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Behind the Curtain: Tracing Hitchcock's Hidden Fingerprints in Jerusalem

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This video examines *With Hitchcock in Jerusalem* (1966), an Israeli state-sponsored propaganda film documenting Alfred Hitchcock's visit to Jerusalem. By juxtaposing it with Hitchcock's feature film *Torn Curtain* (1966) and other historical audiovisual materials, the video constructs a narrative that blurs the line between reality and fantasy.

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Creator's Statement

Shortly before traveling to South Bend, Indiana, to participate in the workshop "Reframing the Argument" at the University of Notre Dame, I received an email from my Ph.D. supervisor, Prof. Orit Rozin. Attached was a Word document containing detailed feedback on the first chapter of my dissertation on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and propaganda films produced by Israeli and Palestinian institutions between the late 1960s and 1987.

The chapter was overly long and examined how Israeli state-subsidized newsreels shaped historical perceptions of the conflict. Within it was a subchapter presenting a tangential yet compelling archival discovery: while reviewing files from the Israeli Film Service, I encountered documentation revealing that Yachin Hirsh—one of the key cinematographers of Israeli newsreels—had been commissioned in 1966 to shoot a state-sponsored propaganda film documenting Alfred Hitchcock's visit to Jerusalem. I was immediately captivated and immersed myself in further archival research, locating the full 15-minute film, originally produced for American television and recently digitized by the Israeli Film Archive.

Although my supervisor acknowledged the story's interest, her feedback was clear: it was not directly relevant to the chapter's central argument and would need to be cut. She was right. Yet I began to wonder: what if I could reframe the argument? What if this episode could be approached not only historiographically but also videographically? The "Reframing the Argument" workshop provided the opportunity to pursue this inquiry. What might otherwise have remained a marginal footnote evolved, through videographic criticism, into a distinct line of research—one that emerged only through unmediated engagement with the media in video editing software.

Before embarking on this videographic examination, I sought to situate the material within a broader historical framework. Hitchcock's visit to Israel was part of a global publicity tour for his Cold War thriller *Torn Curtain* (1966), which follows an American physicist (Paul Newman) posing as a defector behind the Iron Curtain, while his fiancée (Julie Andrews), unaware of his mission, believes he has defected to the USSR. Though commercially successful, the film received a lukewarm critical response. Newman later regretted his participation, and Andrews remarked that Hitchcock seemed more interested in manipulating audience reactions than in directing actors (Spoto 1984: 519).

Questions of audiovisual manipulation were clearly on Hitchcock's mind. During the *Torn Curtain* publicity campaign, he spoke to students at Oxford University, advancing what might be described as Orwellian ideas about cinema's power to shape perception. He referred to "mass hypnotism" as the future of the moving image and likened the audience to an instrument played by filmmakers. Two months later, Hitchcock arrived in Israel, where he participated in the aforementioned propaganda film—a project driven by figures who may have shared his understanding of cinema's strategic potential to mold public opinion.

In *With Hitchcock in Jerusalem*, Hitchcock appears almost as a supporting figure. The central actor is Teddy Kollek, then mayor of Jerusalem, whose biography intersects with the formative years of Israeli intelligence. In the early 1950s, he was sent to Washington to cultivate ties with the CIA, later serving as Director General of the Prime Minister's Office (Kollek and Kollek 1978: 90–104; Bachi-Kolodny 2008: 71–117). In 1956, following Israel's occupation of Gaza and Sinai during the Suez War, Kollek explored cooperation with American intelligence to infiltrate Arab radio broadcasts and insert Israeli and pro-Western messaging. Within months, after another visit to the United States, he became convinced of television's greater potential and abandoned his radio ambitions, later playing a key role in developing Israel's ties with Hollywood (Shavit 2018: 235; Shaw and Goodman 2022: 68).

This belief in the strategic power of moving images shaped Kollek's meeting with Hitchcock in Jerusalem in September 1966, resulting in a state-sponsored film intended for American television. Kollek's involvement extended beyond his on-screen role as Hitchcock's guide: he personally oversaw post-production, aiming to secure its broadcast in America on a national channel affiliated with Universal Studios, which had also produced *Torn Curtain*. To this end, he maintained direct contact with Universal president Lew Wasserman and his deputy David Lipton, and even enlisted Alma Reville, Hitchcock's wife, to remind him of Wasserman's interest in the project.

What lay behind Kollek's enthusiasm? Did he and Hitchcock share similar ideas about engineering audiovisual perception? What did Kollek hope to achieve through

this collaboration? Was he seeking to shape American sentiment toward Israel, and if so, what message did he aim to convey? In other words, what were the hidden fingerprints behind the Hitchcock–Kollek connection?

My video essay is a videographic attempt to address these questions. By juxtaposing *With Hitchcock in Jerusalem* with *Torn Curtain*, alongside other audiovisual materials featuring both Hitchcock and Kollek, I construct a narrative that blurs the boundaries between fiction and propaganda, and between reality and fantasy. Through techniques such as split screens, sound manipulation, compositing, rotoscoping, and photomontage, I revisit a neglected thread in my research.

Reframing the argument through videographic practice has deepened my understanding of historical events while sharpening my awareness of audiovisual persuasion. Rather than merely describing propagandistic manipulation, I applied its mechanisms to the films themselves. By deconstructing them, detaching them from their original context, challenging image–sound relations, and re-editing them alongside other materials, I reframed propaganda into a different kind of fantasy. In this process, I constructed a new original narrative that may have historical roots yet also sustains its own life and its own invented reality.

Compared to written scholarship, the audiovisual form appeared both more deceptive and more persuasive: its seams are less visible, while historical "facts" become more fragile and open to manipulation. Ultimately, this videographic examination demonstrates how such methods can reframe almost any argument, and how audiovisual propaganda can reframe reality itself. It also clarifies a central hypothesis of my research: films do not merely represent reality—they actively shape it, laying the foundations of a collective historical perception that almost always intertwines reality and fantasy.

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Biography

Iddo Better Pocker is a Ph.D. candidate at the Chaim Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies and Archaeology at Tel Aviv University, researching the audio-visual history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His research focuses on propaganda films produced or subsidized by Israeli authorities and Palestinian organizations between 1967 and 1987 to serve national agendas. He is a recipient of the Azrieli Graduate Studies Fellowship and the Rotenstreich Scholarship for Outstanding Doctoral Students.

Review by Ohad Landesman, The Steve Tisch School of Film and Television at Tel Aviv University

Iddo Better Pocker's video essay offers a lucid and inventive example of how videographic practice can function as a genuine mode of historical inquiry rather than a mere illustration of archival research. By centering on the seemingly marginal episode of Alfred Hitchcock's 1966 visit to Jerusalem, the video essay demonstrates how videographic methods can reframe historiographic relevance itself, transforming what might appear as an anecdotal detour into a critical lens on Cold War propaganda, audiovisual persuasion, and the construction of historical perception.

The work's primary strength lies in its reflexive engagement with manipulation as both object and method. Through split screens, compositing, sound disjunctions, and rhythmic re-editing, the video essay does not simply expose the propagandistic ambitions behind *With Hitchcock in Jerusalem*; it reenacts and tests those ambitions within its own audiovisual argument. These formal strategies do not simply compare fiction and propaganda but actively blur their boundaries, encouraging viewers to attend to shared techniques of suspense, performance, and narrative control.

Rather than advancing a single explanatory claim about intention or influence, the video essay remains attentive to the ambiguity of the historical encounter it examines. The figure of Teddy Kollek, for example, emerges not as a fully legible authorial force but as part of a broader network in which cinematic publicity, state image-making, and Cold War geopolitics intersect. This restraint allows the videographic argument to unfold through audiovisual association rather than assertion.

By foregrounding its own processes of re-editing, recombination, and narrative construction, the video essay makes visible how historical meaning is shaped through audiovisual form. In doing so, it offers a persuasive demonstration of how videographic criticism can generate historical insight by working with images and sounds rather than merely about them.

Review by Daniel J. Pope, University of Massachusetts Amherst

A videographic essay with Alfred Hitchcock's "fingerprints" in its title might evoke a Hitchcockian aesthetic—suspense, dread, desire, shock. Instead, Iddo Better Pocker's "Behind the Curtain" blends the slick tone of spy movies (think James Bond) with parodic documentary and the flashy feel of advertising. The result is an enthralling, imbricate portrait of Hitchcock's 1966 visit to Jerusalem, a tour for Hitchcock to promote his recently released *Torn Curtain* (1966) but also for Teddy Kollek to promote Jerusalem and Israel to America and the West with the propaganda film *With Hitchcock in Jerusalem*.

Better Pocker's work certainly emulates the ludic wit evident in nearly every one of Hitchcock's films. We have the 2024 revival of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Sunset Boulevard* (1993) playfully positing Hitchcock's impressions of Jerusalem as of an "abandoned movie set." A lapel pin with the arms of the city of Jerusalem features visually as a "MacGuffin," an element that drives the plot of a film but is ultimately of no importance. Documents flash past highlighting stories of Kollek's role in international espionage and the Mossad. A photo of Kollek appears in a newspaper "wanted" notice in a scene from *Torn Curtain*.

At the center of this playful artistry looms the question of Hitchcock and propaganda. Seductive, playing on our fears, stoking our desires, propaganda is not interested in content but only in creating an effect in its audience. A sentiment we see Hitchcock profess. If Hitchcock were a cynical manipulator, then his alignment with themes of propaganda holds. The "curtain" of the videographic essay's title might refer to the Cold-War-era Iron Curtain in *Torn Curtain*, but its overriding resonance is with "the man behind the curtain" from *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939), who is revealed to be an illusionist, a showman, a charlatan. But Hitchcock was more. "I only deal in fantasy [not facts]" Hitchcock coyly claims, but *The Wrong Man* (1956), *Blackmail* (1929), and *The Lodger* (1927) are based on or inspired by real events. Hitchcock's most factual work was his contribution to the unfinished Holocaust documentary, *Memory of the Camps*, the factuality of whose footage he strove to present as unequivocal. "Israel, as I've seen it, is not a fantasy. It's a fact," Hitchcock continues. The year following his tour, war broke out between Israel and its neighbors who would not likewise declare the young country's legitimacy. In this fantastic videographic essay, as playful as a Hitchcock film, facts also abide.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.