

'Designing for Moving Pictures': Production Designers, Authorship and Archives

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The title of my talk is from a book published in 1941 by Edward Carrick. The publisher – Studio Publications – made a speciality of 'How To Do It' books, including volumes on wood engraving, photography, embroidery design, lithography and even soap carving. The book-jacket notes for this one proudly declared the publication as: 'The first in the English language which deals *exclusively* with the complicated art and technique of designing for the motion picture'. It was intended to be read by professionals and amateurs and the author was highly qualified for this task. Carrick was the son of celebrated theatre designer Edward Gordon Craig (he changed his last name to avoid confusion with his father). Carrick designed many films, heading art departments for Associated Talking Pictures at Ealing in the 1930s, working with the Crown Film Unit in the 1940s and finally at Pinewood Studios in the 1950s. Carrick's published research and papers housed in the Harry Ransome Humanities Research Centre in Austin, Texas, serve as a salutary reminder of the limitations of conceiving film authorship solely in terms of the director, and of how archives do not typically reflect the collaborative, professional codes established for key functions surrounding film production at every stage. I want to argue that there is much to be gained from taking a multifarious, inclusive approach to investigating source material and that its use is not confined to film historians. Crucially, by consulting a plethora of sources we can illuminate more precisely the significance of *different* contexts of production, from first release, through to VHS, DVD and downloadable incarnations. I'm going to look at examples of art directors' papers to illustrate how their work is crucial in influencing a production, while suggesting some of the methodological issues involved in deciphering such material, particularly relating to authorship. Finally, I suggest some implications of the research, and future directions which might be productive in thinking about expanding the corpus of archival evidence and its potential application.

Primary documentation is not always consulted when films are re-mastered or restored, resulting in films existing in many different forms and in varying types of package. While DVDs commonly contain a 'director's commentary', 'extraneous'

material such as trailers, posters, set and costume designs, is seldom reproduced with a similar attention to contributing insight, or problematising notions of authorship. There is rarely an explanation for its inclusion in the package which presents it as additional ‘eye candy’ for the collector, a way of differentiating the product in a market aimed at DVD *cinephiles*. Indeed, a hierarchy seems to persist which privileges the significance of auteur-director archives, relegating visual material such as set drawings, production designs and models as secondary to interviews with directors, scripts and correspondence.

Yet recent work on Hitchcock – *auteur par excellence* – has shown the benefits of seeing beyond the auteur-director, in acknowledgement of the fact that in spite of his self-promotion, he worked intensively with many collaborators who can be said to have had a decisive impact on key films. This was demonstrated at a wonderful travelling exhibition called *Casting a Shadow* which first opened in 2007 at the Bloch Museum of Art, Northwestern University. Able to show drawings, sketches, storyboards and costume designs, the exhibition demonstrated the range of documentation associated with particular stages of a film’s production. These included drawings that were used to inspire the director and designer in the early stages of a project, through to those which assisted the crew in problem-solving a particular technical issue for the camera and editing. As Hitchcock stated: ‘It is no use telling people: they have to SEE. We are making pictures, moving pictures, and though sound helps...they still remain primarily a visual art’.¹

Yet Carrick was right there, doing this in his book in 1941, with his reproductions of the different phases of a production, explaining in detail how designers worked, their professional backgrounds and technical expertise. While he praised the work of British designers, he was acutely aware of the trans-national nature of British cinema with its high number of émigré personnel working in this area. In a recent research project I’ve explored the seminal and sustained influence of Continental design practice in the UK during the 1930s and 1940s, a theme Carrick was attuned to with his admiration for French and German practitioners.² His book included, for example, detail on Lazare Meerson and Cavalcanti, identified with the ‘French School’ of designers. He also admired the work of Klaus Richter and the German School, illustrating his book with relevant drawings showing Richter’s original pen and wash drawing for the student’s room in *The Student of Prague*, 1913, and designs by Herth and Roerig for *Faust*, 1926. Carrick noted that Richter’s

drawings were generally ‘perfect’ for a set – props, lighting and figures all thought out with the main character of the drama ever in mind. On the other hand, those by Herlth and Röhrig tended to be more about establishing a ‘style’ rather than conveying the specifics for the actual set.

Notions of the director as ‘auteur’ were challenged by studying émigré art directors such as Alfred Junge, Lazare Meerson, Erno Metzner, Vincent Korda. What emerges is a far more collaborative concept of the evolution of a project from script to screen and this is in large part because of examining their drawings and sketches which are held in various archives (Austin, Texas; BFI National Archive; Bifi, Paris; Margaret Herrick Library, LA). These artists reorganised the concept of *mise-en-scene* by aspiring towards a concept of ‘total design’ (this had its origins in German practice; William Cameron Menzies in the USA was also a great advocate of this approach) that emphasised pre-planning the ‘look’ of a film before shooting began, involving designers with key aspects of creative control during the production process. One of the most striking drawings reproduced in Carrick’s book is of camera angles showing a ‘bird’s eye view’ of a set, as well as the layout of three sets altogether on one floor, showing the allowance made for long shots. Designers’ sketches, drawings, models and built sets provided the essential stylistic mood of a film that was further embellished through repetition and contrast in collaboration with writers, directors and cinematographers. Often designers would work on a wide range of different projects, demonstrating versatility and often in difficult circumstances. In methodological and conceptual terms this means moving away from conventional notions of authorship to a more *functionalist* concept of design, focusing on what was achievable within particular production environments, studio agendas, budgetary constraints and styles. To be considered ‘good’ or ‘the best’, meant a designer having to adapt to what was required. That doesn’t mean that they didn’t have preferred methods and approaches, it’s just that the generic nature of filmmaking required them to be versatile in such a way that searching for a clearly-recognisable authorial stamp is not particularly the most productive way to study design in this period.

The case of Alfred Junge working with Hitchcock is instructive on this point, and the archival evidence was crucial in developing this approach. After emigrating from Germany, Junge became head of the art department at Gaumont-British in the 1930s and he went on to work with Powell and Pressburger. Hitchcock’s time in Germany in the 1920s introduced him to methods of production design that were later

taken up in Britain when Junge revolutionised design methods and practice. Some of the most important innovations introduced by Junge included the use of scaffolding and crane technology to facilitate camera and set mobility.³ Junge also famously established the designer's right to fix camera positions for all set-ups.⁴ This is a key indicator of the extent to which it gradually became recognised that designers' awareness of 'camera consciousness' was a crucial determinant of mood.⁵ This again relates to Germanic influences since cinematographers such as Gunther Krampf who also worked in Britain studied a designer's drawings before lighting a set which harks back to the close co-operation between art directors and cinematographers during the heyday of Weimar cinema. As a contemporary design critic noted when commenting on the work of Korda and Junge, the 'perfect' sketch for a film design 'shows style and furnishing, indicates character of dressings, determines lighting'.⁶ These competences placed the designer in a highly influential position during the pre-planning of a film in designing sets that anticipated *moving* images: the *pre*-filmic image is therefore conceptually linked to the *pro*-filmic image. We can see this in examples of Junge's drawings for *Gangway*: the Daily Journal office set and then how he designed the tracking shot down the corridor (the original drawings are to be found in Junge's archive, see below).

Joseph Garnarcz has argued that when Hitchcock worked in Germany in the 1920s his own expertise in the area of design informed his 'cinematic ideals' of creating a 'style of visual narration' and also to establish himself and his reputation as the central creative force behind his films.⁷ Yet this tends to overlook the work of the art director/production designer within such a system which Hitchcock would have witnessed as operating in a very collaborative environment. I want to argue that even in the case of a director such as Hitchcock, who actively promoted the view that he was in total control of the images in films he directed, there was room for a designer's influence to be of key importance in determining the 'look' of a film. German practices would have engrained this into him, so much so that perhaps he felt this went without saying when he was seeking to place himself at the centre of his work for publicity purposes, and to enhance his own professional status at a time when it must be remembered his position as an *auteur* was not established or even articulated in those terms.

Junge's archive (in Austin, Texas) consists mainly of set drawings, so the challenge is to connect them to other related documentation on contemporary design

practice, as well as ‘reading’ them in relation to ideas about film space, ‘pre-filmic’ images; *mise-en-scene* and on-and –off-screen space. To demonstrate this I now want to turn to two specific examples of the director-designer collaboration where there is evidence that the designer played a significant part in developing the conception of a scene. The first is from *Young and Innocent* (1937). It is clear from examining Junge’s set drawings that he often anticipated the camera’s exploration of space, such as in a key example from *Young and Innocent* when his work showed the court corridor set from above. While this shot doesn’t appear in the film, it’s important in presenting the geography of the building that would have informed Hitchcock’s approach to the use of space in the court scene: the key point is that the main courtroom has two doors, shown from above in Junge’s sketch which provides the geographic rationale for the action. Central character and murder suspect Robert is questioned by detectives and is taken to court for the hearing. The case has been delayed because Robert’s attorney has lost his glasses. Robert is escorted into the courtroom where another case is being tried. When it is over the next crowd begins to enter and in the confusion Robert slips away from his escorts. They notice when they see that a man they were following is not Robert: ‘Here, this is the wrong man!’ We see Robert entering the first door he finds which turns out to open on to another aisle of the same courtroom. The news spreads that a prisoner has escaped. Robert sits down and slips on the glasses he took from the attorney earlier. In the confusion people start leaving the courtroom; Robert slips out undetected but is not able to see very clearly because of the thick glasses. Outside, he walks calmly through the crowd of officers. Informed by Junge’s idea of the courtroom having two doors, as we see in the drawing, Hitchcock is thus able to translate this space into scenes of suspense and comedy. Outside the courtrooms we see Hitchcock in a famous cameo role, as Robert escapes.

My second example is from *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934). A key scene in which a change of identity/disguise occurs appears to have been carefully plotted in collaboration with the art director. Lorre is one of the villains in a film that begins in St. Moritz, where a holidaying family, Bob and Jill (Leslie Banks and Edna Best) and their young daughter Betty (Nova Pilbeam), unwittingly befriend a French man who is shot. As he is dying he tells Jill where to find a cryptic message which Bob recovers. This is a note which includes the name, G. Barbor, and a location, ‘Wapping’. Betty is kidnapped to stop Bob from passing on the information and on

his return to London he decides to investigate the message himself, discovering that the name 'Barbor' referred to a dentist. We see here how details that can be found in drawings were often exaggerated in close-up to produce what we would probably identify as a typical 'Hitchcockian' motif, in this case a model of false teeth to indicate the dentist's surgery. While Junge's drawing had this in the background, and so the details is just visible, in the film Hitchcock close to show this detail in close-up for the huge false teeth which signals the beginning of the extended sequence at the dentist's in Wapping. We don't know whether the idea for this came from Junge or Hitchcock, but it's certainly there in Junge's design which is dated May 1934. We know that the film's scenario was given final shape in April and May, but actual filming did not take place until later on in June-August. This gives the drawings a key role in pre-production planning as one would expect, but the dates alert us to their foundational value in preparation for shooting. For the Wapping sequence Junge's drawing of the man ascending the stairs bears an extremely close resemblance to the final scene in the film as suspense is created by low-key lighting. The drawings for this film also reveal how the central light that becomes an important element of suspense in the following scene, was very much Junge's idea, again completed in May 1934, well before shooting commenced. Indeed, this may have acted as an inspiration for the action as the light becomes an active prop when Bob (Leslie Banks) manipulates it to disguise the fact that he's swapped places with the dentist. For this scene the light becomes an active element of *mise-en-scene*, demonstrating how a 'pre-filmic' idea such as this is always predicated on a conception of the *moving image*. This is how the scene develops: Bob in dentist's chair being closely examined by dentist he realises is one of the villains; Bob struggling with the dentist; Bob manages to overcome the dentist by using the anaesthetic on him and Bob puts on the dentist's white coat. Bob hears and we see a man coming up the stairs outside. Bob turns light towards door so that whoever enters will be blinded; the villain enters and looks away. Because of the light he hasn't noticed Bob's masquerade as the dentist and looks towards Peter Lorre who has just entered the room.

As well as analysing set design drawings, to study this topic other sources are important including contemporary journals on architecture and building as well as Edward Carrick's publications and papers. In turn, this led in our Set Design project not only to re-evaluating conventional notions of authorship, but also to taking a different approach to interpreting design within the moving image, drawing on

theoretical work which we built upon to establish our own perspective on how sets were 'displayed', to a lesser or greater degree, to audiences. Drawing on Charles and Mirella Affron's 5-step criteria set out in their book *Sets in Motion* for determining the extent to which a set engages with narrative on increasing levels of visibility, we were interested in the relation between sets and narrative, asking questions such as when does a set exceed its narrative requirement and become spectacle? Also important was the work of Charles Tashiro in his book *Pretty Pictures* which discusses how sets invite 'outward looking' beyond the confines of the frame. While some images operate 'centripetally', others are more 'open' - centrifugal images - encouraged by camera movements such as pans or figure movement away from the centre and suggesting designed space beyond the frame. Junge's set for *Evergreen* (1934) was designed to accommodate Matthews's dancing, creating a navigable, geographic plot which allowed for considerable movement within the frame, anticipating camera movement to create an expansive sense of pushing at its boundaries.

Conclusion

Although Carrick's book was published in 1941 film historians have been slow in grasping the full implications of its significance in the academy and beyond. In a special issue of the *Journal of British Cinema and Television* on Production Design published in 2005, Sue Harper and Vincent Porter comment that: 'The failure of media historians to address issues of visual style may lie in part with the difficulty of finding an appropriate verbal language with which to discuss it...In order to appreciate the visual style of a film or television programme, the scholar probably requires not merely the analytical abilities of the historian, but also the visual eye of the painter or photographer and the structural sensibility of the architect'.⁸ In this talk I've concentrated on how designers can be seen to exercise a crucial role in the planning and execution of a film project, working alongside others, including the director, in the problem-solving enterprise of filmmaking. Knowledge of the multifarious and visual nature of the archival material on which such analyses depend, highlights the importance of archives and their acquisition policies. Designer's drawings and set models present archives with problems. The British Film Institute, for example, keeps such materials in Berkhamsted, a location relatively difficult to access and the

materials are not available digitally and with no copyright clearance. Also, with many British art directors' papers residing in American archives, travel costs for consultation can be very expensive. Often undated and without supporting documentation in the form of memos or letters, the materials themselves often require more than the usual degree of detective work to contemplate the significance of such documentation. Jacques Derrida's notion of 'Archive Fever' is particularly pertinent in relation to visual materials about a visual medium. While archives preserve at the same time they remind us of what has been lost, the missing studio memoranda, contracts and letters which might elucidate more about many under-valued workers in the film industry. What is lost haunts the researcher on two counts; first in the sense that key documents have not survived, and, secondly, according to Derrida, in organising materials archives often lose something along the way as regulatory systems are prioritised, hence his observation that: 'The future of the archive is spectral and the structure of the archive is spectral'.⁹ It is important at the same time not to place too great an emphasis in assembling 'complete' documentation, for surely this is an impossible goal which in any case can never amount to an unmediated notion of 'truth'. Yet archives frequently problematise accepted accounts and theories and play a key role in securing a future for the past. This future should be directed towards being fundamentally involved in preservation and restoration projects, as well as influencing the commercial imperatives of DVD production so that 'extras' of visual materials are adequately contextualised with the same degree of attention devoted to conferring authorial status on the director. For all his swaggering boastfulness, it is ironic that Michael Powell was fully appreciative of the work of the art director, particularly Alfred Junge with whom he worked on many celebrated films including *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* and *Black Narcissus*. Perhaps the greatest compliment was paid to him when his drawing for *A Matter of Life and Death* actually appeared in the film, as an element in the transition from earth to heaven. This example is a fitting one on which to finish since it graphically illustrates how a drawing inspired movement in a spectral moment before the figures become animated. Indeed, as Carrick so cogently argued, the essence of the design was for *moving* pictures.

¹ Sidney Gottlieb, ed. *Hitchcock on Hitchcock* (University of California Press, 1995), p. 48, quoted in Will Schmenner and Corinne Granof (eds), *Castings a Shadow: Creating the Hitchcock Film* (Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 9.

² See Tim Bergfelder, Sue Harris and Sarah Street, *Film Architecture and the Transnational Imagination: Set Design in 1930s European Cinema* (Amsterdam University Press, 2007). This book was the primary outcome of an AHRC project on Set Design in 1930s European Cinema.

³ Tim Bergfelder, 'The Production Designer and the Gesamtkunstwerk: German film technicians in the British Film Industry of the 1930s' in Higson, A. (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings in British Cinema* (Cassell, 1996), p. 25.

⁴ Edward Carrick, *Art and Design in the British Film* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1948), p. 13.

⁵ The term 'camera consciousness' is used by Carrick, *Designing for Films*, p. 24.

⁶ Carina Carroll, 'Art direction for films' in *Design for Today*, Oct 1935, pp. 389-395.

⁷ Joseph Garncarz, 'German Hitchcock', in Sidney Gottlieb and Christopher Brookhouse (eds), *Framing Hitchcock: Selected essays from the Hitchcock Annual*, (Wayne State University Press, 2002), p. 73.

⁸ Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, 'Beyond Media History: the Challenge of Visual Style', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2005, p. 15.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 91.