1983

**Briefly Noted**

**Recommended Citation**

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Briefly Noted


A. A. Chesterfield was a clerk for the Hudson’s Bay Company in their Great Whale River and Fort George outposts from 1902 to 1904. When he had the time, Chesterfield took photographs of the Cree and Inuit people who came to the outpost. In 1974, over seventy years after these images were produced, William James, who was on the faculty of Queen’s University, discovered the glass plate negatives and records of Chesterfield. James put together an exhibit of the pictures and produced a catalog to accompany the exhibit around Canada. The photographs are extraordinarily strong. Many share the “confrontational style” of the Inuit photographs taken by Robert Flaherty a decade later. The people stare out at you in a way that is compelling and at times disturbing. Chesterfield took these images for his own amusement. Until James produced this catalog few had been published or exhibited. We know them at all simply because his widow decided to give the collection to someone who would preserve it. As more and more collections of photographs like those of Chesterfield, Flaherty, or Roland Reed emerge, we begin to realize how many more there must still be in attics and barns throughout North America. We also are beginning to realize that our assumptions about the photographic portraiture of native peoples has been based too much upon a handful of photographers when in fact there were hundreds, all trying to record the rapidly disappearing lives of the Native American.


This analysis of Hitchcock’s work is based on a detailed examination of five of his best films: The Lodger (1926), Murder! (1930), The Thirty-Nine Steps (1935), Shadow of a Doubt (1943), and Psycho (1960). This particular combination of films serves as an excellent vehicle for the author’s demonstration of developments in Hitchcock’s use of formal devices and in the philosophy served by these devices. What sets this book apart from other books on Hitchcock and, indeed, from almost all other books on film—is the extraordinary degree to which the discussion is based on a direct examination of visual material. The book contains hundreds of frame enlargements from the five films, and much of the text is tied directly to these illustrations. Thus, Rothman’s remarks about such matters as point of view, camera angle, and visual metaphor are made with a doggedness of concenrrcoco and authority that is rarely present in writing on film. It must also be noted, however, that the author’s ultimate intention—to which the formal analysis is always secondary—is to arrive at an understanding of the philosophy which Hitchcock’s films embody. Accordingly, much of the book is given over to an attempt to justify the claim that Hitchcock’s films are self-reflexively preoccupied with the nature of the medium itself and with the relationship between filmmaker and audience. Readers interested in this line of interpretation will undoubtedly find this a most rewarding book.


According to the dust cover, this book is “a moment in the history of a small farming community in East Central Illinois.” Photographer Raymond Blial has chosen to depict the place mainly through informal portraits taken where he found the people. One is reminded of the work of Bill Owens, particularly Suburbia. Blial, like Owens, lives near the community he portrayed. The subjects often confront the camera in an apparently relaxed manner. There is an implicit trust expressed that results from the photographer’s participating in the life of the community he is trying to represent.