

Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*

Edited by

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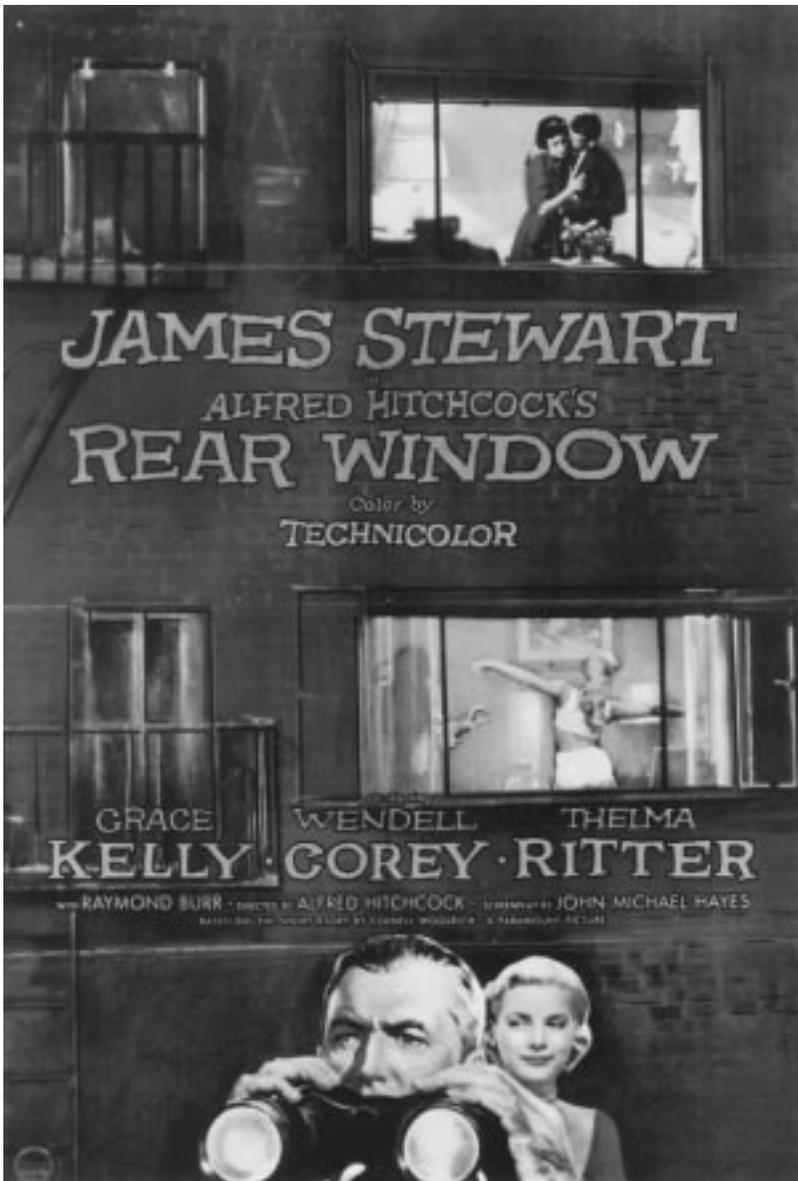
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Introduction

SPECTACLE AND NARRATIVE

Like many of the best works of classical Hollywood cinema, *Rear Window* is a deceptively obvious film. Its chief virtues are clearly visible for all to see. An exemplary instance of commercial motion picture entertainment, it represents the best that Hollywood had to offer its audiences in the tumultuous 1950s.¹ (Indeed, its classic status continued to be reaffirmed in the 1990s; in 1997, the Librarian of Congress placed it on the National Film Registry, and in 1998, it was listed among the American Film Institute's best 100 American films of all time.) Filmed in glorious Technicolor and projected on a big screen in a widescreen format,² it is, on a purely technological level, a compelling example of 1950s motion picture spectacle. Though its subject matter lacks the epic proportions of that era's big-budget biblical spectacles, costume pictures, or westerns, its basic situation is pure spectacle. Indeed, its story is "about" spectacle; it explores the fascination with looking and the attraction of that which is being looked at. The story goes as follows: Confined to a wheelchair with a broken leg, photojournalist L. B. Jefferies (James Stewart) has little to do but to look out his rear window at his Greenwich Village neighbors. He suspects that one of them, a jewelry salesman named Thorwald, has murdered his invalid wife. With the help of his girlfriend, Lisa Fremont (Grace Kelly), and his nurse, Stella (Thelma Ritter), he continues to observe Thorwald until evidence is discovered that confirms that Thorwald did, indeed, kill his wife.

In a number of ways, the film looks back to what scholars of



The Cinema of Attractions: An original poster for *Rear Window* exploits its status as spectacle. Note the ad's rearrangement of apartments and rewriting of basic story material (the sinister hand) to emphasize love, sex, and potential violence. Photo courtesy of Paramount.

early cinema have termed “the cinema of attractions.”³ According to Tom Gunning, early (i.e., pre-1906) films were more concerned with exhibition, presentation, and display than with narration. They consisted of a series of loosely connected acts or attractions, resembling, in part, the structure of a vaudeville show. Though *Rear Window* has a strong narrative line and is centrally concerned with the act of narration, its story is grounded not only in voyeurism but also in exhibitionist display, “revealing [as its advertising copy proclaims] the privacy of a dozen lives.”⁴ It consists of a “montage of attractions,” of various windows that display a variety of different “acts.” The film is about what the hero sees out his rear window. What he sees is apparently random – different neighbors are engaged in various, unrelated activities. These activities constitute the film’s spectacle. The sense that the hero makes out of these activities comprises the film’s narrative, a narrative that he imposes, as it were, on seemingly random events.

Rear Window is spectacle in more traditional ways as well. It is concerned with the display of its lavish set and costumes. The film’s set (discussed in this volume by Scott Curtis) remains one of its chief attractions; it is a “star” in its own right, dominating posters and other advertising material for the film on its initial release. “Fifty men worked for two months to build the set, which includes seven apartment buildings, most of them six stories high, and three smaller buildings on the other side of the street.”⁵ Occupying an entire sound stage, the set measured 98 feet in width, 185 feet in length, and 40 feet in height; it cost more than \$9,000 to design and more than \$72,000 to construct. These were unprecedented costs for a single studio set in 1954.

Designed by Edith Head, the costumes worn by the film’s heroine (also discussed elsewhere by Sarah Street) represent the latest in Paris fashion. The display of these costumes provides the viewer with a kind of fashion show, a form of spectacle that was a staple of Hollywood productions of the past (from *Fifty Years of Paris Fashions, 1859–1909*, 1910, to *Cover Girl*, 1944, *Singin’ in the Rain*, 1952, and *Funny Face*, 1957) and that continues into the nineties (*Ready to Wear*, 1994). Popular awareness of costume design in

motion pictures was longstanding, but critical interest in the “art” of costume design blossomed only a few years before *Rear Window*; the first Academy Award for Costume Design was presented as recently as 1948. Fashion featured in the headlines in 1947, when Christian Dior unveiled his “New Look” in Paris. Interest in fashion dramatically escalated in the 1950s when Oleg Cassini, Dior, and Givenchy became household names. At the same time, fashion magazines, such as *Harper’s Bazaar* (the journal read by the heroine in the film’s last scene), functioned as mass-produced fashion shows in pictures and print and brought the spectacle of fashion to millions of postwar, middle-class, female consumers.

On a purely visual level, then, *Rear Window’s* set and costume design provide viewers with something spectacular to look at. The film’s story and theme build on this highly visible base, exploiting and exploring the nature of spectacle. The film does this by examining more abstract aspects of the relationship between spectator and spectacle, between the film’s voyeur-hero and what he sees. It addresses the concepts of voyeurism and exhibitionism and explores the nature of their interconnectedness.

The film is deceptively obvious in that it is, above all, so eminently entertaining. It combines an engagingly suspenseful murder mystery with a seductively sexy love story featuring two of the decade’s most attractive stars, the well-known James Stewart and the relative newcomer, Grace Kelly. The narrative plays with their screen personae: Stewart, Hollywood’s most eligible bachelor until his recent marriage in 1949 at age 41, plays Jeff, a freedom-loving photographer who fears marriage because, as he tells his editor Gunnison, when he’s married, he’ll “never be able to go anywhere.” Stewart’s most famous postwar role – as George Bailey in Frank Capra’s *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946) – explores this theme: George desperately wants to leave Bedford Falls, to become an engineer, and to build bridges in far-away countries, but is trapped in his hometown, initially by the needs of the family business and then by marriage and children.

Kelly had a somewhat notorious (off-screen) reputation for seducing her leading men.⁶ For Hitchcock, Kelly was like “a snow covered volcano” – hot on the inside and icy cool on the outside.⁷

In *Rear Window*, he contrasts her overt sexual desire with her cool, quasi-aristocratic reserve. In the film, Kelly plays Lisa, a high-fashion career girl who will do almost anything, including moving “into an apartment across the way and do[ing] the dance of the seven veils every hour,” to get the hero’s attention.

The narrative is based, in large part, on a short story, “It Had to Be Murder,” written by mystery/thriller novelist Cornell Woolrich in 1942. The original story, however, differs considerably from the script of the film. One chief difference is that Hitchcock and Hayes give the protagonist a profession – that of photojournalist – and a girlfriend. (Woolrich’s hero’s sole companion is a male, African-American “day houseman” named Sam, who takes care of him.) The reworking of the Woolrich story by Hitchcock and screenwriter John Michael Hayes also draws on aspects of biography, persona, and personal history. As Steve Cohen has pointed out, *Rear Window* is, in part, a reworking of the story of Ingrid Bergman and Robert Capa.⁸

Bergman met the famous war photographer, Robert Capa, in Paris in 1945 and immediately fell in love with him. When Bergman returned to Hollywood to star in Hitchcock’s *Notorious* (1946), Capa accompanied her, taking photographs of her on the set for *Life* magazine. Hitchcock, according to biographer Donald Spoto, had become romantically obsessed with Bergman during the making of *Spellbound* (1945).⁹ Hitchcock noted Bergman’s passion for Capa as well as Capa’s noncommittal responses to her. Bergman clearly wanted to marry the photographer, but he refused to, fearful of the commitment of marriage.¹⁰ The Capa-Bergman affair dissolved within a year, largely over Capa’s refusal to marry her. Cohen speculates that Hitchcock was amazed “that the photographer would walk away from a woman about whom he himself [Hitchcock] could only fantasize” and that the director deliberately set out to re-create this relationship several years later in *Rear Window*.

Cohen notes that the Jefferies character is subtly connected to Capa in the following ways: Both are photojournalists, both work for *Life* magazine,¹¹ both frequently eat at “21,” and both live in Greenwich Village (within a block of one another).¹² Cohen con-

cludes his comparison of Capa and Hitchcock's hero with the most bizarre and uncanny link between the two. "On May 25, 1954, two months before the release of *Rear Window*, Capa was taking photographs outside of Hanoi [in Vietnam] when he stepped on an anti-personnel mine. The explosion tore a gaping hole in his chest and blew off his left leg – the leg that Jefferies has in a cast. . . . By the time [Capa] was taken to a French field hospital, he was dead."¹³ Production of the film had been completed by January (or at the latest, February) 1954, so Hitchcock could not possibly have known about Capa's left leg, but this final connection between life and art must certainly have astounded both Hitchcock and Bergman (if she ever realized that *Rear Window* was, in part, about her and Capa).

Aspects of star persona regularly play a role in the stories and themes of many motion pictures, but the role played by the biography of the director remains more problematic. Hitchcock never spoke of *Rear Window* in these terms (i.e., as "about" Bergman and Capa); nor was screenwriter John Michael Hayes aware of any connection between the scenario he wrote and the Bergman-Capa story; indeed, Hayes insists that the character of Lisa is based on his own wife, not Bergman.¹⁴ But Hitchcock, who playfully acknowledges himself in the cameo appearances he makes in most of his films, was never one to refrain from including inside jokes or biographical allusions in his films. Indeed, *Rear Window* itself contains one such joke, played at the expense of Hitchcock's former producer, David O. Selznick, with whom the director repeatedly struggled for artistic control of his films. In directing Raymond Burr, who plays the villain Lars Thorwald, Hitchcock coached the actor to use various gestures and mannerisms that the director had seen his former employer use, especially the way Selznick cradled a telephone in the crook of his neck. Hitchcock also went out of his way to make Burr look like Selznick, giving him curly gray hair and making him wear the same style of glasses worn by the famous producer.

It would be foolish to place too much emphasis on the Bergman-Capa or the Selznick allusions; the film is not "about"

them. The thematic concerns of the film cannot be reduced to biography. Nor should the critic engage in cheap psychoanalysis, proclaiming “eureka” when an aesthetic work can supposedly be traced back to some prior trauma or obsession of its creator. Ultimately, *Rear Window* is not about Bergman and Capa or about Hitchcock’s obsession with Bergman. Nor, once its factual basis has been established, should such biographical detail be dismissed entirely. The film clearly is about the kind of relationship Bergman and Capa had – the aggressive pursuit by an attractive, glamorous, sexy, “perfect” woman of a man who fears commitment to her. But this theme remains one of many in a complex tapestry of related themes and ideas.

It’s important to remember that the film is as much a product of classical Hollywood cinema as it is of Hitchcock or other creative personnel. The narrative deftly alternates back and forth between murder mystery and love story, intertwining the two through the theme of voyeurism. In this respect, the film is a perfect example of classical Hollywood cinema in that the narrative consists of “two plot lines: one involving heterosexual romance . . . , the other line involving another sphere – work, war, a mission or quest. . . . The story ends with . . . a resolution of the problem and a clear achievement or nonachievement of the [two] goals.”¹⁵ The hero’s voyeurism links the two plot lines; it is clearly related to the murder mystery which he pieces together by looking out his window, but it is also connected to his relationship with the heroine. Refusing to commit himself to a love relationship, Jeff prefers looking out his window at his neighbors across the way to looking at Lisa, the beautiful blonde who is in the same room with him and who repeatedly throws herself at him. He opts for a one-way relationship based on voyeurism instead of a two-way relationship rooted in mutual regard, recognition, and concern; he would rather look than love.

The pleasure he derives from watching his neighbors without their knowledge or permission is essentially sadistic. (See Elise Lemire’s discussion of feminist readings of the film in this volume.) It is a pleasure based on domination. A similar form of

sadism emerges as a fundamental aspect of his relationship with the heroine. Lisa provides a willing exhibitionism in answer to his voyeurism: She wants to display herself to him. Thus, shortly after she first appears, she turns on lights one by one to introduce herself (“Lisa . . . Carol . . . Fremont”) and to display her new \$1,100 dress. But Jeff refuses her attempts to engage him in a mutual exchange of looking and being looked at. The film repeatedly opposes its two main “attractions” – Lisa and the murder mystery – and Jeff routinely turns his gaze from Lisa and focuses instead on events across the way.

Lisa’s self-display is an attempt to control his gaze. Jeff, however, resists her strategy and tries, instead, to force Lisa to abandon her own attempts to control his gaze and to submit herself to *his* gaze, to join him in his voyeuristic activities. In other words, Jeff wants to enlist her in his own sadistic regime; he wants to dominate her. Though he himself, an invalid confined to a wheelchair, is weak, he attempts to achieve power over her by subjecting her not only to his “vision” – that is, his understanding of what is happening across the courtyard – but also to a form of emotional abuse. Jeff rejects Lisa’s efforts to please him (the dinner from “21”) and is deliberately rude to her after dinner, insisting that she “shut up” and let him talk. He toys with her, refusing to marry her, yet he remains unwilling to break off their affair.

The murder mystery initially provides the hero with an obsessive interest that he uses to avoid participation in the love story. Yet it also functions as a way of working out the tensions in that relationship. What Jeff represses in his relationship with Lisa is worked out in the actions seen across the way.¹⁶ Thorwald’s apparent murder of a nagging, invalid wife serves as a release of sorts for the hero from the threat posed by the heroine who has the immobilized hero at her mercy. The hero unconsciously identifies with the villain’s desire to free himself from the responsibilities of his relationship with a woman who seeks to control him. Yet he would clearly never do what Thorwald apparently does: he consciously represses this desire and actively pursues the villain for his own would-be crime. The fact that the hero has so much trou-

ble proving that the villain has killed his wife underscores the tenuous nature of his own identification with the forces of law and order. He remains torn between two desires – that of the villain and that of the villain’s nemesis, the law. Jeff works out his feelings for Lisa by openly rejecting his identification with Thorwald, by relentlessly refusing to give up his belief in Thorwald’s guilt. When he and Thorwald physically battle in the penultimate scene, he finally acts out – on a physical level – his opposition to the villain. Yet he also pays – with a second broken leg – for his (repressed) desire to do what Thorwald has done. Once Jeff’s anxieties have been acted out, he can then resolve his relationship with Lisa. Though the film doesn’t conclude with a marriage, it does present a final image of them as a more-or-less-stable couple.

If this is a very Freudian film, in which the villain functions as the Id to the hero’s Super-ego, acting out his desires, it is also a very Catholic film. In projecting his desires, the hero becomes responsible for their acting-out by another. In the contemplation of evil, he becomes guilty of evil, even though he himself does not commit it. For Catholics like Hitchcock, the sin of omission – an immoral thought or desire that is repressed – is equal in the eyes of the Church to the sin of commission – an acting out of that illicit thought or desire. In this way, the double narrative remains tightly intertwined. *Rear Window*, as the title suggests, is a view onto unconscious desire: It looks into the back of the mind and at what it conceals. The eye is traditionally, for poets at least, a window into the soul; it is the “front” window, as it were. The unconscious mind, which opens onto a different terrain of desires, functions as a “rear” window: It sees what the eye does not. *Rear Window* explores the relationship between these two “windows,” between what the eye sees and what the mind desires. What Jeff sees – the evidence of a murder – is what his mind unconsciously desires. The action of the film becomes a drama of catharsis – the purgation of his fears and desires by means of an acting out of them. His cure is achieved, quite appropriately, when Thorwald pushes him out of his rear window and, dragged down by the weight of his own body (and that of the heavy cast on his leg), he falls to the courtyard below.

Inasmuch as *Rear Window* is an “obvious” film, it wears all of these classical features, commercial “attractions,” and manifest themes quite stylishly on its sleeve. But there is a great deal more to *Rear Window* than these obvious themes and commercial trappings. Admittedly, the film has its eye on the box office. It grossed \$5.3 million in 1954, \$4.5 million on its reissue in 1962, and another \$12 million on its re-release in 1983, making it director Alfred Hitchcock’s most commercially successful film. But if the film has one eye on the box office, or “front” window, it also has its other eye on another, less obvious, decidedly “rear” window. It has noncommercial interests, looking at issues that, most properly, belong to the domains of film theory, criticism, history, and aesthetics. Its story and the way that story is told raise questions about the nature of the cinema itself. In this respect, *Rear Window* is Hitchcock’s “testament” film – that is, it is a film that is “about” the cinema, a film that serves as a director’s ultimate statement about his or her craft.

In other words, what is least obvious about the film is its own artistry. Like most Hollywood films, *Rear Window* strives for transparency. Its story and its characters are delivered to the audience simply and directly, as if they were just “there.” All signs that might reveal the artifice of the film’s production or construction have been carefully effaced. Yet *Rear Window* (like Hitchcock films in general) is not entirely transparent. It is carefully constructed. As narrator, Hitchcock maintains a visible presence that goes far beyond his cameo appearance. *Rear Window* is, after all, a Hitchcock film, marked by his dark sensibility, by his wry wit, and by his intrusive presence as a storyteller.

Hitchcock’s visibility as a narrator has become part of his “contractual” relationship with his audiences. Viewers expect a Hitchcock film to be “Hitchcockian” – that is, to have a certain kind of narrative sensibility – much as they expect Hitchcock’s own cameo appearances within the films themselves. (In *Rear Window*, Hitch appears in the Song Writer’s apartment [reel 2A, shot 44] winding a clock, just before Jeff and Lisa sit down to a lobster dinner from “21.”)¹⁷ By means of this sort of visibility, Hitchcock vio-



A Film about Looking: Voyeurism escalates and becomes contagious. Jeff (James Stewart) starts looking with his naked eye, then with binoculars, and finally with a telephoto lens. Here Stella (Thelma Ritter) joins in. Note the smashed camera on the table in the background – a symbol of prior punishment for voyeurism. Photo courtesy of Paramount.

lates the norms of classical Hollywood cinema; he winks, as it were, at the audience, and conspires with them in constructing the illusion of the fiction; he thus acknowledges that the film *is* a construction and that *he* has constructed it.¹⁸

A self-reflexive work, the film is about looking. Jeff serves as a surrogate for the spectator. Seated in his chair and unable to move, he looks, through a frame that resembles that of the screen, at events that take place in a semidistant space. His activity is like that of a typical spectator: He attempts to make sense out of – to read – what he sees. Thus he constructs a narrative out of the disparate actions that occur within his view. This is what all film

spectators do.¹⁹ Jeff, however, crosses the line; driven by his desire for more knowledge, he “invades” the space across the way, sending Lisa into it to deliver threatening messages to Thorwald. This violates the traditional “segregation of spaces” that defines cinematic spectatorship in which the space of the spectator remains distinct from that of the action on the screen. The penalty for this transgression is Lisa’s terrorization by Thorwald, followed by Thorwald’s entry into Jeff’s space. In effect, Hitchcock explores the nightmarish consequences of voyeurism – what happens to a spectator when he or she looks and is unprotected by the conventions that safeguard the typical film spectator.

The fact that Jeff is a photographer – a professional voyeur – reinforces the notion that *Rear Window*, as a testament film, is about the consequences of looking. The accident that put Jeff in a cast is presumably a consequence of his professional desire to see; he got too close to the action he wanted to photograph and was hit by a race car. The film’s backstory (the circumstances surrounding the accident) thus establishes a logic that connects looking to its consequences. Whatever pleasures derive from voyeurism are accompanied by anxiety and pain – by the fear of being seen and by punishment for having seen. Jeff sees Thorwald as the latter finally sees him. Now seen, Jeff suddenly becomes the victim of the villain’s gaze. The disturbed nature of this transfer of vision from Jeff to Thorwald is conveyed in the penultimate scene in which we share Thorwald’s point of view as he is blinded by the exploding flashbulbs of Jeff’s camera. When we see from Thorwald’s point of view, we suddenly experience Thorwald’s pain and displeasure. The film takes us full circle from voyeuristic pleasure to voyeuristic pain. Yet it works out this shift in a way that reinstates and supports the spectator’s right to look. (Jeff’s voyeurism is vindicated in that it leads to the apprehension of a murderer; the villain’s appropriation of that look is seen as a disturbance that is inappropriate and is thus presented as painful via red suffusions.)

Rear Window observes the principles that shape classical Hollywood narratives – economy, regularity, symmetry, and order. It is systematic; all of its elements are part of a larger formal system. The functions of its various elements are driven by the demands of

the narrative. Every event serves a narrative purpose; in this way, the film observes the principle of economy. Events are presented in terms of their function within a larger narrative structure; one feature of this “economy” is that they are organized according to the principles of regularity, symmetry, and order. The film is constructed around instances of repetition and variation (of motifs and specific shots). These motifs and shots are organized into a larger pattern. This pattern underlies the film’s construction.

As a construction, *Rear Window* is classically Aristotelean: It has a beginning, a middle, and an end; it observes the basic Aristotelean unities – unity of action, unity of place, and, given some ellipses, unity of time.²⁰ These points of time (the beginning, middle, and end) punctuate the narrative in a fairly obvious, theatrical way. Whatever abstract significance the title of the film may have, the rear window functions quite literally to mark the stages of the film’s narrative progression. At the same time, it characterizes that narrative as theatrical spectacle. The film’s credit sequence begins with the rear window and with the raising of its three bamboo curtains to reveal the courtyard beyond Jeff’s window. The film ends with the lowering of these three curtains. (The mid-1980s re-release prints of the film, distributed by Universal, omit this last shot because it contains the logo of the film’s original distributor, Paramount. This omission seriously distorts the formal design of the film. Universal’s recent restoration of the film recognizes the significance of this earlier deletion and includes the final lowering of the curtains.)²¹

In the “middle” of the film (reel 5A, shots 43 and 47), Lisa lowers, then raises, the curtains. The initial opening of the curtains “opens” the narrative, presenting it as if it were a spectacle at the theater, where the raising and lowering of the curtain would punctuate breaks between acts. The final curtain “closes off” the narrative, signaling to audiences that all the various enigmas raised earlier in the narrative have been resolved. Both of these actions are performed by Hitchcock. They are nondiegetic events; the raising and lowering of the curtains is performed by an unseen agent (a presence connected with the presentation of the credits). In contrast, the lowering and raising of the curtains in reel 5 are

diegetic events. This action is performed by a character within the film (Lisa).

Though it does not literally occur in the middle of the film, Lisa's action does break the narrative into two halves.²² Lisa lowers the curtain in a false resolution of sorts. Lt. Doyle has just left after informing Jeff and Lisa that there has been no murder and that "there is no case to be through with." After watching Miss Lonely Hearts entertain then struggle with a would-be lover, Jeff and Lisa question the ethics of watching neighbors "with binoculars and a long-focus lens." Lisa then closes the blinds, providing herself as another spectacle to take the place of Jeff's previous interest in his neighbors. Declaring (in suitably appropriate, theatrical language) that the "show's over for tonight," she displays the nightgown that she has brought with her, describing it as a "preview of coming attractions." The case has been closed; the mystery is over and the love story has reached a climax of sorts. Fade out.

But wait. The film is not over. It fades back in. Lisa models her nightgown. A woman screams off-screen. Lisa raises the blinds to look and discovers a second murder, that of a dog who "knew too much." With the scream (which recalls the disembodied scream Jeff hears on the night of Mrs. Thorwald's murder) and the opening of the blinds, the murder-mystery narrative resumes. Jeff declares that Doyle was wrong: Thorwald did murder his wife and killed the dog because it was too curious about what Thorwald had buried in his flower bed. With the death of the dog, the film suddenly reverses itself. Prior to this moment, Jeff has been primarily a voyeur. After it, he becomes a *provocateur*. He continues to look, but he also takes action. In the first part of the film, the spaces have been separate – Jeff's apartment occupies one space and the apartments across the way occupy another. At the same time, the voyeurism has been unidirectional; Jeff and others look from his apartment at apartments across the way. In the second part, the segregation of spaces is constantly violated. Jeff immediately dispatches Lisa with a blackmail note ("What have you done with her?") which she delivers to Thorwald's apartment. A few moments later, Lisa invades the apartment in search of evidence.

This intrusion is answered by Thorwald, who catches Lisa, real-

izes that Jeff has been spying on him, and then attacks Jeff in his own apartment. Thorwald thus reverses the direction of the narrative. From looking at Thorwald, Jeff becomes looked at: Lisa's screams for Jeff direct Thorwald to him. Jeff's point of view, which has dominated the film so far, gives way momentarily to Thorwald's. We see through his eyes, via red suffusions, as Jeff attempts to blind Thorwald with flashbulbs. Jeff's point-of-view shots end at the moment that Thorwald begins to stalk him. Jeff's audio point of view is suddenly foregrounded and expressionistically heightened. He hears Thorwald's footsteps as he clumps up the stairs, walks down Jeff's hallway, and unscrews the hallway light. Thorwald, who had been a silent presence until now, speaks for the first time, asking "What do you want from me?"

The dog's death emerges as a pivotal moment in this dramatic shift in point of view. For the first time, the camera abandons the position it has occupied since the beginning of the film (its vantage point from Jeff's rear window) and situates itself within the courtyard area, looking up from the garden at the Siffleuse (literally "the whistler," better known in the film as the dog's mistress), Miss Torso, and others. Though the initial point of view from Jeff's apartment returns after this brief disruption, the grip it holds on the film has been undermined; its future stability can no longer be assured. Thus, a few minutes later Thorwald grapples with Jeff and pushes him out of his apartment through the rear window. At this point, the film cuts to a perspective that previously had been suppressed; we see Jeff hanging from his windowsill from the vantage point of Doyle and the neighbors across the way. For the first time, we see the rear wall of Jeff's apartment building and the rear window from its reverse side. This shift in point of view forces us to rethink Jeff's and our own role as spectators. For a moment, it is our own voyeurism that has become the film's spectacle. The tracking shot at the end of the opening credits that takes us through the rear window and displays for us the world of the film and draws us into it here has its answering look. From the other side of this world, we look back and see Jeff, our surrogate as spectator within the film, suddenly small and helpless in the frame. At risk for the first time in the film, he pays the price of his

voyeurism with a fall out of his own rear window and with a second broken leg.

The final shots of the film recall the first shots. A single crane shot around the courtyard records the resolution of all the narratives introduced in the film's first few shots, which provided similar surveys of the courtyard. Miss Lonely Hearts and the Song Writer are now together; the Thorwalds' apartment is being repainted and readied for new occupants; the Siffleuse and her husband have a new dog; Miss Torso welcomes home her boyfriend, a dumpy-looking soldier; the Newlyweds squabble; and Lisa is now a permanent fixture in Jeff's apartment, supervising his recovery. With the resolution of the mystery, Jeff peacefully sleeps; this last image of him thus recalls the first image of him, asleep with his back to the rear window.

The formal structure of the film underscores its meaning. The opening and closing shots link a survey of the characters in the courtyard to the back of Jeff's head, which "faces" out the rear window. The implication is that what he sees through this window is an extension of his unconscious mind, of the back of his head. During the course of the film, Jeff repeatedly turns and looks out the window. Crane shots (culminating with shots of Jeff asleep) give way to point-of-view and reaction shots, as he watches his neighbors. Through the conscious activity of his gaze, he attempts to make sense out of unusual, enigmatic, puzzling, and irrational occurrences. He imposes logic and meaning on a human activity that ultimately defies understanding. What sense does it make for a man to kill his wife because she nags too much or for a lonely woman to try to kill herself? As Armond White suggests later in this volume, Jeff's vigilance keeps chaos at bay; his voyeurism is an attempt to defeat disturbances out there in the world of 1950s America. Or better yet, his conscious gaze functions to regulate and render harmless his (and our) unconscious desires. In other words, the film's structure announces and maps out the interconnection between the conscious and the unconscious mind, between active voyeurism and passive, vaguely articulated, unconscious desire. The film is *about* looking and desire; it is *about* the interaction of conscious and unconscious activity; it is

about the processes and activities of the cinema as it engages its spectators in the attractions that define it as “entertainment,” as a form of mass amusement that holds us in its thrall.

In the essays that follow, *Rear Window* is explored from a variety of vantage points, or “looks.” Each chapter reconstructs the film from a distinct perspective; the anthology thus provides a vision of the film that expands upon the restricted vision that lies at the core of the film. These various perspectives will hopefully enable readers to see more clearly how the film actually works. Scott Curtis provides a detailed production history of the film, drawing on studio production files housed at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. At the same time, he links the production of the film to certain notions of construction within it, ranging from the literal construction of the sets and the physical filming process to the film’s more abstract concern with the construction of meaning by the film’s central character, Jeff, as well as by the film’s spectator.

Elise Lemire discusses *Rear Window* in terms of feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey’s use of the film as an example of the patriarchal nature of classical Hollywood cinema and the gendered nature of film spectatorship. Lemire contrasts Mulvey’s reading of the film with theorist Tania Modleski’s critique of Mulvey’s reading in an attempt to understand exactly how the film addresses female spectators and how it both supports and subverts the paradigms of patriarchal cinema. Lemire complements the psychoanalytic readings of the film by Mulvey and Modleski with her own, “cultural studies” reading. Situating the film within various discourses on masculinity and female sexuality in postwar America, she argues that *Rear Window* explores male anxiety in the face of radical changes in the professional and sexual identity of women in 1950s America.

Sarah Street looks at *Rear Window* from the angle of fashion and costume design. For Street, Hitchcock maximizes the function of fashion by enlisting it to convey crucial plot points, gender distinctions, and class relations, as well as serving as a vehicle that could be manipulated by specific (female) characters for purposes of masquerade and transgressive control of their own image. In

this way, the film can be read through its fashions, which comprise a discourse on the film's narrative mechanisms, character relationships, and themes.

Michel Chion discusses the construction of the film's space – both that of the courtyard and that of Jeff's apartment – in relation to its hero's point of view. At the same time, Chion explores the film's careful manipulation of the soundtrack to direct both the hero's and the spectator's attention through this space.

In his chapter, Armond White analyzes the film in terms of the social and political landscape of 1950s American culture. Until recently, Hitchcock's work has been viewed as apolitical.²³ White calls attention to the film's representation of the social (the courtyard, the alienated figures gathered together around it) and to the political implications of these images. This study provides a foundation for White to explore subsequent reworkings of elements of the film's theme, plot, and character by other, more overtly "political" directors. In particular, he deals with Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966), Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974), and Brian De Palma's *Sisters* (1973) and *Blow Out* (1981).

The anthology also includes contemporary reviews of the film (including a review by composer Stephen Sondheim) published shortly after its release in 1954.

NOTES

1. *The Film Daily Year Book* voted it one of the ten best pictures of 1954, ranking it third behind *The Caine Mutiny* and *On the Waterfront*. *The 1956 Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures*, ed. Jack Ali-coate (New York: The Film Daily, 1956), 125.
2. Paramount's "Detail Production Cost" memo, dated December 31, 1955 and reproduced at the end of Chapter 1, indicates that the film was shot in widescreen and in stereo sound. Though not filmed in VistaVision (Paramount's proprietary large-format, widescreen system), it was designed to be masked in projection to conform with the studio's preferred 1.66:1 aspect ratio (ratio of width to height). It is not clear that all theaters projected the film in widescreen on its release, and there is no additional evidence that it was recorded in stereo sound. At this point in its history, Paramount was using a pseudostereo, optical sound system known as Perspecta Sound. This system enabled films recorded monaurally to be played back in the theater in stereo.

3. See Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8, Nos. 3/4 (Fall 1986), 63–70.
4. The quoted text comes from the front page of Paramount's original 1954 "Showmanship Manual" (press book) for the film. This ad also features many of the windows across the way, accompanied by captions highlighting the sensational aspects of the characters associated with these windows. Thus "MISS TORSO – Hot nights or cold, her shades were never drawn!"
5. Joe Hyams, "Hitchcock's *Rear Window*," *New York Herald Tribune*, August 1, 1954.
6. Kelly reportedly seduced the married Ray Milland, her co-star in Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder*, 1954, and, at the time, Hitchcock commented on her promiscuity to an interviewer. See Robert Lacey, *Grace* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1994), 138, 140.
7. Lacey, 11.
8. Steve Cohen, "*Rear Window*: The Untold Story," *Columbia Film View* 8, No. 1 (Winter/Spring 1990): 2–7. I want to thank Scott Curtis for bringing this essay to my attention.
9. Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983), 307–308.
10. Capa's relationships with women and his fear of commitment are discussed by his biographer, Richard Whelan, in *Robert Capa: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1985), *passim*.
11. *Life* refused to give Hitchcock permission to use its name in the film, but the design of the cover of the magazine on which Jeff's fashion photo appears (it is a positive print of the negative seen framed in Jeff's apartment) is clearly modeled on that of *Life*.
12. Capa lived on 9th St.; Jefferies lives within view of Thorwald's apartment, which Lisa tells us is at 125 West 9th St. See Cohen, 5. There is a reference to "21" in Hitchcock's first film with Bergman, *Spellbound*. Playing a psychoanalyst, Bergman interprets the hero's dream about cards, the suit of clubs and 21, as a reference to the 21 Club in New York.
13. Cohen, 6–7.
14. In an interview with Steve Cohen, Hayes denied any knowledge of the story's indebtedness to the Bergman–Capa affair. Indeed, he insisted that the Kelly character, Lisa, was modeled on his own wife, not on Bergman. Cohen, 6.
15. Bordwell, "Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrative Principles and Procedures," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, 18, 19.
16. See Robin Wood's "Rear Window" in his *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 102.
17. Reel and shot references are based on *Rear Window: Release Dialogue Script, June 21, 1954* (in the author's collection).
18. An acquaintance of mine once suggested that the rear window of

Jeff's apartment was like the lens of a camera and the apartment itself was like the interior of a camera. When Thorwald enters, he opens "the camera" and exposes "the negative film." Since Jeff never takes a picture during the course of the film, this analogy might have some credibility in that the notion of the camera functions largely on a metaphorical rather than literal level.

19. In *Narration in the Fiction Film*, David Bordwell discusses Jeff's role in terms of the activities of the typical spectator, who constructs a story out of plot events. See *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 40–47.
20. The film appears to cover four consecutive days as well as an unspecified fifth day. It progresses from a "run-of-the-mill Wednesday" to a climactic Saturday (when Thorwald throws Jeff out the window), followed by an unspecified later date (when Jeff has been treated and released from the hospital, the Song Writer's composition has been recorded, and time enough has elapsed for Thorwald's landlord to begin the repainting of his apartment).
21. The "text" of *Rear Window* was significantly altered once again during the mid-1980s for a television broadcast version of the film. In 1986, in order to fit the film into a two and one-half hour time slot, MCA-TV prepared a "long" version of the film by reformatting the original, which ran at 24 frames per second, to run at 23 frames per second and by adding dream sequences. On the night that Thorwald goes out again and again in the rain carrying his sample case, Jeff sleeps fitfully. During one of his slumbers, MCA inserted "a three-minute montage of footage and nonsynchronous dialogue from earlier in the film." This version was apparently withdrawn from circulation shortly after it was aired in February or March of 1986. For a discussion of this version, see Joseph L. Streich, "Reinventing the Wheel: How TV Remakes the Classics," *The Village Voice* (March 11, 1986).
22. Lisa lowers the curtain near the end of the film in Reel 5A, shot 43; she raises it moments later, in the same reel, during shot 47. The film has six 2,000-foot reels.
23. For a sociopolitical reading of Hitchcock, see Robert Corber's *In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia, and the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).