

# Rear Window (1954)



character's optical point of view introduces perspective, for while it is simply a physical place of view, it can become understood—or projected—as also a mental space. We are prompted, that is, to infer a character's mental and emotional response by seeing what she is seeing. Hitchcock, in the example he gives from *Rear Window*, places himself in the tradition of Soviet montage editing when he cites the famous experiment by Lev Kuleshov:

In the same way, let's take a close-up of Stewart looking out of the window at a little dog that's being lowered in a basket. Back to Stewart, who has a kindly smile. But if in place of the little dog you show a half-naked girl exercising in front of her open window, and you go back to a smiling Stewart again, this time he's seen as a dirty old man! (Interview 265)<sup>2</sup>

Here the camera reveals the observing eye while itself being an observing eye that can be observed. A *mise-en-abyme* of observer observed is thus invoked, which we cannot be sure ends with Hitchcock as author, for he is only a stand-in or double for the omniscient gaze of the Other.

## Analysis

### *The Story and Its Narration*

The film's opening credits appear over bamboo blinds at a rectangular bay window; the camera then moves through the window and cuts to show, in a series of craning and panning movements, the apartments with their occupants, finally revealing Jeff, asleep by his window. The third shot repeats this movement, showing everyone getting ready for their day. The camera returns continually during the film to explore this enclosed space in shots at times marked as a character's—usually Jeff's—look, but also (on some six further occasions) as simply the camera's look. After a fade, the next shot shows Jeff on the phone talking with his editor. Their conversation provides us with background on how Jeff broke his leg, on his appetite for dangerous assignments,

<sup>2</sup>Hitchcock draws on the account of the experiment given by the Soviet filmmaker and theorist Vsevolod Pudovkin, who had been a student with Kuleshov.

background  
info

## Rear Window

and on the fact that he still has a week more before he gets out of his plaster cast. The camera, however, remains within Jeff's apartment (although shots of Jeff's editor were filmed, these were not used), and we are now given Jeff's look as he gazes around at the buildings outside. All at once, what he and we see is juxtaposed with what we hear, becoming a visual comment or counterpoint when, as the two consider the dangers of marriage and Jeff's editor retorts, "women don't nag, nowadays, they discuss," we observe with Jeff the altercation of the married couple opposite. Introduced here are Jeff's views—and fears—about marriage.

Later, Jeff is visited by Stella, his nurse, who berates him both for his obsessive window gazing and his failure to recognize Lisa's love for him by marrying her. To Stella's advocacy of Lisa as "perfect," he replies that yes, she is, but this is just what he finds a problem! Lisa is sheer spectacle when she visits him that evening, wearing a stunning couture dress and bringing an extravagant lobster dinner, complete with waiter, from the "21" Club.<sup>3</sup> The powerful sensuality of their relationship is established in the shot of Jeff asleep when Lisa, in a big close-up, enters the frame and kisses him as he awakes.<sup>4</sup> Their conflicts—ostensibly arising from their different styles of living and expectations of life—are explored in their witty and rebarbative dialogue, which gives us a vivid portrayal of their contrasting desires and suggests that Jeff is largely immune to the attractions of the spectacle Lisa offers of herself. As he compares her to his neighbor, whom he has dubbed "Miss Torso," and her "male drones" (in contrast to Miss Lonelyhearts, whose preparations for a dinner guest, paralleling Lisa's, prove to be make-believe), Lisa acidly challenges his limited understanding of femininity, declaring that it is clear that Miss Torso

nurse recognizes connection

<sup>3</sup>Sarah Street offers a fascinating analysis of Edith Head's costume design.

<sup>4</sup>Hitchcock refers to this as a "surprise kiss," in contrast to a suspense kiss. The film here captures Grace Kelly's perfect, shimmering beauty, but there is, perhaps, something uncanny when, as she bears down on Jeff, he suddenly opens his eyes, ending the connotations of a Princess Charming awakening her sleeping Prince and opening the way to the suggestion of a terror in the surprise. A similar shot, with further and different implications, is used by Hitchcock in *Marnie* (1964), when Mark Rutland (Sean Connery) bears down on the terrified Tippi Hedren as he abandons his "nice-guy" response to her sexual frigidity and consummates their marriage by force.

doesn't love any of the men, and suggesting that she, too, is not immune to loneliness. Then, realizing that her "good-bye" is intended as a permanent farewell, Jeff quickly changes his tone and pleads with her to keep their relationship as it is. While he does not wish to marry her, neither does he want to end their relationship. Lisa hesitates, reiterates her good-bye, then qualifies it with "until tomorrow."

Here, then, is the first narrative enigma: How, if at all, will Jeff overcome his fears and marry Lisa? For Jeff rejects the loss of freedom involved in the kinds of compromises that would be required of him by Lisa's picture of their possible married life together, wanting to keep the pleasures of bachelorhood and the excitement of sexuality outside the legal confines of marriage. Such a view, Robin Wood suggests, sees marriage as a form of disempowerment—castration—of the male (376). Classical Hollywood, however, has been characterized as a cinema that moves its male protagonist from lawless to lawful, from unmarried to married. The woman's desire must be brought to mirror the man's, to complement him and no longer confront him with her otherness as a subject, and object, of desire (Bellour). For Stanley Cavell, the goal of Hollywood's romantic comedies of remarriage is "the creation of a new woman," namely, as partner to the man (262). In *Rear Window*, however, it seems that it is not Lisa who changes (despite her very different costume at the film's close), but Jeff. Could we not say, then, that what we have here is the creation of a new man, that is, as partner to the woman? For the exploration of the problem of marriage and the curtailment of desire that Jeff fears is not resolved through narrating the subordination of Lisa's desire; rather, Jeff comes to be able to desire her as desiring.

Following Lisa's departure, Jeff resumes his observations when suddenly a woman's scream, followed by a crash, is heard. A little later Jeff sees the composer returning home, drunk, and Miss Torso firmly refusing the advances of her male friend as she shuts her door on him, implicitly confirming Lisa's earlier comment. Jeff also observes the husband of the nagging invalid wife in the apartment opposite—whom Lisa will later discover is Lars Thorwald—going out and returning several times with his salesman's bag. Jeff is puzzled by the salesman's actions, but, finally falling asleep, he does not see the salesman go out one final time, now accompanied by a woman we may assume is his wife.

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24/10  
2/10

New  
man?

marriage  
and created  
him.

## Rear Window

The following day Stella remonstrates again over Jeff's window watching: "What are you going to do if one of them catches you?" She, too, however, is interested in his neighbors, and, moved by his account of Miss Lonelyhearts' dinner the night before, Stella voices the hope that she might find someone. Jeff wonders if the salesman might "be available soon," given his wife's disappearance, and thus opens the way to a thought not yet fully articulated—that the salesman may have disposed of his wife—which is the film's second enigma.

Two narrative spaces have been established: First, the apartments Jeff spies on with their many stories played out in front of us by their diverse occupants, to which Jeff is like a camera/filmmaker whose looks open up these narrative spaces, revealing their scenes, and second, Jeff's apartment, which is the *mise-en-scène* for his interrelation with Lisa and for his pursuit of the truth about the nagging wife who disappears. A third space is invoked, namely the exterior of Jeff's own apartment and its adjoining spaces. While Lisa and Stella each traverse this space, their look back at Jeff is, curiously, not shown in a point-of-view shot. This space is revealed only much later, in three separate but climactic shots: on the discovery of the dead dog; then when the salesman, Thorwald, looks back at Jeff; and when Jeff falls from his window. Unseen by Jeff, it is therefore a space that his look cannot control. Jeff is also subject to a fascinating curiosity, which drives him to make sense of the stories he overlooks, drawing on the bits of information his eyes chance on, trying to fit them together as a plot—that is, as motivated actions—just as we, the audience, are doing. Stella and Lisa, too, are fascinated by these dramas and the comedy and pathos of the everyday lives they narrate. They, like Jeff, as well as the spectator, are also at the same time enjoying the very act of looking itself, insofar as it enables them and us to see what might otherwise be hidden and secret, while being ourselves unseen. We are voyeurs, for what defines the voyeur's look is an over-looking; it is a look that is never returned. What is hidden and what the voyeur wants to see is conventionally the sexual, of course, which Hitchcock affords in the views of the voluptuous dancing of Miss Torso, or which can be imagined in the shots of the newlyweds on their first night and, later, when we see the husband half-dressed at the window. The visual pleasure of looking arises not simply from what is seen (the woman's body, for example), but in the uncovering of the secret of the seen,

which is the secret of the woman's—or man's—enjoyment, without being seen ourselves. It is here that the sadism intrinsic to voyeurism, as Laura Mulvey notes, is located (21).

*Rear Window*, however, displays a self-consciousness or reflexivity in relation to its voyeurism, not only in the many comments by characters throughout the film, but also by showing the overlooking of others who are being watched by a third party, as when Jeff observes the young women on the roof, who, we may infer from their gestures, have stripped to sunbathe nude but now scurry to cover up when a helicopter appears overhead. The film also foregrounds the reversal—often comically—of implicit narratives of desire assumed in many of these scenes. For example, in the epilogue we discover that Miss Torso loves not one of her many male admirers but her less than conventionally handsome GI boyfriend.

We are not left to enjoy our voyeurism in peace, however. Suspense is introduced by Hitchcock precisely in relation to the possibility of the look returned. When Jeff suddenly notices that Thorwald is himself surveying the apartments that can be viewed from his own window and that therefore he, Jeff, might be espied, he quickly urges Stella to step back as he wheels himself away from the window. The voyeur's titillating pleasure is undermined as Hitchcock plays with our expectations—and our pleasures—introducing a narrative development that disrupts the act of overlooking the sexual scene. The film continually shifts its characters, and spectators, between a more proper curiosity and an "improper" voyeuristic looking, both of which are subject to comic irony in the dialogue, reversals of expectation, and visual puns.

Jeff cannot see clearly enough on his own, and as a result enlists the help of some mechanical devices as visual aids, which become physical extensions or prostheses. The binoculars that Jeff asks Stella for as she leaves are not sufficiently powerful, and instead he wheels himself over to a cupboard where he takes out a telephoto lens and fixes it to his camera. With this addition, Jeff is empowered to see all, a mastering that Hitchcock underlines in the framing of Jeff as he views Thorwald through his telescopic camera-eye—with all its considerable phallic connotations. He sees Thorwald wielding a large knife—itsself a kind of phallic mirroring that further suggests a doubling of Jeff/Thorwald—which he wraps in newspaper. Hitchcock, well known for his interest

Suspense  
created by  
the reaction

Expectations  
plays with  
you

## Rear Window

in Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious and human sexuality, no doubt intended such references. The image is all the more potent given Jeff's immobility as a result of his enormous leg and waist cast, and this can be read metaphorically as a "castration": a disabling that is symbolized as well by the image of his smashed camera at the beginning of the film. (Of course there is also a parallel between Jeff and the bedridden Mrs. Thorwald, each of whom spy on Thorwald and become subject to his murderous desires.)

These tropes of empowerment and disempowerment in relation to the look culminate in the confrontation between Jeff and Thorwald at the end of the film, as Jeff tries to defend himself by shooting off flashbulbs, but can only temporarily blind Thorwald. Jeff's impaired potency, represented by his broken leg, connects him by association to the impairment—or castration—that he believes marriage itself threatens, and which is seen vividly and with all its murderous consequences in the example of the henpecked Thorwald. The metaphor of impairment refers not to an irreversible loss or literal castration, but to the threat of loss, to being made weak, impotent. In contrast to the solution to which Thorwald resorts in murdering his wife, Jeff comes to view Lisa differently, a change signaled within the film through his point-of-view shots of her. At the same time, in the course of the film's action, Lisa is also transformed: her desire for marriage no longer threatens him with loss.

The next scene, that evening, opens once more with a camera pan across the apartments, coming to rest in close-up on Jeff and Lisa kissing. Lisa, however, complains that Jeff seems distracted, saying, "I want all of a man . . ." When Jeff explains his growing suspicion that his neighbor has murdered his wife, she declares she is worried about his mental state: "What is it you're looking for?" she asks; "I just want to know what happened," Jeff replies. "There's nothing to see," she retorts, and, pulling his wheelchair back around from the window to face her, she challenges all his suppositions (just as Lieutenant Doyle will do later). She then taunts him, saying, "Why, for all you know there's probably something a lot more sinister going on behind those windows," pointing off right, and Jeff turns to look, then realizes her trick, for there is nothing to be seen. Just then Lisa's gaze is caught by Thorwald's activities opposite, and her expression suddenly changes. Hitchcock, however, does not give us Lisa's point of view, but instead

cuts to Jeff watching her and then to his view, through the binoculars, of Thorwald tying up a large trunk with heavy rope. "Let's start from the beginning again, Jeff," she demands. "Tell me everything you saw. And what you think it means." Nevertheless, Hitchcock has shown that Lisa's conversion arises not from what Jeff says, but from what she herself sees.

Jeff's reply is elided as the film fades to black, giving further rhetorical emphasis to Lisa's sudden conversion. We next see Jeff alone beside a phone, looking down; the film cuts to the apartment opposite, the room unlit except momentarily by the flare of a match, betraying the presence of an occupant—presumably Thorwald—smoking in the dark. Hitchcock uses fades throughout the film for scene transitions that are, in classical Hollywood films, always ellipses in time of some considerable length. Here, however, he reverses our expectations: when the phone rings, the call is from Lisa reporting the name of the occupant of the apartment opposite as Lars Thorwald, implying only a brief elision of time. Lisa remains unseen, however, and instead she invokes Jeff's look when she asks, "But what's he doing now?" Jeff answers, "He's just sitting in the living room," but the reverse shot shows not Thorwald as such but a metonymic stand-in for him as his cigar flares brightly before dying out.

The following day Stella serves Jeff a bacon-and-egg breakfast, but as he eagerly starts to eat, Stella—herself nibbling on a piece of bacon—begins to muse, "Just how do you suppose he cut her up?" Jeff returns his fork to his plate with the mouthful uneaten, apparently put off his food. Then, as Stella considers the problem of leaking blood if the trunk were used to move the wife's body, Jeff abandons drinking his tea. The deft visual comedy here is superb macabre humor, while also revealing that Stella is now a convert to Jeff's theory of wife killing.

Jeff has seduced both Stella and Lisa with his story, but fails later that day to convince his old wartime friend, now a police detective, Lieutenant Thomas J. Doyle, who nevertheless agrees to make further inquiries. The film now plays with a series of repetitions and reversals of its various stories. Jeff notices the dog of the childless couple who live above Thorwald digging at his flowerbed. Later that evening, surveying his neighbors again, he sees the dog let down in its basket as usual, while Miss Lonelyhearts dresses to go out; the pianist is giving

Reactions  
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film

Fades  
usually mean  
ellipses in  
time



## Rear Window

a party; Miss Torso is practicing dance steps with a male partner. Seeing Thorwald packing his clothes, Jeff phones Doyle and asks him to come over again, then watches Thorwald make a long-distance phone call while taking jewelry out of his wife's alligator handbag, which Jeff recounts to Lisa when she arrives. She responds with firm feminine intuition, saying that no woman would go away without her jewelry, nor would she leave it tangled up in her favorite handbag. Delighted, Jeff kisses her with an enthusiasm not apparent earlier, and Lisa then reveals her plan to spend the night with him, showing him her case, diminutive but sufficient for her needs, she says, in a riposte to his earlier incredulity at her claim that she could pack for the kinds of journeys he makes. Leaving it to one side, she goes to the kitchen to make coffee and warm some brandy.

When Doyle arrives, his gaze is caught by the open case and the negligee spilling out of it, returning to this several times. Overseen by Doyle, its sexual implications are emphasized; but the policeman, observed by Jeff, is warned against jumping to conclusions. His look here echoes both his earlier fascination with the surreal painting above the fireplace and his rapt gaze at Miss Torso—a look noticed by Jeff, who asks pointedly, "How's your wife?" When Doyle quickly withdraws his gaze, we can infer both his visual pleasure and its firm repression. After receiving a phone call, and with a backward look at Lisa's case, Doyle walks forward into the room and, in a low-angle close-up, declares that Thorwald did not kill his wife. With the cold reasoning of a policeman, in contrast to the amateur imaginings of Jeff and Lisa, Doyle presents an alternative narrative account, dismissing each of their arguments—their "jumping to conclusions"—while also posing back to them an image of how their own actions might appear under the gaze of rational skepticism. But Doyle's view of things already has been subtly questioned by Hitchcock in his showing the policeman's uncomprehending gaze at the painting, with its bizarre array of objects whose sensible significance is drawn as much from our unconscious as our conscious recognition. That the complexity of desire and its dangers escapes the understanding of the law is underlined in the subsequent comedy when Doyle spills his brandy as he knocks it back, unused to drinking from a snifter glass; that is, he lacks the sophistication of Jeff and Lisa (suggesting his class difference as well). It is only as he leaves that Doyle reveals final proof that Mrs.

Female  
P.O.V

Reaction

Thorwald is not dead when he announces that the trunk—containing her clothes and not her body—had been collected by Mrs. Anna Thorwald. Doyle delays revealing the information from his phone call—just as he did on his earlier visit—mirroring Hitchcock's own role in revealing and withholding information in the film.

Despondently, Lisa and Jeff gaze out at their neighbors. Watching as Miss Lonelyhearts brings a—younger—man home, then throws him out when he gets too fresh, Jeff calls it “pretty private stuff,” and asks, “I wonder if it's ethical to watch someone with binoculars and a long focus telephoto lens?” Lisa's reply, “I'm not much on rear window ethics,” echoes his implicit recognition of the dubious morality of their spying, and at the same time implicates the cinema audience as well. Visual pleasure remains the theme, however, when, closing the blinds, Lisa declares, “the show's over for tonight,” but offers a “pre-view of coming attractions” and reappears, to Jeff's noticeable appreciation, in her negligee. A second murder then interrupts this apparent closure when a woman's scream leads Lisa to open the blinds again, discovering Miss Lonelyhearts bending over the childless couple's dog, its neck broken. The wife on their balcony above demands to know who did it, fiercely rebuking the apartments' occupants for their lack of neighborly feeling. Meanwhile, the camera—quite independent of Jeff and Lisa's look—swoops and circles to reveal the watching neighbors, including Lisa and Jeff framed at his window in the first of the three reverse-angle shots from the space of the courtyard. Jeff, noticing that Thorwald—sitting in the dark, betrayed again by the flare of his cigar as he smokes—is alone among the neighbors in not having come to his window, is again convinced of his guilt.

The next evening Stella, Lisa, and Jeff are gathered at the window again, as the film moves quickly to its denouement. Jeff discovers that the flowers where the murdered dog had been digging have grown shorter, suggesting Thorwald has replanted them. With this new evidence, Lisa—despite Jeff's reluctance—delivers a note to him, asking, “What have you done with her?” Seeing Thorwald's guilty change of expression through the telephoto lens, Jeff is gripped by fear that Lisa will be caught as she leaves, when Stella, noticing Miss Lonelyhearts, asks for the telephoto to look more closely at what she is laying out—namely, enough sleeping pills to kill herself. Here the scene is set for a second and parallel drama to unfold, which functions both to create

Jeff is  
proving unconscious

## Rear Window

suspense and to revalue their voyeurism as the nosiness of concerned neighbors. Lisa, returning, appears transformed as, filmed at the door, her half-lit face is flooded with excitement as she looks toward Jeff. The reverse shot reveals Jeff's rapt gaze mirroring hers, his eyes highlighted, smiling, suggesting that his view of Lisa has also been transformed. As Laura Mulvey writes, "When she crosses the barrier between his room and the block opposite, their relationship is reborn erotically" (23). Lisa has entered the field of Jeff's desire by stepping into the space of his gaze not as an image but as a subject who acts, and desires.

Now determined to find evidence, Jeff lures Thorwald from his apartment by arranging a meeting with him nearby. Stella and Lisa explore the flower bed, but, discovering nothing, Lisa—the full skirt of her dress billowing around her—climbs up and enters Thorwald's apartment. But she fails again, for the handbag she finds proves empty. Just then, Stella and Jeff see Miss Lonelyhearts about to swallow her pills, and Stella urgently demands that Jeff call the police to stop her, but as he does so the composer's song—"Lisa"—is heard, and she abandons her suicide attempt. Still connected to the police, Jeff is unable to warn Lisa when he sees Thorwald returning to his apartment and alerts the police instead. He and Stella then watch helplessly as, discovered by Thorwald, Lisa calls out to Jeff for help. Nevertheless, once rescued by the police, she manages to hide on her own finger the wedding ring she found, displaying it behind her back to Jeff. The ring, symbolizing authorized sexual union, passes from the nagging wife to the girlfriend. Worn triumphantly as a clue to—and thus trace of—a murder, it is also a symbol of Lisa's own desire. We see in close-up through Jeff's telephoto lens—thus from his point of view—her gesture, which is overlooked by Thorwald, who now looks back at Jeff to discover his mysterious pursuer. The reverse shot shows Jeff in medium close-up, but as Stella goes to extinguish the light, the camera pulls back to frame Jeff at his window from Thorwald's point of view.

This look returned presages a violence to which Jeff will become prey, as if the object of his look now returns all the aggression Jeff has projected. Alone and realizing that Thorwald knows where he is, Jeff anxiously listens for footsteps outside his apartment signaling Thorwald's arrival. Entering, Thorwald is framed in half light (just as Lisa

had been) and repeats, "What do you want from me?" wrongly assuming blackmail given Jeff's earlier phone call and Lisa's failure to turn him in (which remains unexplained). But what Jeff wants is the truth of Thorwald's desire—that is, to be rid of his wife—yet the desire to be unwed is also Jeff's own. The evidence of Thorwald's guilt is his wife's ring, now worn by Lisa, making her, too, a participant in this circuit of desire. Thorwald's confession later, however, displaces the ring's evidentiary function, and, unused, it becomes a Hitchcockian "MacGuffin." Through this, and like many of the denouements in Hitchcock's films, the sequence conjoins desire and violence.<sup>5</sup> While blinding Thorwald momentarily by setting off his flash, Jeff's impotence is nevertheless apparent. *Rear Window* concludes with farce as Jeff is pushed out of the window. While saved from Thorwald's clutches by the police, Jeff acquires—it emerges later—a second broken leg. Cradled in Lisa's arms, we may wonder if, in this reference to the film's opening, we should understand Jeff to now be doubly castrated or on the contrary, we should see him as transformed and actually newly empowered by his changed relation to Lisa.

The film closes with an epilogue presenting a series of vignettes—alternately comic and poignant. The couple have a new dog, Miss Torso greets her returning GI fiancé, and Miss Lonelyhearts and the composer find friendship. The newlywed wife, however, is seen berating her husband since, despite all the sexual enthusiasm the film has led us to infer from her, she would never have married him if she had known he'd lost his job! As the camera tracks back through Jeff's apartment, it shows him asleep, in a reprise of the film's opening shot, but now with both legs in casts. Lisa (in slacks and shirt appropriate to her new role), noticing she is unobserved by Jeff, puts down a book on the Himalayas and picks up her copy of *Harper's Bazaar*. Hitchcock, playful to the end, gives the woman the last laugh in giving Lisa, as Tania Modleski notes, the final look. He also introduces a certain undecidability here, keeping open the question of desire and the problem of its orderly transaction within human relations such as marriage.

<sup>5</sup>For example, in *Blackmail* (1929), *Strangers on a Train* (1951), *North by Northwest* (1959), and *The Birds* (1963).

symbolism  
and  
connection

hurt  
in action  
again

ended  
with open  
question

## Conclusion

*The Voyeurism of Rear Window*

"We've become a race of Peeping Toms," Stella tells Jeff at the beginning of *Rear Window*, after chastising him for his obsessive window gazing. Her words, of course, apply equally well to the cinema as to real life, and indeed *Rear Window* is often referred to as an essay on voyeurism. Moreover, in her reference to Peeping Toms Stella invokes the specifically sexual pleasure of looking that is identified as exemplary of classical Hollywood. For, Laura Mulvey argues, the look in Hollywood's cinema is held by the male, and its films were "cut to the measure of male desire," tailored to the fears and fantasies of the male spectator (25). Many critics, like Donald Spoto, have assumed that a majority of the film is seen through Jeff's visual point of view and his mental perspective (241),<sup>6</sup> whereas on closer viewing it becomes apparent that such shots are a minority, while Jeff is himself the object of looks from Stella, Lisa, Doyle, and, finally, Thorwald. Yet it seems that we assimilate the "objective," or non-character-motivated shots, from Jeff's apartment with those that are motivated as being Jeff's look. Camera views motivated as point-of-view shots allow the spectator to see *as if* they were the character. In *Rear Window*, however, we also project onto Jeff our own, that is, the camera's look, *as if* it were his. This, despite numerous shots of Jeff *asleep* that Hitchcock has playfully included, and which show him subjected on two occasions to another's look, namely Lisa's—most tellingly at the film's close.

Stella's words might sum up Hitchcock's broader project as a filmmaker, namely, to implicate us as spectators in the ethics of our looking by making us, too, into Peeping Toms. The film is not only about its characters' voyeurism, their prying curiosity, and, for Doyle and Jeff, their visual pleasure, for, by failing to offer a simple critique or condemnation, *Rear Window* explores the limitations such voyeurism produces in our relations to others. Instead, it demands that we recognize our implication, and pleasure, in voyeuristic looking and what this makes us blind to.

<sup>6</sup>Wood notes, "With one brief exception . . . we are allowed to see only what he sees, know only what he knows." The exception Wood is referring to arises when, as Jeff sleeps, Thorwald leaves his apartment with a woman (103).

Stella introduces a quite different issue of looking, however, when she goes on to say, "People ought to get outside and look in at themselves," and it is this which I suggest is also central to *Rear Window* and to Hitchcock's films in general, namely, the look back at ourselves—a self-reflexivity. It is a look from elsewhere that may be—as Stella suggests—imagined by us, that is, a mental look. The set of *Rear Window* enacts Stella's metaphor, enabling us to come to know and identify with the various residents and their lives and stories, looking in on them as we might on our own lives and stories. But this is a look that may be not our own, but another's. It is a look that may be solicited, just as Lisa—seeking to impress Jeff—displays the beautiful and expensive clothes she wears. Or it may be a look fearfully anticipated, for Jeff does not wish to be seen seeing his neighbors, and certainly not spying on Miss Torso, as Stella also acidly observes. What is involved here is both our self-scrutiny and self-knowledge and our subjection to a scrutiny by an other who may praise (the ego ideal) or judge (the superego, the law). The spectator is caught in the play of the gaze (with its anxieties as well as pleasures), while, in displaying its devices and exposing its fictions, *Rear Window* disrupts our identification not only with the characters but also with the cinema's look as a distant, mastering vision. Hitchcock's film is about a gaze that finds itself seen; embodied and desiring, it is a gaze implicated in the scene.

## Credits

United States, 1954, Paramount Pictures

Director: Alfred Hitchcock

Producer: Alfred Hitchcock (uncredited)

Screenplay: John Michael Hayes (based on a story by Cornell Woolrich)

Cinematography: Robert Burks

Editing: George Tomasini

Music: Franz Waxman, Jay Livingston and Ray Evans (song "Mona Lisa")

Art Direction: J. McMillan Johnson (Joseph MacMillan Johnson) and Hal Pereira

Set Decoration: Sam Comer and Ray Moyer

Costume Design: Edith Head

### CAST:

L. B. "Jeff" Jeffries                      James Stewart

Lisa Carol Fremont                      Grace Kelly

Lt. Thomas J. Doyle                      Wendell Corey