can't make head nor tail of it." (Truffaut 1963 Pg 249)

Francois Truffaut, in his long form interview 'Hitchcock', identifies '*North by Northwest*' as the picture that "epitomises the whole of (Hitchcock's) work in America" (Truffaut 1984 Pg249).

This is an interesting take on the movie for a number of reasons, not least that it was written specifically or tailor-made as a 'Hitchcock' movie but also that *North by Northwest* has been described by some as a light movie, for instance, Constantine Verevis as one of the "standard" Hitchcock thrillers in the vein of '*The Man who knew too much*' and '*To Catch a Thief*'. (Verevis 2006 Pg18)

Hitchcock, himself, described how he made the film, "with tongue in cheek" and to him, it was "one big joke", saying how he would have liked to put Cary Grant inside one of the nostrils on Mount Rushmore. (Truffaut 1963 Pg. 102) So Verevis's assessment of the movie as light is probably closer to how Hitchcock saw it.

The movie was a creation to satisfy a contract with his Hollywood studio, a sort of product created, as opposed to the development of a piece of artistic literature which fits with the themes of ostentatious consumerism depicted in the film.

'*North By Northwest*' came into being when it was developed instead of an adaptation of a book called 'The Wreck of the Mary Deare' which both Hitchcock and his screenwriter Ernest Lehman had been originally contracted by MGM to bring to the screen. In his special features commentary on the 2009 MGM DVD release, the screenwriter Ernest Lehman told Hitchcock after three weeks of trying that he couldn't get a decent script out of the book so he was resigning from the project. It was reported back to Lehman that Hitchcock was furious with this but it was eventually decided that it was just too dreary a story to make any sort of riveting movie out of, as most the story revolved around a dry naval inquiry regarding the ship, 'The Mary Deare' which had been found abandoned and drifting in the English

Channel. So instead of going their separate ways Hitchcock proposed that he and Lehman develop their own story as they had a rapport and worked together so well. (Lehman 2009)

Lehman said to the director that he wanted

“to make the Hitchcock picture to end all Hitchcock pictures.” which Lehman expanded on as a “a picture with wit, sophistication, glamour, action and lots of changes of locales” (Lehman 2009).

In one of their first script meetings, Hitchcock declared that he had always wanted to do a chase across the faces of Mount Rushmore and that, Lehman revealed in his DVD commentary, was the genesis of the story. (Lehman 2009)

Together they embarked on the new project and Lehman began writing the script bit by bit for what would become *North by Northwest*. The title comes from the workings and reworkings of a plot that geographically seemed to head north-west from New York and ended up towards the Canadian border as potential locations, prompting the scriptwriter, Lehman, to use a working title of *A Northwesterly Direction*. It finally became *North by Northwest* as a casual suggestion for a better working title from Kenneth McKenna, the head of story department at MGM and it stuck. (Creative Screenwriting. Interview 2000) The title, subsequently, has no particular intended significance, although some critics and commentators have tried to read into the similarities to a quote from Shakespeare's Hamlet, specifically:

“I am but mad north-north-west. When the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw.”

This has been dismissed by Lehman himself (Lehman 2000). This reference or reading of Roger Thornhill as Hamlet as the victim being driven mad by the machinations of others, is however repeated by Christopher Morris (Morris 1997 Pg. 41). He also goes on to describe the film as seeing the world as ‘Postal’ emphasising

the separation and misunderstandings between people, the signifier and the signified and messages being missed or mistaken (Morris 1997 Pg. 46). I feel this reading also fits into the themes of chance and mistaken identities that the movie hangs on.

In their 2015 web article '*Modernism at the movies : North by Northwest*' ,Sandy McLendon and Joe Kunkel point out Hitchcock constantly underlines the luxury that surrounds Roger Thornhill throughout the movie, the hotel locations like the Plaza in New York and the Ambassador East in Chicago. (Jetsetmodern.com 2015) The lobby of the building Thornhill works in and the Townsend mansion that we encounter in the beginning opening scenes are great examples of the best of Manhattan society lifestyles. Eva Saint Marie's wardrobe is from a high end luxury design house, Bergdorf Goodman, which is conspicuously pointed out when her character Eve Kendal slips a note into her purse and the camera seems to linger on the label inside it. The Vandamm house which is, intentionally, highly reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wrights '*Fallingwater*' house in Pennsylvania, adds another coating of sophisticated luxury. And of course, Cary Grant is the perfect example of handsome urbane sophistication and Eva Saint Marie, a beautiful, manicured heroine. Stanley Cavell in 'A Hitchcock Reader' regards the main topics of the movie as topics of seduction.

"Our seduction by one another, by beautiful women and beautiful men and beautiful things" (Cavell 2009 Pg.260).

All of this signalling and ostentatious demonstrations of wealth are not only escapism for the viewer and practically an advert for the very best of what capitalism can be but it is also suggesting that even though our hero has all this wealth, none of it can save him.

This to me seems to be one of the main underlying themes of the film, the fact that everything in life is precarious. In his 1969 book '*Hitchcock's Films*', Robin Wood interprets Thornhill's case of mistaken identity and descent into uncertainty as an extension of sheer chance,

"Hitchcock's sense of the precariousness of all human order... chaos abruptly takes over."(Wood 1969. Pg 101)

Thornhill's moment of complete isolation and fragility is illustrated as Wood points out at

"the supreme symbol of potential world order in the United Nations building." (Wood 1969 Pg 102)

We see the tiny figure of Thornhill, as we view him from a great height many floors up, running to a taxi. A microscopic, diminished figure reduced from the worldly Manhattan sophisticate that led a successful life of ordered luxury, to this.(See Fig.2)



Fig 2.United Nations building *North by Northwest* still. 1959

This theme of the upending of order and chance appears in many of Hitchcock's films such as '*The Man who knew too much*' (1956), '*The Wrong Man*' (1956), '*Lifeboat*' (1944), '*The Birds*' (1963), '*The Thirty-Nine Steps*' (1935) and others.

R. Robert Palmer makes the argument that this attack on both him and his identity does not represent real life, that it is not realistic to think

“an underworld of chaos and threat could suddenly sweep up and over any unsuspecting individual.” (Palmer 2006 pg.101).

But this is exactly what has happened throughout history, with recessions, depressions, political turmoils, global pandemics and now we are seeing that precariousness of order with climate change. It is also interesting to note that the premise of the invention of a decoy spy, that is George Kaplan in the movie, came from an actual conversation that Ernest Lehman had with a journalist from The New York Tribune, called Otis Guernsey Jr.. Guernsey had once told him how the C.I.A. had created a fictitious agent as a decoy to distract from the activities of the real operative. (Lehman 2009) In a letter to Hitchcock dated 14th of October 1957 (see Fig.3) Guernsey recounts the story as taking place in the middle east during World War II (the.hitchcock.zone/wiki).

October 14, 1957

Mr. Alfred Hitchcock
% M-G-M
1540 Broadway
New York, New York

Dear Hitch,

A few years ago I suggested to you an idea for a movie, vaguely based on something which actually happened in the Middle East during World War II. At that time, a couple of secretaries in a British embassy invented--for the fun of it and to relieve the boredom of an inactive post--a fake masterspy. They gave him a name, and a record and planted information around to lure the Nazis onto his trail.

To their delight and astonishment, the enemy gobbled the bait and spent some valuable time and energy trying to hunt down the non-existent operative.

I suggested to you that this escapade might be built into a good movie melodrama in any one of a number of ways. The actual treatment we discussed at the time involved an ingenuous young American--probably a traveling salesman--who has the fake identity pinned on him by accident and finds that he cannot get rid of it. He is on the spot: the enemy is trying to capture and kill him, and his friends cannot help him because they cannot afford to have their ruse exposed.

However you plan to use the idea at this time, I hereby hand it over to you, blithely and with best wishes, with all rights and privileges, etc., etc., with no purpose of evasion or mental reservations, etc., etc., for such consideration as may have been discussed between my agent and yours, for all the good it may do you which I hope will be plenty.


Cordially yours,

Otis L. Guernsey Jr.

Fig 3. Letter from Otis Guernsey Jr. 1957

Probably the most iconic scene in the movie, the crop dusting scene is one that came about from a couple of different ideas. Firstly, our protagonist, Thornhill is, as Hitchcock put it,

“faced with the same old cliché situation, the man who is put on the spot, probably to be shot.” (Hitchcock 1963 Pg 256)

and he wondered how this was usually depicted. Conventionally, he surmised, it would be a dark, a wet cobbled street, the victim in a pool of light, cats jumping out, furtive glances from windows etc. so he figured he would create the antithesis of that scene and leave our man in the middle of nowhere in bright sunlight in a blank landscape with no place for any villains to hide. (Hitchcock 1963 Pg 256)

During another script meeting, Hitchcock described how he wanted to do a scene where there is a man in the middle of nowhere, where there's absolutely nothing and the villains have lured him out to kill him in this isolated place and then suddenly a tornado whips up and it, of course, kills the man. Lehman thought this was too far-fetched and asked Hitchcock how he thought the villains were going to whip up a tornado? Not having thought that far ahead, Lehman suggested to him that a plane appear on the horizon and the scene developed from there. (Lehman

2000) Hitchcock's attempt to stage-direct a tornado also speaks to a wider view of the human relationship with the natural world as a whole, in the context of the Anthropocene, in that it exists to serve us. This notion of nature and landscape, or inanimate objects, being almost characters or having a tangible presence or agency in the film, re-occurs a number of times throughout Hitchcock films, the birds in *'The Birds'* (1963), the house in *'Psycho'* (1960), the apartment block in *'Rear Window'*.

In *The Birds*, Hitchcock touches on the effect that humans or in relevant terms, the Anthropocene, was having on the natural world. The character of Mrs Bundy, the ornithologist, makes a small speech in defence of the birds:

“Birds are not aggressive creatures, they bring beauty into the world. It is mankind rather who insists on making it difficult for life to exist on this planet.”
Mrs Bundy.

Later we hear from the local fisherman, Sebastian Sholes, played by gruff character actor Charles McGraw, who also played the sadistic boss of the Gladiator school in Stanley Kubricks '*Spartacus*' (1960) (IMDB.com) who suggests a very human solution to the problem of the local birdlife is to:

“get yourself a gun and wipe them off the face of the earth.” Sholes.

Chapter two - Aesthetics

"Put first and foremost cinematic style over content" (Cinema. 1963. Pg3)

Alfred Hitchcock

Hitchcock's is not concerned necessarily with conveying any message in this cold war film, but rather the art of the medium of cinema.

'It's just that the public doesn't care for films on politics' (Truffaut 1963 pg 249)

However there are motifs and themes that can relate to issues of the anthropocene. One poster to *North by Northwest* shows Cary Grant as Roger Thornhill being shot by Eve Kendall, in a pose falling to the ground. The biblical reference to 'the Fall of Man' is described as Adam and Eve's separation from God and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:19). It could be considered that the fall into consumerism and subsequent loss of Eden as an appropriate simile to the climate crisis. Adam and Eve's demise was of their own doing - they were told not to eat the apple and they did and similarly the current climate crisis results entirely from our own doing. The human exploitation and extraction of natural deposits of minerals and biosystems, to satisfy the acquisitiveness and demands of full blown capitalist, consumerist societies that the term 'Anthropocene' represents, can also be seen a self imposed exile from Eden or perhaps more accurately, a destruction of Eden.

T.J. Demos makes the claim that a more appropriate name for this age would be the Capitalocene rather than the 'misdirecting and obfuscating Anthropocene' (Demos 2017 Pg.60). It is capital and the constant chasing of 'growth' in financial terms that fuels the Anthropocene rather than too many humans. The Richest 10% of the world population are responsible for almost half of the total lifestyle CO2 emissions of the entire global population. The poorest 50% are responsible for approximately 7% of total lifestyle consumption emissions (Thunberg 2022 Pg4). The natural world, our Eden, is rapidly disappearing and being poisoned for the sake of consumerism that was, at this point in time, driven for the most part by developed, first world, western nations.

This motif of falling is something that reoccurs in other Hitchcock films. We see the bad guy falling from the statue of liberty in '*Saboteur*' (1935), Kim Novak as Madeleine falling from the bell tower in '*Vertigo*' (1958), James Stewart falling from his window ledge in '*Rear Window*' (1954) and Danielle rescued from falling off a roof by Cary Grant in '*To Catch a Thief*' (1955) . (See Fig.4)



Fig 4. Hitchcock movie poster for *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest* and *To Catch a Thief*

The concept of 'the Fall of Man' is an interesting one that permeates '*North by Northwest*' as we see the fall of Roger Thornhill from New York advertising executive

to a fugitive from justice with no identity. There is a primal fear of falling that we can all relate to, that Hitchcock exploits often. The image of the fall is repeated through the film, for example in the crop dusting scene where Thornhill is attacked by a plane, in the cafe scene at the Mount Rushmore monument where he is shot by Eve and in the closing scenes on top of the Rushmore monument where we see both bad guys fall to their deaths. The scene closes with Eve clinging desperately to Roger's hand as she dangles over the cliff face.

The image that the film is perhaps most famous for and is often referenced is the 'Crop dusting scene', Robin Wood regarded it as

"justly famous and seems widely accepted as one of Hitchcock's most brilliant scenes." (Wood. 1969. Pg.105).

Francois Truffaut described this particular scene as

"Cinema, approached in this way, becomes a truly abstract art, like music." (Truffaut 1963 Pg.256).

There is an artifice to the scene, in many ways, but particularly in the way Cary Grant falls to the ground, his movements are almost dance movements, particularly choreographed. (See Fig.5)



Fig 5. Still from *North by Northwest*

In the Rushmore Visitors centre cafe scene, when Eve shoots Roger, it is equally as choreographed and animated. Roger Thornhill steps back like an old melodrama actor, anticipating the shot, takes the bullet and rises on to his tiptoes almost suspended in the air, (See Fig. 6) he turns in pain, his arms aloft, and eventually falls (See Fig.7). In both of these scenes, I am reminded in all his poses of Robert Longo's 'Men in the Cities' Series from 1979 - 1983 (See fig.8) that, according to Artnet.com,

'capture the emotional potency and grandeur of American capitalism' (Artnet auctions 20221)

which seems to me an appropriate analogy but in this case it is the fall of man, in the context of the climate crisis, due to capitalism.



Fig 6. Still from *North by Northwest*



Fig 7. Still from *North by Northwest*



Fig 8. *Men in Cities* Robert Longo 1979 -1983

Another manifestation of America's advance and progress is evident in the iconic crop-dusting scene begins with a vast open space of farmland with a highway running straight through it. Thornhills bus arrives at the crossroads and there is something quintessentially American about this scene. Firstly, it is the vastness of the midwest agricultural land, America as mass producer and master of nature. It is a flat plain with nothing but fenced off fields with a crossroads where Thornhill is

dropped off by a shiny, chrome and white Greyhound bus on an endless highway.

(See Fig.9)



Fig 9. Still from *North by Northwest* (1959) MGM

Ed Ruscha's work 'St Crosses Ave' from 2000 (See Fig.10) is a piece that relates to this scene in simplicity, geometry of human intervention and description. Although the terms Street and Avenue are city descriptors, there is a sparse Americana in this work and other works like 'Standard Station' (1966) that point to the emptiness and language of the American landscape and particularly, the highway.



Fig 10. 'St crosses Ave' (2000) Ruscha

In David Company's *'The Open Road, photography and the American Road Trip'*, Company discusses the notion of the 'Continuous experience' that American writers and artists, such as Hopper, Kerouac, Rauschenburg have tried to express, that the road represents and it's unrelenting

"ongoingness'...'even if it was clear that the wheels would eventually come off this juggernaut of 'progress" (Company 2014 Pg 24)

In the same year as the movie's release, 1959, Robert Frank's book 'The Americans' was released which was regarded as a 'watershed American photographic project'(Company 2014 Pg 24) in its depiction of the American highway.

Company goes on to reference *North by Northwest* in '*Open Road*', in that both Frank's and Hitchcock were examining and exploring the same thing ;

"American anxiety, secrecy and power, manipulative images, deceptive appearances and troubled masculinity." (Company 2014 Pg 27).

The scene itself, between Thornhill arriving at an empty crossroads and the arrival of a farmer to catch the return bus, lasts for some seven minutes. Truffaut called this a "real tour the force" (Truffaut. 1969 Pg. 254), as it is a considerable amount of screen time where nothing happens. It is literally, Thornhill standing by the side of a road waiting for something to happen and the mysterious George Kaplan to show up. There is also a sense of the solitary rural life that is evoked by the farmer who turns up to the crossroads, dropped off by his wife by the cornfield, that could be an Andrew Wyeth or Edward Hopper painting, both very American artists that reveal something about the stoicism and isolation of rural America, that are conjured up contrary to the conspicuous consumerism that concerns much of the film.



Fig 11. Still from *North by Northwest* (1959) MGM

The scene ends dramatically when the crop dusting plane that is attacking our protagonist (See Fig.11) crashes into a tanker truck carrying a delivery of oil and explodes. A couple of approaching vehicles pull up and the occupants get out to view the scene, Thornhill runs up to them and seems to creep, invisibly, through the line of figures (See Fig.12) that could be characters from a Norman Rockwell painting. (See Fig.13)



Fig. 12: Still from *North by Northwest* (1959) MGM

This image harks back to Palmers (University of Texas Press 2006) point about the ‘underworld of chaos’ that he says doesn’t exist in real life but what we are seeing are two different Americas sliding by each other. As the bystanders move towards the crash scene, Thornhill is edging the other way almost unseen by them. The rural,

'decent' folk of middle America going in one direction and all the complicated intrigues and double dealings of the elite going the other way.



Fig. 12: Detail from 'Norman Rockwell visits a country Agent' (1948)

Jeff Mene noted in his article for Post45.org, 'Hitchcock's closed system' that

"Alfred Hitchcock had an odd affection for rear projection, matte paintings, and composite shots—in short, an affection for cinematic artifice." (2021. Post45.org)

Throughout *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock employs this clearly artificial technique for creating backdrops and composites. But as an audience it could be said we surrender as modern viewers because we are aware that this is an historical convention of filmmaking. However as Mene points out, Hitchcock was aware at the time that this was already an outmoded style of filmmaking with the advent of the Italian Neorealist cinema, like Rossellini's *Rome - Open City*. 'Cinema Verite' was evolving in France at the same time that allowed for an undirected and improvisational, 'natural' style of filmmaking.

"Aesthetically, he believed in a designed world, one minted in the mind and rendered concretely through the work of craft" (Post45.org. 2021)

He tried out this new type of filmmaking on location, using untrained actors in the 'The Wrong Man' (1956) but it didn't sit well with him philosophically about how a film should be made. (Post45.org. 2021) What the artifice that the painted backdrops (created by art director Robert Boyle) signal, is that not only is this a movie, an entertainment, and it is part of the craft of moviemaking, but also the artifice of our ordered world.

Chapter three - The Great Acceleration - Consumerism and Militarism

'War is hell, even when it's a cold one.'

The Professor (*North by Northwest* 1959)

In 1944, a year before Hiroshima, Hitchcock was told by a writer friend that the Americans were working on a project in New Mexico that was of the highest security and that the Germans were working on heavy water experiments in Canada.

Hitchcock deduced from these two clues that these were both atomic bomb experiments so he proposed a uranium 'MacGuffin' for the plot of '*Notorious*' (1944).

A 'MacGuffin' is used to describe something of no real interest to the audience apart from being a vehicle or excuse to move the plot along, like government secrets.

(Truffaut 1963 Pg138). The producers didn't go for this idea, as they felt that Uranium was implausible so Hitchcock switched the MacGuffin to become industrial diamonds. However during his research for '*Notorius*', Hitchcock spoke to a Dr Milikan of the California Institute of Technology at Pasadena to get technical information and dimensions of a nuclear device for the film and was told that they could all be arrested for simply discussing it. Hitchcock relates that he later discovered he had been under surveillance by the FBI for three months following that meeting. (Truffaut. 1963. Pg168)

This illustrates how Hitchcock was aware that the atomic age was upon us, a technology that has come to affect the planet physically and dominate it politically up to the present day, with President Putin seemingly threatening the use of nuclear weapons in the conflict in the Ukraine.

The singularly human concerns of international espionage drives the plot of '*North by Northwest*', the 'selling of government secrets' in the nuclear age suggests that they are, in fact, nuclear secrets, although we are never specifically told what they are. The atomic process, that has the potential to destroy the planet's ecosystem purely for the struggle of global ideological dominance - is solely an abstract human concern.

The Nuclear Age, however, has manifested itself as a marker of the Anthropocene in the form of traces of radiation, in particular military produced radionuclides that are present in all human and animal life forms on the planet. Jan Zalasiewicz, Mark Williams, Will Steffen and Paul Crutzen propose in '*The New World of the Anthropocene*' (2019 P.69) consider 1945 the starting date of the Anthropocene. This is when 'tiny but measurable amounts of artificial radionuclides' (2019 P.69) appear in the earth's strata as a result of the world's first nuclear bomb test in Alamogordo Bombing Range in New Mexico on July 16th 1945, codename Trinity.

In '*Allegories of the Anthropocene*' Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey discusses the absolute disbursement of radioactive particles throughout the planet. The U.S.military's historic use and testing of nuclear, and by extension, the American government's, has had an ongoing and all encompassing effect on the planet. DeLoughrey argues that U.S. Militarism has remained largely ignored in its contamination of the earth and the atmosphere. She suggests that the U.S. Military are also the world's largest institutional consumers and producers of fossil fuels and carbon emissions (DeLoughrey 2019 p.69) and uses more than one hundred million barrels of oil annually, but it is also in its experiments in nuclear and radiation and its disbursement that has left a continuing legacy. Large amounts of militarised radiation

have been released into the seas and atmospheres as part of experiments that far out way the radiation caused by Chernobyl. The radiation that emitted from the Bikini Atoll tests in 1954, and subsequent tests throughout the sixties, have become part of every human on the planet in the form of Strontium-90 contained in us all as a byproduct of these testings (DeLoughrey 2019 P.76.) So although the nuclear age wasn't the start of the Anthropocene, this era stands as an indelible marker of it.

Grant's split character of Thornhill/Kaplan evokes what David Crowley and Jane Pavitt call 'the twin props of Cold War modernity: consumerism and militarism.' (Post45.org. 2021)

In his interview with Truffaut, Hitchcock explained that he had come up with an idea to include the Ford Factory as Detroit was one of the stops on the way. He proposed a long dialogue scene between Cary Grant and a factory worker as they walk along the assembly line while behind them a car is being assembled from nothing. They accompany the assembly from the first nut and bolt to the end of the line where it is ready to be driven away. They turn to admire the car, open the door and a corpse drops out of it! Truffaut asked why the director hadn't included the scene and Hitchcock replied that he couldn't make it fit into the story and he replied that even a gratuitous scene must have some justification for being there. (Truffaut 1963 Pg. 257)

Apart from sounding like fantastically morbid fun, it does illustrate Hitchcock's understanding of what American consumerism stood for and nothing says that better than Henry Ford's assembly line.

Michael R. Griffiths describes Hitchcock's style as 'compulsively driven toward motifs of technological transport: trains, automobiles, hulking ships' (Griffiths 2013)

and he goes on to state that Hitchcock needed a pre-eminant technological understanding in order to be able describe America in film. It is the celebratory quality and impressive depiction of heavy industry that describes America at this time and we see that in the triumphalism of consumerism and mechanisation of human movement represented in the film. From the bustling and jarring metropolis we see in the opening credits, representing a thriving economy and the enviable status and earning power of the American economy to the cinematic shots of vast tracts of farmland and the mastering of nature with shaping of granite mountains, illustrated by the chase across the towering sculpture of the four presidents on the Mount Rushmore monument.

In the Human Planet , this era of the late fifties and into the sixties is identified as the Great Acceleration with the annual increase to population of 2% in comparison to our current 1.1%.(Lewis and Maslin 2018 Pg.234) In this period also, the uptick takes off on all sorts of metrics from population to fertiliser use, fresh water use, outputs of carbon dioxide and ocean acidification. (The Climate Book. Rockstrom 2022 Pg 34-35) This has happened in the space of a generation, in the life times of the post war children that have come to be known as 'the Baby Boomers' of which the previous generation of Roger Thornhill and Eve Kendall are the parents.

Conclusion

Alfred Hitchcock was born in England in 1899, when Queen Victoria sat on the British throne, The Lumiere Brothers in Paris had only four years previous, given the first public screening of a moving picture (Martin 2019) and it wouldn't be for another four years, in 1903, before the Wright brothers would conduct their historic first powered flight. (wrightbrotherinfo.com 2016)

Hitchcock died in 1980 but those intervening years saw America put men on the moon and all the massive technological advancements that came after that.

Hitchcock was a truly historic figure but was also a very modern figure. Two of his most important, professional collaborators were women at a time when women struggled to have their voice heard on equal terms. His wife Alma Reville, had been an editor, director and screenwriter in her own right before her marriage to Alfred. His second closest collaborator was Joan Harrison, his trusted assistant and scriptwriter who went on to become a producer. On his move to America, he told the famed producer and studio executive, David O. Selznick that he wouldn't sign up without Harrison on the team. (*I am Alfred Hitchcock* Sky Arts 2021)

As a young man of eighteen, he studied photography as a hobby, he noticed that lighting effects in American films differed to British productions. British movies of that time, essentially set up as a stage play would, and pointed the camera at the scene which, he noticed, left the scene flat. Whereas American lighting techniques separated the players from the background with backlights, a technique he later adopted in his filmmaking. (Truffaut 1963 Pg31) He was not afraid to see that one technique was better than another and utilise it.

He began his career, working in silent movies and was one of the few directors that adapted to sound with great success. (Truffaut 1963 Pg 31)

For his 1927 silent movie *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog*, Hitchcock had a glass floor created so he could film, from below, the feet of a man pacing in his bedroom, so for the audience it illustrated what they were listening to and visualising it. This was an inventive solution to a problem that would be solved nowadays purely with the audio sound of footsteps pacing (*I am Alfred Hitchcock* 2021) but is another example of Hitchcock's unique perspective and inventiveness. His style of moviemaking has become a reference that even almost half a century after his last movie, 1976's *Family Plot*, is still relevant, and to describe something as 'Hitchcockian' is universally understood.

North by Northwest speaks to the time it is set in, intentionally and unintentionally, and is a significant piece of cinema that stands as a document that straddles America's past with its future. A lot of the closing action takes place across the faces of the four historic presidents, which speaks to the identity of America's past and shaping as a nation. Hitchcock was in tune with and understood modern America. *North by Northwest* also points to its future in the new atomic age of consumerism and how that consumerism ultimately kickstarts the Anthropogenic climate crisis that we are now facing.

Bibliography

Belliot, W. (1959) *New Yorker Magazine* - Article. 15 August.
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1959/08/15/hitchcock-on-hitchcock> accessed Jan 2023

Boyd, D. and Palmer R.B. (2006) *'After Hitchcock : influence, imitation and intertextuality'* University of Texas Press.

Cavell, S. (1981) *'North by Northwest'* Critical Enquirey, Vol 7, No.4, pp. 761-776.
University of Chicago Press.
<https://people.brandeis.edu/~teuber/Cavell%20North%20by%20Northwest.pdf>
accessed Jan 2023

Cinema (1963) - Hitchcock on Style: An Interview with Alfred Hitchcock. Volume 5, issue 1. Spectator International, Inc.
[https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/Cinema_\(1963\)_-_Hitchcock_on_Style:_An_Interview_with_Alfred_Hitchcock](https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/Cinema_(1963)_-_Hitchcock_on_Style:_An_Interview_with_Alfred_Hitchcock) accessed January 2023

Company, D. (2014) *'The Open Road - Photography and the American Road Trip'*.Aperture

Creative Screenwriting (2000) - "North by Northwest": An Interview with Ernest Lehman. volume 7, issue 6, pages 47-53. Lehman. 2000
[https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/Creative_Screenwriting_\(2000\)_-_North_by_Northwest%22:_An_Interview_with_Ernest_Lehman](https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/Creative_Screenwriting_(2000)_-_North_by_Northwest%22:_An_Interview_with_Ernest_Lehman) accessed Jan 2023.

DeLoughrey, E.M. (2019) *'Allegories of the Anthropocene'*. Duke University Press,.

Demos, T.J. (2017) *'Against the Anthropocene - Visual Culture and Environment today'* b. Sternberg Press.

De Semlyen,P. and Rothkopf, J. (2022) Time Out magazine '100 best thriller movies of all time'
<https://www.timeout.com/film/best-thriller-movies> accessed January 2023

Deutelbaum, M and Poague, L. (2009) *'A Hitchcock Reader'* Wiley Blackwell, second edition.

Etsy.com

Fandom.com
https://mgm.fandom.com/wiki/North_by_Northwest accessed Jan 2023

Fitzgerald, P. (2000) *'Destination Hitchcock: The Making of North by Northwest'* Documentary, Metro Goldwyn Mayer

Griffiths, (2010) M.R. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Thought on Contemporary Cultures*. Production Values: Fordism and Formalism in North by Northwest. Volume 20, Number 3. Rice University.
<https://www.pomoculture.org/2013/09/03/production-values-fordism-and-formalism-in-north-by-northwest/#b10> accessed Jan 2023

Leblow, V. (1955) - Journal of Retailing -Price Competition in 1955 - Publisher New York University.
<http://www.ablemesh.co.uk/PDFs/journal-of-retailing1955.pdf> accessed Jan 2023

Luce, H.R. (1999) '*The American Century*' Diplomatic History Vol. 23, No. 2 (Spring 1999), pp. 159-171 (13 pages). Oxford University press
https://www.jstor.org/stable/24913736#metadata_info_tab_contents accessed Jan 2023

Morris, C.D. (1997) *The Direction of North by Northwest*, Cinema Journal Vol. 36, No. 4 (Summer, 1997), pp. 43-56. University of Texas Press
https://www.jstor.org/stable/1225612#metadata_info_tab_contents

McCarthy, J.A., Maran, E. and Miller, J.J. (2021) '*I am Alfred Hitchcock*' Documentary. Sky Arts.

Mene, J. (2021) '*Hitchcocks closed Systems*'. Midcentury design cultures. Issue 6.
<https://post45.org/2021/03/hitchcocks-closed-systems/> accesses Jan 2023

Martin P.G. (2019) Nationalgeographic.com
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/history-magazine/article/creation-of-the-motion-picture-lumiere-brothers> accessed 2023

North by Northwest (1959) Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. (Film). USA Metro Goldwyn Mayer

North by Northwest (1959) Releasedetails.com
<https://www.releasedetails.com/movies/north-by-northwest/> accessed Jan 2019

The Birds (1963) Directed by Alfred Hitchcock (Film). USA Universal Pictures

Truffaut, F. (1984) '*Hitchcock*'. Simon and Schuster Inc. Revised edition.

Solnit, R. (27 April 2014) '*Call Climate Change what it is: Violence*'
<http://rebeccasolnit.net/essay/call-climate-change-what-it-is-violence/> accessed Jan 2023

Spencer, T.J.B. '*Hamlet*' by William Shakespeare. Penguin Boosd Ltd.

Thunberg, G. (2022) '*The Climate Book*.' Penguin Random House

Wood, R. (1969) '*Hitchcock's Films*'. Tantivy Press. Second Edition

Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_by_Northwest accessed Jan 2019

Wrightbrothers.info 2016
<https://wrightbrothers.info/>

Yanal, R.J. (2005) '*Hitchcock as philosopher*' McFarland & Company inc