HITCHCOCK'S MORAL GAZE
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As a way of opening this review about an anthology of essays that addresses the relationship
between Hitchcock's cinema and the ethical and moral spheres, it is worth considering that
the aforementioned collection presents itself as a praise of Hitchcock's psychological and
philosophical depth. For it is in this sense that Irving Singer, in his book about the
relationship of philosophy to film[1], considers Hitchcock as a "philosophical filmmaker",
despite Hitchcock considering himself, in his interviews and writings, as "someone who
merely provides entertainment to an interested public" (Singer, 2004, p.7). Furthermore, it is
clear that a considerable portion of Hitchcock's reflexion about film is devoted to technical
aspects associated with the medium and his craft. Nonetheless, the discussion of such
assertions would be out of the scope of this review. One might only add, following Singer,
that "art becomes philosophical when it offers probing insights into our reality that are
valuable to people who have learned how to appreciate them" (Singer, 2004, p.8). It is such
assumption[2] that informs the philosophical sophistication and solemnity of Hitchcock's films.
Hitchcock's subtlety as a "moralist not moralizing" is noteworthy, "an artist committed to
portraying characters who find themselves compelled to choose" (Palmer, Pettey &
Sanders,2017, p.8)[3]. It should be emphasised that Hitchcock's film philosophy manifests
itself in the implementation of these fictional characters, as means for a broader reflection
about the effects of cinema, for it is in the relationship that is built between the director and
the audience that Hitchcock is interested. With that in mind, the fifteen essays distributed
throughout four chapters ("Skepticism"; "Immorality", "Moralizing", "Moral Acts")
"reconsider the concept of morality in terms of Hitchcock himself, the content of his films,
and their effect on his audience" (p.14). By reflecting on Hitchcock's moralism and ethics,
the book constitutes a place, a *geography* (if we may put it like that), an *ethos*; therefore
emerging likewise, as Hitchcock's movies, as a political project.

The first essay, Graham Petrie's "Jealousy and Trust in *The Lodger*", draws on Marie
Belloc Lownde's *The Lodger* (1913), which is considered to be the "earliest full-length
fictional treatment" (p.24) of the theories and speculations that surrounded Jack the Ripper.
Hitchcock's *The Lodger*, considered to be the "first true" Hitchcock film is, following Petrie,
the result of an "amalgam": Lownde's novel, some facts about the "real life" of Jack the

Ripper and the play *Who is He?* (H. A. Vachel, 1915). Although inspired by such "documents", Hitchcock (re)writes the fictional by introducing some changes rendering the film "less complex psychologically than the book" (p.28) but closer to Hitchcock's signature: suspense and, in this case, an univocal ending (more precisely, a "happy ending" simultaneously linked to a theme of rejoice).

In "Fun with Suspicion", Thomas Leitch analyses the actual ending as well as the potential endings of *Suspicion*, a film inspired by Francis Iles's novel *Before the Fact*, whose opening paragraph states: "Some women give birth to murderers, some go to bed with them, and some marry them" (p.39). Filming such novel would imply major changes on the original narrative, introducing conflict in the very process of filming, thus giving place to a collision between film and novel. In fact there were "no fewer than six endings Hitchcock and his collaborators scripted, often filmed, and sometimes previewed (p.42). For many the actual ending of the film is unsatisfactory; a dissatisfaction that has its origins in what one may call, alongside Leith, an "anticlimactic finale". However, Leith argues that the debate around the ending of *Suspicion* is to some extent pointless, thus overlooking "the crucial point that the film is impossible to bring a satisfactory conclusion" (p.47); rather, *Suspicion* (as does *The Lodger*) presents another of Hitchcock's signatures: "suspecting without knowing". Following Leith, such a passion (if we may use this word), is a kind of wondering; a state of contemplation or of consideration. Indeed, it is a suspension of our attention, an *état d'âme*, a capturing. This provides the audience with a particular aesthetic experience, which is that of a "pleasurable anxiety". This experience is pedagogical in its essence, for it is rooted in a *Gedankenexperiment*, where entertainment and moralism merge.

Nick Haeffner addresses the "Spoto myth", which states that Hitchcock's characters and narratives are extensions of his own personality, thus attributing to Hitchcock a perverse psyche. His movies are therefore considered to be the offspring of a diseased personality Taken to its last consequences, this myth even suggests the possibility of contagion, drawing on the manipulative capability of cinema, and on Hitchcock's famous comparison of the audience to a piano (Hitchcock as a *virtuoso* instrumentalist) or to an orchestra (Hitchcock as conductor). To deconstruct such myth, Haeffner develops an intertextual analysis of villainy in Hitchcock, providing a particular examination of Uncle Charlie (*Shadow of a Doubt*), inspired not only on romantic philosophy (the idea of the heroic villain, which has one of its sources in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but also on a "Sadean perspective". Indeed, Haeffner states that Hitchcock was a "keen admirer of Buñuel" (p. 71), who was also an admirer of de Sade. Thus, Hitchcock's villains ought to be understood more as "effective dramatic conventions with their own histories" (p. 61).

Brian McFarlane focuses on a Christian theme, in *The Paradine Case* and *Under Capricorn*, by placing due emphasis on the guilt and confession of Maddelena Paradine and

Lady Henrietta Flusky, respectively. It could be argued that both films also explore the theme of sacrifice where, according to McFarlane, if Henrietta finds relief and hope, then the same cannot be said of Maddelena Paradine, which perhaps finds relief, but no hope. The "network of relationships", as McFarlane calls it, is also present in both movies; both involve a man "who is meant to be helping her to deal with the facts of her guilty past" (p. 75), who falls in love with the subject guilty of murder. In addition, this play of passions also encompasses the problematics of class and gender, via the movements of the characters in a hierarchized and patriarchal society. Thus, both films exhibit what may be acknowledged as an anatomy of passions, a notorious trait of Hitchcock's movies.

George Toles, in *The Forgotten Cigarette Lighter* refutes that the cigarette lighter of *Strangers on a Train* is a mere "Hitchcockian MacGuffin". On the contrary, the visual emphasis that Hitchcock gives to Guy's lighter, and its relevance till the end of the movie, attributes to the object a moral dimension, rendering the object in a quasi-subjective stance, a "thought-object". Indeed, the cigarette lighter is semiotically charged, for "once in Bruno's hands, [the lighter] begins to mirror its new owner" (p.103), leading Toles even to suggest if it might be possible to cast a moral judgement on the object. Furthermore, for Toles, the public exposition of the lighter at the end of the film, suggest the end of the control that Bruno exerts over Guy.

Opening with a statement of Philippa Foot, Steven Sanders addresses the fundamental and complex question of "Why should I be moral?", taking Bruno Anthony and Uncle Charlie as examples of the psyche of "Hitchcock's immoralists", while simultaneously showing the insufficiency of Kantian and Hobbesian approaches to the question. In fact, for Sanders, Hitchcock's movies (specially *Strangers on a Train* and *Shadow of a Doubt*) provide the ideal *Gedankenexperiment*, by which the viewer can "compare the two ways of life" (p.130). Sanders concludes that the odds of conducting a moral life are high, or at least there is enough of a justification to opt for a moral life, seeing how Hitchcock's immoralists represent "not how well one can live once he has shed the constraints of morality, but how devoid of feeling and stability such a life would be." (p.131).

In "Hitchcock the Amoralist", Sidney Gottlieb takes a look on *Rear Window*, commonly known as a film that meditates and urges meditation about the act of looking, more specifically, that that in the field of cultural studies was called the "gaze". Therefore, according to Gottlieb, the ways of looking and seeing can be measured, qualified and judged according to moral categories, giving place to a polarised view of our "ways of seeing". Gottlieb, on the contrary, argues for an "expanded view of the wide variety of «ways of seeing»" (p.135) that are presented in the film. Therefore, Gottlieb lists "Seven Ways of Looking at Hitchcock's Ways of Looking" (p.135). The first proposition is about the eye and the world, its blindness, coupled with misperception; and its binding, coupled with

connectivity. The second proposition states that *Rear Window* is about "a culture of looking and being looked at" (p.136); a culture which has at its core the eye coupled with the I. Thirdly, the film is about "looking good and looking well". The fourth premise addresses the multiplicity of gazes in *Rear Window*, one of the most interesting being the "exponential look", "people looking at people looking at people looking" (p.138). This takes us to the fifth proposal which states the medial character of the look. Sixth, *Rear Window* as cinema of attractions but also of distractions. Finally, the seventh proposition is about the control of looking and tactility, an ethics of distance and proximity, and the fight against chaos and horrifying abysses. The questions raised by *Rear Window* and by the practices of looking, in this case, voyeurism, are further analysed by Richard Allen, which not only seeks to "revisit" thoroughly this concept, but also expands this category, building a typology that encompasses sexual voyeurism, psychological voyeurism, cine-voyeurism and "mediated-voyeurism", thus contributing to the analysis of the complex moral apparatus of Hitchcock.

Following Goffman's interactional symbolism, Kenneth Keniston's distinction between morals and ethics and Hitchcock's *The Lodger*, *The Wrong Man* and *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, Murray Pomerance offers a "dramaturgical approach" and a "conceptual map", showing that Hitchcock's films display a metatheory about morals – the problems that affect and destabilize morality and moralism – and an "ethical drama" – the "ethical world of his characters, that world and its doubts, its vacuums, its labyrinths, its obscurities, its fervent hopes (p.182).

R. Barton Palmer, in "The Deepening Moralism of *The Wrong Man*", shows how the collapse of the illusion that our lives are guided by what may be called a "metaphysics of justice" (p.197) is addressed. Hitchcock tackles such assumption through the topic of misidentification, which has its corollary in the failure of the justice system. Hitchcock teaches the most immutable and unchanging lesson, combined with a harsh psychological moralism: "life's unfairness and the dead-end to which all human hopes and intentions must eventually come" (p.199). In *The Wrong Man* Hitchcock presents a sort of "re-creation", something "stranger than all the fiction that has gone into many of the thrillers that I have made before", and that he "was offering […] a semidocumentary film" (p.206).

Analysing *Rear Window*, *Psycho*, *North by Northwest*, *Rope* and *The Birds*, whilst drawing mainly on Hegel's philosophy of art, as well as on Deleuze's film theory and Arthur Danto thesis on painting and cinema, Jerold Abrams argues that cinema becomes philosophy. Firstly, cinema "transcends representationalism"; secondly, and as a consequence of the former, cinema enters the movement of history (the general movement of the *Geist*), becoming self-conscious, reflecting on its own conditions. Now, the reflection on the "historical self-consciousness" of cinema; this double movement is the singularity of Hitchcock. Therefore, it is with him that cinema ascends to the highest form of consciousness;

that we witness the end of cinema, not in a technological sense, but in an historical sense: in the absence of the possibility of evolution, film becomes post-historical.

Alan Woolfolk not only stresses Hitchcock's social critic in *Vertigo*, namely "the poverty of American institutional and popular psychology when faced with serious moral questions […]" (p.238) but also that Hitchcock shows the effects of the fragmentation of the individual after the "fleeing of the gods" (Hölderlin) or the "death of God" (Nietzsche). Individuals are caught between the decaying of the collective "ascetic culture" and the loneliness of mass society. Thus, Hitchcock emerges as an heir of the "crisis psychology", that finds in Nietzsche, Freud and Kierkegaard its prophets. This is the case of John "Scottie" Ferguson, for Hitchcock "prefers to describe the deficits of the self in a culture with a dearth of spiritual and moral demands, rather than the inner conflicts of one with too many" (p.238). Therefore, for Woolfolk one of the best ways to analyse *Vertigo* is to pay attention to the psychological references, for this "therapeutic culture" in which the characters are portrayed is immersed in such references but is powerless in curing psychic ills.

Following Russell's *Marriage and Morals*, Jennifer Jenkins considers marriage as a leitmotif in *North by Northwest*. Hitchcock's film emerges as a social critic, amidst the reconsideration of human relationships and romantic love, that is, a "re-negotiations of gender roles […]" (p.255). *North by Northwest*, contests the theme of feminine "conformist domesticity", replacing it by autonomous moral agents and an ethics of choice. Neil Syniard too gives continuity to what may be considered as a more social approach towards morals and ethics in Hitchcock, not only by examining professional ethics in the controversy between Hitchcock and Bernard Hermann, but also by showing how *Torn Curtain* explores morality "in both the personal and political sphere" (p.272). In fact, the main protagonist's role (Paul Newman as Michael Armstrong) is a dubious and ambiguous one, not only due to the nature of his mission but also derived from the relationships that he establishes with other characters, inasmuch as he begins to endanger people to the point that Sinyard calls *Torn Curtain* a Faustian narrative.

The last contribution, written by Homer Pettey, drawing on the philosophy of Hobbes and Hume, states that in *Frenzy* Hitchcock "plays with the philosophical concepts of scepticism, causation, and moral judgement" (p.289), casting at the end what may be called an alternative to both philosophical systems (a different "moral gaze"). The film not only represents one of Hitchcock's signatures, namely the theme of the false accusation where the innocent protagonist (Richard Blaney) is accused of a crime he did not committed, but also leaves the moral judgement and conclusion to the audience. Living in what may be called a "Hobbesian society or social structure", Pettey shows how the narrative of *Frenzy* makes visible the chasm that exists between the individual and the state, and the risks that the former must take to prove his innocence. Hume's sympathy is materialised in Inspector Oxford's doubts and

the Hobbesian society and justice (which central figure is the state) "finds its antithesis in the Blaney case, whereby all judicial procedures were based in error […]" (p.303).

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[1] *Three Philosophical Filmmakers: Hitchcock, Welles, Renoir.* This seminal work was also cited by the editors of *Hitchcock's Moral Gaze*.

[2] Also cited by the editors of the collection (p.8).

[3] From now on this work will be referenced only according to its page number.