REAR WINDOW: A "CONSTRUCTION-STORY"
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REAR WINDOW: A "CONSTRUCTION-STORY"

RUTH PERLMUTTER

"The ending (of *Rear Window*) is agonizing. American women scream and can't tolerate the anguish of the film. All the spectators scream, and that makes me very happy, it amuses me alot; even now, that kind of thing is alot of fun for me. On that score, I am not as serious as the public. I must confess that when I hear them scream, I find that comical."

Hitchcock Interview with Chabrol and Truffaut.

I.

"I always take the audience into account."

Alfred Hitchcock

The sexual interplay and role-reversals in *Rear Window* are woven into the design of the film as a parable of process. It is as much about the narrative process as it is about the "trouble" with love.

In terms of structure—repetition of motifs and of opening and closing shots; crisis-to-resolution patterns that are kept exciting by suspense; and the repartee of charming "stars" in their traditional roles—*Rear Window* is a simple narrative film. In keeping with his ability to maintain mass appeal, Hitchcock frames the film within the confines of a thriller with the light touch of screwball comedy.[1] He feeds stars and plots to the audience like peanuts to elephants.

II.

The story focuses on the voyeurist activities of action photographer, L. B. Jeffries (Jimmy Stewart), who is confined to his apartment with a broken leg (a result of a macho daring) during a summer heat wave. We learn all this with the opening pan (just after the titles and the rolling up of window shades). To pass the time, "Jeff" occupies himself with observing the activities of his neighbors, whose windows face across a shared courtyard. First, there is Miss Torso, a pretty chorine who "performs" at her window and who is desperately seeking male companionship. Window two finds Miss Lonelyhearts, a suicidal single, who eventually is "saved" by Jeff's intervention. She listens to a melody which is being composed by a songwriter, who falls in love with her as he completes his composition, concurrent with the end of the film. At window three is Mr. Thornwalt, a travelling salesman to whom Jeff "attributes" a murder. As it turns out, he has already dismembered his wife.

The dramas that Jeff perceives and interprets reflect his own. His curiosity and imagination are generated, not only by enforced inactivity and his creative professional imagination (a daring photographer who looks for "stories"), but also by his "fear" of deeper involvement with his fiancée, Lisa Fremont (Grace Kelly), an upper class fashion model. In order to earn his acceptance, Lisa enters into his "parlor-game,"[2] and in fact, becomes a partner in detection and imaginative invention.

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The ending is classic. The murderer, in a reversal, seeks out and attacks Jeff who defends himself with flashbulbs, but is defenestrated from his own rear window (the frame of guilt). The film ends as it began with a reprise of the opening pan. The camera travels over the sleeping Jeff, now with both legs in casts, and finally settles on Lisa, sitting on his bed, triumphant. The lyrics of the song, in process throughout the film, turn out to be dedicated "To Lisa." The song ends with an orchestral flourish and the closing of the triptych of window shades.

III.

William Irish's story[3] on which the film is based, is really about ratiocination and story-telling, an Edgar Allen Poe tale on a pop level. Told in the first person, the narrator describes his state of aroused curiosity about his neighbors, motivated by an enforced immobilization.

The very first paragraphs sum up the narrator's concern about his voyeurism. "Sure, I suppose it *was* a little bit like prying, could even have been mistaken for the fevered concentration of a Peeping Tom." He questions his suspicions of murder across the way based on dim perceptions (He doesn't know their names; can't hear their voices; and their features are too far away to be identifiable) and only circumstantial evidence, such as Thornwalt's nervous smoking and excessive sweating. The whole plot hinges on delay. The protagonist and his friend, a cop, both intuitively know before they can articulate or confirm their suspicions.

Hitchcock changed his protagonist from private-eye type to action photographer, thereby allowing him to use photographic apparatus instead of the bust of Rousseau (natural man) or the wise man, Montesquieu (the narrator is not certain), which the story-teller uses as protection against the murderer. Hitchcock changed the story's Poe-like murder—the wife being cemented into the kitchen floor—into a gruesome dismemberment (sic: narrative deconstruction). He also added along with Lisa, the love-object, whole issues of sexual politics—the themes of marriage, the sin of voyeurism and the invention of stories based on sexual conflict in romance. Although he kept the subjective point of view for the most part, he changed Jeff from an ordinary "curiosity-monger"[4] to a fetishist whose motivations are prompted by fear of sexual commitment.

IV.

Despite its masscult genre form, the film functions metacinematically and pedagogically: it uses thriller tactics within the "constructions" that constitute the narrative text. Clothed in artifice and stylization, it belongs to the tradition of "theatrical" texts,[5] that not only question the aesthetic manipulations that produce realism, but also set up a parodic subtext that explores the characters, the director, the viewer, and ultimately, cinema itself.

Rear Window, typical on one level, is a maieutic film, which reflects Hollywood's concern with the development of a character (and/or viewer) towards some moral or didactic self-realization. It is also a meditation on its narrative "construction," in its consciously assertive linear development; staging of segments of its manufactured world; involvement, indeed, hyperbolization of its construction; and in the deliberate foregrounding of clues that we along with the characters try to understand at the same time that we see them.[6]

A second reading reveals a critique of viewer involvement woven into the fabric of a traditional thriller. With the juxtaposition of silent movie-like dramas enacted in a series of windows (screens) and the unfolding of an intrigue that is developed and connected deductively by the characters who are also viewer-surrogates, Hitchcock demonstrates the way the

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Jimmy Stewart as L. B. Jeffries in Hitchcock's *Rear Window.*

moviegoer inferentially reconstructs the story from bits and pieces. They and we are drawn into enigmas that beg solutions and that are driven by what the Russian theorist, M. Bakthin called "the impulse to continue" and 'the impulse to end."[7] The characters' pleasure in spying and conjuring monstrosities, also indicts the vicarious enthrallment of the audience (passive, stupefied, gullible gossips, "fiendishly ghoulish," as Lisa calls herself and Jeff) and its enjoyment of the predicaments of others.[8]

This second level then, refers to the narrative and filmmaking process, which underlies the viewer's involvement in an adventure story. The unified aesthetic and realist motivations (what Bakhtin calls the "chronotope"[9] or organization of space/-time patterns in the novel) are suddenly opened up and perceived as mechanical constructions of seeing and interpreting—and what is more, by the rules and conventions of cinema. Thus, *Rear Window* conforms on a cinematic level, to Bakhtin's terminology of the "autocritique" novel, where protagonists are either writers or readers (sic: "living according to literature").[10] Everything in the dialogue, the music track, the editing rhythms, the artifice of the constricted studio set, the "screens" of dramas and the development of Jeff's personality as "artist," detective, director, viewer, assert that the film is not only an art of space and time, but also a reality *during* its own space/time.

Like the title, the characters function in a number of ways that reflect Hitchcock's multi-levelled strategies. Unfolding within the confined space of a rear window courtyard (the parameters of the camera or projector), which suggests the double possibility of looking back from an interior or looking into an area of observation—these strategies are, at once, parts of a story about viewing, icons of viewer pathology and manipulative elements within the "construction" of a Hitchcock thriller.

There is always the awareness evidenced by the strong sense of design that behind the scenes, is the master puppeteer, Hitchcock. He is the most authoritative *auteur* of them all. The regularity of alternating

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points of view, the seeming autonomous pan shots around the courtyard, and the sequences built on shot-countershot exchanges between characters reveal the handprint of the director: the power that controls the gaze and the moral dilemma that is inherent in the exercise of that power.

The first two sequences are microcosms of the film's concern with the manipulated points of view that are at the heart of the relationship between director, audience and characters. On the story level, the opening pan (like the others through the film) is a traditional establishing shot. As if from "nobody's" point of view, it articulates the space-time fictional world. Eloquent in its silence, it reveals the essential introductory information about the characters and their idiosyncratic activities. In rhetorical terms, it purposefully presents the initial pieces of the jigsaw puzzle that establish the causality for the creation and completion of the final assemblage. On the subtextual level, the pan functions as a highly directive interloper, indeed, voyeur. In its slow deliberate sweep, it invades the inner sanctum of Jimmy Stewart (well-known star) and then tells us who and what he is; we discover his name, L.B. Jeffries, written on his leg cast, a broken camera, and adventure photos on the wall. The fact that he is asleep is not just accidental (diegetically). The opening pan, in a sense, "brings him to life." It also initiates his double role as voyeur and filmmaker, while drawing us with him into the original movie sin of voyeurism and vicarious participation in sex, crime and violence.

In the second sequence, an awakened Jeff watches a helicopter outside his window which is spying on two nude female sunbathers. We do not see the nude figures, but are focussed with him on the act of voyeurism itself. This camera action shift to Jeff's limited subjective point of view sets up the major spectatorial involvement of Jeff as spy/filmmaker once the story begins. In his "director's chair" and from a safe distance,[11] he invents and then begins to prove the existence of a crime. Appropriate to both his diegetic role as photographer and his metaphoric one as voyeur/filmmaker, he uses photographic equipment to "close-up" on the murderer and "shoot" him. The ultimate parody of the director/creator/viewer occurs when the killer invades the sanctuary of Jeff's observation post and is held off by exploding flashbulbs.

The ensuing dialogue between Jeff and the nurse also links the pathology of prying with male tyranny, thus connecting the sexist nature of Peeping Tomism with traditional male directorial control. When the nurse accuses him of being a Peeping Tom, Jeff assumes Hitchcock's own patriarchal position, excusing his involvement in his neighbors' activities as an "innocent" and "*fatherly*" interest.

V.

The two discourses, plot and subtext, like receding railroad tracks, are parallel in purpose and join in the distant ending. The characters/director/viewer provide the ties between fragments of information and join in a pleasurable wished-for closure. Indeed, Hitchcock's characters alter their initial status as viewers when they "direct" the outcome they and we (the traditional movie-goer) invent and desire—a murderer *is* apprehended, a suicide averted *and* girl gets boy.

Allied to the fulfillment of filmic pleasures, is viewer-identification with the characters as "stars." Grace Kelly and Jimmy Stewart are not only admired, believed, and able to command audience identification, but they also function as "stars," whose grandness endows them with the right to be exceptions, even "monsters." Jeff in his fear of involvement with Lisa alternates between paranoid spectator, who creates the story (imagines

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it, investigates it, then believes it) and "overreacher," who directs and creates Lisa as well. He "constructs" her into the "star" of the film. The perfect girl, she is brought to life by Jeff's refusal to notice her. Jeff's passivity induces her to put out, to seduce the audience. Lisa enters the story like a vampire. Her shadow crosses Jeff's face when she bends down to kiss him and then we see her luminessence, her beautiful face in extreme closeup. Her role as vamp in the struggle to be noticed and to be loved suggests the outrageous means women are obliged to use to catch a man and to be recognized as a "star."

Lisa brings an overnight bag to Jeff's apartment and in showing its contents, she executes a routine characteristic of strippers and beauty contestants. It is an overt seduction scene in which she shows her wares to the voyeur who is fixed on the rear window. Her dialogue is a constant patter of allusions about movie-viewing. Even her entrance is staged, as she turns on a series of lamps in order to introduce herself as fashion model and classy "dame," Lisa Fremont.[12] She models her lingerie, calling it a "coming attraction" and refers to their eavesdropping as a "show." She competes with the distant windows, but fails because the screens across the courtyard reveal less, and are less threatening to the anonymity of the obsessed voyeur/film audience. Her allure and availability are so overpowering that Jeff and the audience are really being ridiculed for succumbing to filmic hallucination instead of the real woman in "our" bedroom.

Gradually, Lisa adopts the tack of joining Jeff in his childish games: voyeur, detective, story-teller. She eventually "directs" the apprehension of the murderer, as a result of her own "inventiveness," a pragmatic knowledge of woman's folly, the irresistible impulse to matrimony.

As a classic story about the pursuit of happiness through marriage, *Rear Window* recalls Hawks' screwball comedies, where the unregenerate male is won over when the girl proves that she is tough and one of the boys (cf. *Only Angels Have Wings*). Lisa, who at first identifies with the women across the way and whom she endows with loneliness because they are unmarried, joins Jeff in the amoral act of prying and becomes *the* instrument of proof for his suspicions of murder. She uses her understanding of women's obsession with marriage, and ironically, it is the icon of marriage, the wedding band, that solves the crime, that in turn consummates the "bonding" of the principals.

The linear development of the "movie skits"[13] enacted across the way are orchestrated with the erosion of Stewart's resistance to Kelly's vampirizing attempts to marry him. The subplots show the anguished yearnings of single people for mates, as well as the murder and dismemberment that result from marriage. Each playlet, moving towards or away from matrimony, affects the progress of the protagonists' romance. The skit of the nagging sick wife of a suspected killer caricatures Lisa's "plot" to couple (Stella, the nurse, and Lisa nag Jeff to think of settling down). In the end, mimicking Lisa's success, Miss Torso (after many "contortions") and Miss Lonelyhearts get the men they *really* desire. Miss Lonelyhearts' stylized playlet is both a caricature of Lisa's romantic problems *and* a microcosm (a *mise en abyme*) of the story and the song that reach a harmonious resolution. As if to provide a missing segment between pursuit and dismemberment, the honeymooners open the window shade that had suggested romantic seclusion and begin to quarrel at the end of the film.

Lisa's role in the working-out of the tropes of marriage, murder and romance, is central to the sexual, moral and cinematic levels of meaning: marriage as a tender trap; spying as evil, but exigent, to find the criminal (husband); and catching a mate.

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The narrative film, like coupling, is inexorable, morally and sexually questionable, filled with uncertainty and composed of pure irony.

VI.

Although at the moment of the discovery of the murderer, the ethical questioning of voyeurist trespass is aborted, the power of the director over the viewer becomes more deeply entrenched. It is Lisa, in her unremitting persistence, who resolves the moral contradictions and oscillations between viewer/director roles. She epitomizes the themes of the marriage trap and the gender gap, and brings together the cut-up pieces of the psychosexual narrative with its metaphor of mutilation. At once a complicit sexist manipulator of men and unprotesting witness to the gory details of violence against women, her involvement is riddled with tropes of dismemberment, decapitation and castration—from the materialization of the murdered wife's head to references of parts of women (Miss Torso and the headless female sculpture) and to her questionably manipulative relationship with a partial man, the disabled Jeff.

It is Lisa who binds together the interplay of plot and subtext. Even the song which is part of the plot as well as the accompanying music track, is Lisa's theme song. During the film, an unformed wordless and mournful fragment, and analogous to the incompleted action of each silent playlet, it is associated by Lisa with the progress of her unrequited romance. Musing over the similarity between her longings and those of Miss Lonelyhearts and Miss Torso, she wistfully claims that the song is being written for her and Jeff (which it is, as well as for us). In the end, the completed lyrics "To Lisa" describe her many attributes and confirm her triumph and her stardom.

Lisa is also the cause of Jeff's change in status as privileged director and viewer. She beards the killer in his lair and this leads to the killer's invasion of Jeff's apartment and the exposure of the sanctuary of the director/viewer.[14] When Lisa is in danger, Jeff becomes the personification of the powerless identifying viewer.

Jimmy Stewart and Grace Kelly in Hitchcock's *Rear Window.*

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He and we in the audience are rooted to our seats, unable to help Lisa when she enters the "screen" of the crime. Jeff is also unable to help himself, despite the clever use of flashbulbs, to fend off the murderer's threat to his figurative projection booth. So involved are we in the action and danger that we suspend judgment of the guilt of the initial act of spying. We are relieved that their meddling has uncovered a real crime, that Lisa and Jeff are "saved" and that Jeff has been captured, not by the male killer, but by the female seductress.

Thus, it is Lisa who activates and resolves the interplay of plot and subtext. Once having revealed within the diegesis the constructions that bind the plot—the questioning of viewer pathology, the solution of the ruses that expose the reality of the murder, the actual confrontation with the murderer, the *raison d'etre* for the film's theme song, the multiple masks of female representations in the film—Lisa re-"directs" us to the sanctuary of our movie seats.

Hitchcock heroines are usually punished for assertive femininity, but Lisa is rewarded for aggressiveness. Frustrated by Jeff's indifference to her allure, we identify with her. Watching her scale the wall in high heels and designer dress, we applaud the courage of the uptown glamor girl, and we become complicit in the class distinctions that accompany the sexual byplay. Jeff's living out of a suitcase in a lower class apartment is contrasted with Lisa's East-side accoutrements: the Mark Cross overnite bag filled with provocative lingerie. Again we see in our constructed heroine the duality of desiring traditional femininity, but requiring the miming of masculine behavior in a bid for romantic acceptance.[15]

Having traversed the obstacle course, the closing shot (with the lyrics "To Lisa" accompanying it) establishes the triumphant finale. Lisa has conquered and occupied Jeff's inner sanctum. Showing the doubly-crippled Jeff asleep again, we are privy to the totality of her victory. The camera fixes on Lisa before the shades are finally drawn. With a self-satisfied smile, she casts aside Jeff's adventure magazine (hiking in the Himalayas) and picks up the fashion magazine of the *haute monde* to which she (Grace Kelly-fashion plate, uppercrust heiress, star) really belongs.

Thus, Lisa has not only captured the guy, but his capitulation has fulfilled our fantasy of acquiring wealth without seeking it, beauty without courting it, feminine aggressive adaptability without any sacrifice of allure. All the convolutions are there: updown/downtown; perfect woman/vamp; active male/passive female; invulnerable male/impotent male. Yet we have been seduced into believing by our own wishful imagination, consciously invoked by an ironic director.

In its final validation of Lisa's peculiar and in some ways, perverse centrality to the film, the last shot underscores the film's hidden misogyny and sheds light on Hitchock's real intentions underlying his "construction-story" method. With the camera's last sweep across Jeff, now completely immobilized (castrated), asleep (camera shuttered), fixing on Lisa in a bright red shirt (siren/vampire), ensconsed on his bed (sexual victor/*femme fatale* of the upper classes), Hitchcock has and has not given us what we want. Yes, coupledom is installed, the crime solved, the multiple "audiences" (them and us) are absolved of voyeuristic guilt. Yet, as always, Hitchcock has revelled in our double standards. The ending indicates how much the Hitchcockian man is ambivalent and weakened by the sex war. Despite the levity and suggestiveness that mask the sex barriers and class distinctions, there is little eroticism in this last sequence. (Even the temperature as shown on the thermometer, has cooled considerably). Although, in taking over Jeff's role

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and proving her macho capability, Lisa has purged Jeff of his obsessions and fantasies of power. He has remained infantile—he is still unable to walk.[16]

VII.

Rear Window, claims Robin Wood, is a "dramatization of fundamental male sexual anxieties" and not misogynistic as much as concerned with the "construction and organization of sexual difference."[17] More intent on blaming the *culture's* misogyny for Hitchcock's manipulations and nastiness, Wood elides the connotations of that final pan from a doubly castrated Jeff to a vampirically triumphant Lisa.

As the bearer of the burden of male anxiety, Jeff's repulsion of Lisa frustrates us. We are drawn into her desire/need to entrap him even though we wonder at her choice. Most of the time, we see him in states of morbid "fascination" (the kind that proceeds from a nothing-to-do catatonia to obsessive attentiveness, and which characterizes the passive moviegoer waiting for filmic pleasure). In fact, he is not just a surrogate for the director and viewer. He is also the incarnation of the early silent cinema protagonist, whose gazes and shot-countershot exchanges are neurotic and binding.[18] Hitchcock himself was aware of the effects of silent movie practices. He discusses how he used Kuleshov's montage methods to anchor the different possible meanings of a single shot of Jeff's gaze.[19] What Stella (the prodding prying matchmaker who tries to "sell" Lisa's charms to him) calls a "hormone deficiency" and what Robin Wood and others consider his basic impotency/castration/sexual immaturity is really his stupefied state of infantilism, not unlike the affectation of innocence in silent film.

Jeff's behavior throughout the film is a primer of Hitchcockian revelations of the unmanned, female-resistant protagonist. As if a pre-motor stage infant, Jeff is not yet ready to make the mirror-stage transactions and separations between himself and the female, as someone "other"to him.[20] Thus, he is depicted in the beginning as a scopophilic (lust for looking), excessively leering and fetishistically fastened to his (movie) seat. Not only is he too absorbed in his self-oriented construct of the murder to respond to the kisses of ravishing Lisa, but also, childlike, he fantasizes female dismemberment. At one point, he asks: "How would you start to cut up a human body?" (Hitchcock might have answered—"the way you cut up a narrative film.") In truth, Jeff becomes so selectively attentive that his enforced immobilized state implies the almost masturbatory involvement of the physically and psychically insulated moviegoer. With his growing suspicions, he settles into a stony stare.

Of course, by skillfully contriving a believable story in the best popular cultural tradition, Hitchcock has concealed his insidious sexist view. Generically, Jeff is typical of the unconscious male detective-type, too busy with his hardboiled world to notice what is so obvious to us (and which Hitchcock had her play to the hilt)—the infinitely charming sex kitten, Grace Kelly.

In the final analysis, however, Lisa's power over Jeff and his over her, is really, Hitchcock's power over us. Having schematized the film for characters and audience to unravel (a hyperbolic unity of space/time; plot following typical expected generic formulae), his heavy-handed sermon on ideology and morality disguises his sexism. The central notion that women are punished because they seduce men into marriage and end up nags is reinforced by playlets that feature victimzed women (the near rape of Miss Lonelyhearts, the dismemberment of the sick wife), the political double standard of the hero's initial rejection and ultimate acceptance of a wealthy mate, and a critique of

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the tenacity and amorality of the supposedly passive female. (In his impotent state, Jeff displays "womanish" traits. He is a gossip who goads Lisa into action.)

In fact, it is the relationship of these effects of the infantile state to cinematic construction which Hitchcock understood in his mastery of the "purely visual."[21] The exchange of gaze shots and linear editing mechanisms move viewer and character towards closure. Despite the irony of Jeff's autoerotic infantilism, the camera has resolved the bodies, the fragmented stories and established the new reigning queen in our shared sanctuary.

It is not without significance that Hitchcock makes his traditional appearance in the songwriter's apartment, when the melody is first being punched out. Shown winding a clock, Hitchcock's presence wryly affirms his control of song, film and the space/time world which characters, spectators, and director experience together.

VIII.

"Everyone is a star in the movie of his own life."
Filmmaker-character tells ingenue in Brian DePalma's *Home Movies.*

Hinging on a multi-levelled conceit suggested by the title, *Rear Window* is a mechanism for the allegorical spectatorial situation. With almost sadistic pleasure in the power of manipulation, Hitchcock indicates how much we, like his characters, are "ghouls" for wishing to see a murder. Our rear window is the means of "enjoying" other people's problems without being seen. Jeff is our stand-in, expressing our curiosity and suspicions. In fact, after he takes up his telescopic lens, in his desire to get closer, his eyes narrow into paranoid slits.

The rear window, then, is more than the locus of the story or the "backstage," where a sexual drama takes place. It is the purgatory of the sin inherent in spectating. Not unlike the "no trespassing" opening of *Citizen Kane* and Hitchcock's own *Psycho,* this film starts with eavesdropping: a triptych of window shades that roll up to reveal a series of private personal scenes, True to Hitchcock's 11th commandment, "Thou shalt not be found out," the camera (protagonist/audience) sees without being seen.

Rear Window is not just a film directed against the movie-goer for being a gullible gossip who too easily accepts movie-going conventions in order to vicariously enjoy the predicaments of others. It is also an embodiment of Hitchcock's pet device, the MacGuffin, the bait or ruse that entices characters and/or viewers to follow the plot. Hitchcock was almost instinctual in his view of the MacGuffin to maintain the wild and always witty gyrations of his stories.[22] *Rear Window* parodies the use of this MacGuffin in thriller films—the build-up of suspicions, the charming seductive banter, the unnecessary garden-path pursuits towards inevitable revelation. In maintaining our interest in whether Lisa will nab Jeff,[23] Hitchcock mocks the traditional validations for the viewer's investment in prying and wished-for closure, despite the means.[24]

The characters of *Rear Window,* who wish, predict and manipulate the story into life embody Hitchcock's snide hostility towards viewers who uncritically digest the "myths" of Hollywood and the "original sin" of cinema—the lust for the unreal and the illusive image. In *Rear Window,* the fool is no longer the character-prankster involved in what Bakhtin called a "gay deception"[25] of other characters. The real clown is the viewer in and out of the film, and the state that lulls him/her into a lack of recognition of the parodied text and the irony of spectatorship.

IX.

When Hitchcock described *Rear Window*

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as his most cinematic work and "a conscious exercise in the *power* of montage,"[26] he was referring to our gullibility, to his skill at manipulating the audience.[27] All the accoutrements of the narrative trajectory—the planting of enigmas, the intentional "construction" of space/time reality (the composition of the song, the edited set-ups, as in Hitchcock's conscious montage practice) and the apparent levity and playful interaction of the "stars"—are the metaphors of the grand MacGuffin which is cinema, and its ability to animate, indeed, bring the viewer to life.

Conversely, Stewart's moribund role motivates the MacGuffin. His spectatorial stupefaction substitutes and postpones real (sexual) involvement. Ultimately, Jeff's immobilized state of "fascination" conforms to Hitchock's ideas about male/female conflict and his own essential misogyny.

By implicating and finally trapping us in *Rear Window,* Hitchcock found the supreme MacGuffin (to couch his view of masculinity in crisis)—a masterful exposition of the unholy compact between the willing audience and the manipulating film director.

APPENDIX I: CRITICAL APPROACHES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

From the beginning, critical responses to *Rear Window* centered on its cinematic subtexts and concerns with sexual/social morality. A number of articles dealt with Jeff's dual role, as spectator and director—and also of his preference for vicarious (intrinsic to both roles) instead of active involvement. Critics have also remarked on the sexual quotient implicit in the position of the director as viewer. J.R. Taylor pointed to the erect phallic symbolism in Jeff's play with the telephoto lens and that consequently, Jeff gets "turned on by what he sees." Also, Jeff is accused of "inventing" and "desiring" murder from his "grandstand seat in reverse" (what the character in the original story by Woolrich calls his rear-front seat) in order to resist marriage and the demands of sexual maturity. D. Kehr actually thinks he invents the story in order to "eliminate" Lisa, and *Enclitic* links detection/murder with the erotic/marriage.

The fact that Jeff turns out to be right about the murder and then succumbs to Lisa's charms, confirms the various often opposing opinions that:

1. The film is really a morality play about the conflict between voyeurism as a sin against others' privacy and the apprehension of real disaster. *Enclitic* sees the film as an indictment of the disease of voyeurism in cinema, but also as a defense of "healthy curiosity."

2. Jeff is "cured" of his "disease," his passive voyeurism, because he has progressed towards self-knowledge and need for community (when he cries for "help.") Specifically, he learns that tenderness and intimacy are preferable to a detachment and a safe place. Robin Wood states that Jeff "enacts a therapeutic experience for us" when he becomes emotionally involved.

Acompanying these hypotheses are opinions that cinema is indicted for its guilt in eavesdropping and/or defended for its "epistemophiliac" revelations of truth and self-discovery. Rohmer/Chabrol take the former stance. They view the film's ending as a statement that nothing changes in the Platonic-Catholic-Hitchcockian world where cinema is a metaphor for self-deception and moral isolation. Latterly, *Enclitic* views the progress towards self-discovery as an allegory of American political McCarthyism at the time the film was made and that the film in its notions of attitudes towards neighbors, expresses the need to restore a collective consciousness.

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3. Jeff is the story-teller who makes healthy order out of his morbid perceptions and interpretations; thus, that there is a literal and figurative purpose to the perversity that exposes the truth. David Kehr sees the film as a "meeting point of creator, creation, and consumer" and that it expresses a "paradigm of the power relationships in art." Lisa, he claims, is like the artist who tells and interprets—she asks Jeff "to tell" (relate) what he "saw" (perceived) and to 'say" what it "means" (interprets).

4. Contrarily, the spectatorial position in its various significations as "intrusions"—cinematic (the camera/the director's eye), social (looking at others without being seen until discovered) and sexual (impotent, castrated, in a state of fascination and stupefaction)—mirrors the culture's anxiety about the incompatibility of marriage to traditional sex/gender roles, particularly male anxieties about sexual potency and settling down. In his 1984 essay, Robin Wood quotes Wollen's notions of the polarity of "Wandering vs. Settling" in Ford's Westerns, as part of his (Wood's) belief that *Rear Window* expresses the notion that marriage is castrating in this society.

5. *Rear Window* is a "construction-story." Taylor describes the intentional mockery of the montage editing. In his earlier essay, Robin Wood describes Lisa as an artificial mannequin and a performer who wants to remake Jeff in order to force him into recognition of her "real" self. Although my argument is closer to *Enclitic's* notion that Lisa's performance mode is related to Jeff needing to distance her because she vampirizes him, I also see performance signs (like the window shades functioning as curtains, the playlets, etc.) as a "construction-story" element.

6. Certainly, the song is another construction story element. cf. Elizabeth Weis' long and substantial critique of the double function, diegetic and allegorical, of the song.[28]

APPENDIX II: BRIAN DEPALMA'S *SISTERS* AND THE MACGUFFIN

My point about *Rear Window* as an embodiment and parody of the notion of the MacGuffin is illustrated by Brian DePalma's borrowings from aspects of *Rear Window* in his early film, *Sisters,* especially in terms of the MacGuffin mechanisms of luring characters and/or audience into credulity about nonsense, which is ultimately the stuff of cinema. Like *Rear Window,* De Palma's film comments on the way a story is structured, while it also questions the ethics of the audience.

Echoing Hitchcock's notion of the MacGuffin, DePalma instructs us to question different levels of credibility, from ordinary Peeping Tomism to a critique of the power of images. The whole film turns on deceptions of the audience. The opening television program, wittily called "Peeping Tom" plays on our media credulity. The split-screen sequences that simultaneously show shot-countershot between the spectator and the crime, represent a parody of the cinematic construction of *mise-en-scene* logic and parallel cutting.

Like Lisa and Jeff, the female protagonist is a composite spectator/investigator. Grace Collier is not just the anagrammatic twin of Grace Kelly; she also has to prove her worth and prove there was a murder. She, too, spies on the "other" space and invades it in the hopes of discovering the murder victim. Punished for prying, for being an unmarried feminist, for believing in a MacGuffin (seeing someone no one believes in), Grace retreats to her mother's home, her childhood bedroom, surrounded by her dolls and mouthing moronic un-truths. Infantilized (like many Hitchcock protagonists) after a number of

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horrendous experiences, she denies the murder we and she saw committed. Like the non-existent Scottish lions, there was no corpse, therefore, there can be no murder. But then, there was no murder because this is only a movie.

The last shot, with the detective an unseen spectator of an undetected crime (the couch that supposedly held the corpse stands unattended in a railway station) is a visual summation of all MacGuffins—and the myth of cinema.

Notes

[1]Dave Kehr, "Hitchcock is Guilty," *Film Comment* 20, no. 3, (May/June 1984): 9-18. Kehr suggests that Hitchcock conceals the complexity of his art behind a naive popular culture text. ("Art was Hitchcock's dirty secret, his original sin." p. 10)

[2]John Russell Taylor, *Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 223.

[3]William Irish (Cornell Woolrich, "Rear Window," *After Dinner Story* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1944).

[4]Irish, p. 419.

[5]Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). Theatrical texts contrast with "absorptive" texts, which to use Fried's delineation of paintings, allow nothing external to disrupt the interaction of characters in their surrogate world.

[6]Hitchcock, by his sensitivity to the mechanisms of audience response, demonstrates Dyer's description of the way we view—sequentially as immediate response (hermaneutically) rather than through the subtexts (proaireutic) which require effort and concentration for simultaneous double interpretation. Richard Dyer, *Stars,* (BFI, 1979).

[7]M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 32.

[8]Francois Truffaut, *Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), p. 166. Truffaut takes this indictment lightly and Hitchcock appears to agree with him. Truffaut found the film's approach "compassionate." ("What Stewart sees from his window is not horrible, but simply a display of human weaknesses" and people in pursuit of happiness.)

[9]Bakhtin, p. 250.

[10]Bakhtin, p. 413.

[11]Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1983), p. 346.

[12]Roberta Pearson/Robert Stam, "Hitchcock's *Rear Window:* Reflexivity and the Critique of Voyeurism," *Enclitic* VII, no. 1 (Spring, 1983): 136-145. See *Enclitic* for an excellent reading of the performance and monster codes in Lisa's role.

[13]*Enclitic* calls these "framed genre pantomimes"—musical, murder story, silent films. p.138.

[14]Kehr describes the space ontologically as "the phantom space on the 'other side' of the fiction, the space behind the camera or in front of the screen that is also the space of Jeffries' apartment." Kehr, p. 13.

[15]One is reminded here of a much later edition of a classy tomboy, in the image of Jane Fonda in *The Electric Horseman,* bravely climbing the Rockies clad in Bloomingfield's boots and Christian Dior specs.

[16]Jeff's infantilism resembles Melanie's in *The Birds.* Accused as a witch, she is finally defanged (crucified) in a little girl's attic bedroom, and emerges an immobilized and desexualized "nun." With a white bandage like a nun's hood over her glazed eyes, she is more the chastened daughter of Mitch's mother than Mitch's erotic object of desire.

[17]Robin Wood, "Fear of Spying," *American Film* IX, no. 2, (Nov. 1983):28-35.

[18]Klaus Wyborny, "Random Notes on the Conventional Narrative," *Afterimage* 8/9 (Spring, 1981):113-132. See his strong indictment of conventional editing. He describes it as "an attribute of sub-criminal anomaly."

[19]Truffaut, p. 159.

[20]Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1981), p. 118. Lacan believes that before movement, before language, before sexual involvements, the child is held in the "fascinatory" stage, the stage of the "gaze."

[21]A. J. LaValley, ed. *Focus on Hitchcock* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 40.

[22]Peter Brooks, *Reading For the Plot* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1984). Hitchcock's notion of the MacGuffin is a perfect example of Peter Brooks' thesis that plotting as a tool to lure the reader stems from an erotic drive (the pleasure principle.)

[23]The story of the original MacGuffin, where it got its name, according to Hitchcock, concerned fictitious baggage with instruments to trap non-existent lions in Scotland.

[24]Examples of MacGuffins as ruses that delay or defer the resolution of romance, come from Hitchcock himself. The MacGuffin of *Rear Window,* he claims, is the wedding ring—it lures Lisa, Jeff, *and* the audience. In discussing the

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use of uranium in *Notorious,* Hitchcock writes that "one MacGuffin was as good as another if we are really putting together a love story." Also, he claimed that the FBI told him the MacGuffin of uranium had to be "entirely subordinate to the romance that Hitchcock had always wanted to emphasize in any case." LaValley, "Interview With Hitchcock," 286.

Also see Spoto, p. 145, who states that the dominant issue in *The Thirty-Nine Steps,* was not fighter plane specifications, but trust between "the couple."

[25]Bakhtin, p. 405.

[26]LaValley, p. 40.

[27]I believe this, despite Hitchcock's assertion that the film was not a question of morality, but a fact and truth that Jeff was a Peeping Tom and that he and Lisa were "a couple of fiendish ghouls" for wanting a murder. In the film, Lisa calls herself and Jeff "ghouls" when she at first thought there was no murder. LaValley, p. 43.

[28]Weis, Elisabeth, *The Silent Scream: Alfred Hitchcock's Sound Track* (New York: Farleigh Dickinson, 1982), chapter 6.

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