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**FROM THE WOMEN WHO KNEW
TOO MUCH: HITCHCOCK AND
FEMINIST THEORY (1988)**

THE MASTER'S DOLLHOUSE: REAR WINDOW

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In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey uses two Hitchcock films to exemplify her theory. According to Mulvey, both *Rear Window* (1954) and *Vertigo* (1958) are films "cut to the measure of male desire"—tailored, that is, to the fears and fantasies of the male spectator, who, because of the threat of castration posed by the woman's image, needs to see her fetishized and controlled in the course of the narrative.¹ Certainly, these two films appear perfectly to support Mulvey's thesis that classic narrative film negates woman's view, since each of them seems to confine us to the hero's vision of events and to insist on that vision by literally stressing the man's point of view throughout. The film spectator apparently has no choice *but* to identify with the male protagonist, who exerts an active, controlling gaze over a passive female object. In *Rear Window*, Mulvey writes, "Lisa's exhibitionism [is] established by her obsessive interest in dress and style, in being a passive image of visual perfection; Jeffries's voyeurism and activity [are] established through his work as a photojournalist, a maker of stories and captor of images. However, his enforced inactivity, binding him to his seat as a spectator, puts him squarely in the phantasy position of the cinema audience."²

This last observation connects Mulvey to a tradition of criticism of the film that begins with the work of the French critic Jean Douchet and that sees the film as a metacinematic commentary: spectators identifying with the chair-bound, voyeuristic protagonist find themselves in complicity with his guilty desires.³ Because of Hitch-

¹Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 17.

²Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," p. 16.

³Jean Douchet, "Hitch et son Public," *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 113 (November 1960): 10. For the most recent discussion of the film in relation to questions of spectatorship, see R. Barton Palmer, "The Metafictional Hitchcock: The Experience of Viewing and the Viewing of Experience in *Rear Window* and *Psycho*," *Cinema Journal* 26, no. 2 (Winter 1986): 4-29.

cock's relentless insistence on the male gaze, even critics like Robin Wood, who are anxious to save the film for feminism, restrict themselves to discussing the film's critique of the position of the hero and, by extension, of the *male* spectator whose "phantasy position the hero occupies."⁴ But what happens, in the words of a recent relevant article by Linda Williams, "when the woman looks"?⁵ I shall argue, against the grain of critical consensus, that the film actually has something to say about this question.⁶

Rear Window is the story of photojournalist, L. B. Jeffries (James Stewart), who, as a result of an accident on the job, is confined to a wheel chair in his apartment, where he whiles away the time spying on his neighbors. These include a middle-aged, alcoholic musician with composer's block; a newlywed couple who spend all their time in bed behind closed shades; a childless couple who sleep on the balcony at night and own a little dog; a voluptuous dancer, "Miss Torso," who practices her suggestive dance routines as she goes about her daily chores; "Miss Lonelyhearts," who fantasizes about gentlemen callers; and Lars Thorwald, a costume jewelry salesman with a nagging, invalid wife.

The film opens with the camera panning the courtyard of a lower east side housing development and then moving back through a window where we see L. B. Jeffries asleep, his chair turned away from the window, beads of sweat on his face. There is a cut to a thermometer, which registers over ninety degrees, and then the camera tilts down Jeffries's body to reveal that his leg is in a cast. The camera proceeds to explore the apartment, calling our attention to some smashed camera equipment, a photograph of a car accident, some other photographs Jeff has taken in his travels, and, finally, a negative of a blonde woman's face followed by a "positive" photograph of her on the cover of *Life* magazine. When Jeff wakes up, he begins to observe his neighbors and then complains on the phone to his editor that if he doesn't get back to the job soon, he's going to do "something drastic like get married." While he speaks of the horrors of marriage, we watch from his point of view as Thorwald (Raymond Burr) returns home to be greeted by a nagging wife.

Soon after, Stella (Thelma Ritter), the insurance company nurse, comes in to give Jeff a massage. She immediately begins to scold him for being a Peeping Tom, and tries to persuade him to marry Lisa Freemont, claiming that his lukewarm attitude to the woman he claims is "too perfect" is abnormal. Later that evening, Lisa (Grace Kelly) comes to visit, dressed in an \$1100 gown and accompanied by a waiter from the Twenty One Club, who is delivering their dinner. Lisa and Jeff have an argument as he tells her that marriage to him, given his grueling life style and her pampered one, is out of the question. When she goes home, Jeff begins to watch the neighbors again and observes some strange movements on the part of Lars Thorwald. Eventually Jeff falls asleep, and we see Thorwald and a woman leaving Thorwald's apart-

ment. The next day Jeff notices that Mrs. Thorwald has gone, and he becomes convinced that Thorwald has murdered his wife—a conviction that becomes more and more obsessive as the film progresses—to the point where he uses first binoculars and then a huge telephoto lens to see more closely. He attempts to persuade Lisa, Stella, and his friend, policeman Tom Doyle (Wendell Corey), of his interpretation of the events across the way. Though Doyle remains skeptical, the women eventually come to accept Jeff's view and actually go looking for clues.

Lisa is caught by Thorwald as she searches his apartment for the wedding ring that will prove Jeff's theory, and Jeff is forced to look helplessly on as Thorwald pushes her around. Jeff warns the police, whom he has just contacted on the phone to alert them that Miss Lonelyhearts is about to take an overdose of pills. The police arrive in time to prevent any harm from befalling Lisa, and they take her to jail. After Jeff sends Stella off with the bail money, he finds himself face to face with the guilty Thorwald, who asks, "What is it you want of me?" and steps forward menacingly. Jeff tries to keep him at bay by popping off flashbulbs in his face, but Thorwald manages to grab him and, during a struggle, Jeff falls to the ground from a window ledge.

The film ends with another pan around the courtyard. The various plots featuring the neighbors have been resolved: workmen are repainting the bathroom of Thorwald's apartment, where blood had splattered when Thorwald murdered his wife and cut her up in pieces; Miss Lonelyhearts, whose suicide was prevented when she heard the musician's beautiful song, has formed a relationship with the musician; Miss Torso's little soldier boyfriend Stanley arrives and asks what's in the refrigerator; the childless couple, whose dog was murdered by Thorwald because it was digging in the flower garden where evidence was buried (the dog who "knew too much," as Lisa puts it), have gotten another dog; and the newlywed wife is nagging her husband because he has lost his job. The camera tracks back into the window to show L.B. asleep, as before, only this time both his legs are in casts. The camera movement ends on a medium shot of Lisa lying on Jeff's bed, in pants and shirt, and reading a book entitled *Beyond the High Himalayas*. She steals a glance at Jeff to make sure he is still asleep, puts down the book, and picks up a copy of Harper's *Bazaar*. On the soundtrack is the musician's song, "Lisa," finally completed, like the narrative itself.

A number of critics, most of whom center their analyses around the film's critique of voyeurism, have pointed out that the film's protagonist is fixated at an infantile level of sexual development and must in the course of the narrative grow into "mature sexuality": "Jeffries's voyeurism goes hand in hand with an absorbing fear of mature sexuality. Indeed, the film begins by hinting at a serious case of psychosexual pathology. The first image of Jeffries, asleep with hand on thigh is quietly masturbatory, as if he were an invalid who had just abused himself in the dark."⁷ By the end of the film Jeff has supposedly learned his lesson and "has realized the corollary psychic costs of both voyeurism and solitude": he is now ready for the marriage he has all along resisted and for the "mature" sexual relation that this implies. Yet there is a sense in which the image of Lisa in masculine clothes, absorbed in "masculine" interests only places Jeff—and the audience—more squarely than ever in the Imaginary. For as the

⁴Robin Wood, "Fear of Spying," *American Film* (November 1982): 31–32.

⁵Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks," in *Revision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Williams. The American Film Institute Monograph Series, Vol. 3 (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1984).

⁶Robert Stam and Roberta Pearson do, however, devote one brief paragraph to this issue in their article, "Hitchcock's *Rear Window*: Reflexivity and the Critique of Voyeurism," *Enclitic* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 143.

⁷Stam and Pearson, "Hitchcock's *Rear Window*: Reflexivity," p. 140.

narrative proceeds, the sexuality of the woman, which is all along presented as threatening, is first combated by the fantasy of female dismemberment and then, finally, by a re-membering of the woman according to the little boy's fantasy that the female is no different from himself.⁸

Jeff claims that Lisa is "too perfect." On the face of it, of course, this reason for resisting marriage is patently absurd, as Stella does not fail to point out. (This absurdity leads one critic to argue that the project of the film is to stimulate the audience's desire for the couple's union by inducing frustration at "Jeff's indifference to her allure.")⁹ But, while it may indeed be "unrealistic" that any red-blooded man would reject Grace Kelly, there is a certain psychological plausibility in Jeff's fear of Lisa's "perfection"—a fear that is related to man's fear of women's difference and his suspicion that they may not, after all, be mutilated (imperfect) men, may not be what, as Susan Lurie puts it, *men* would be if they lacked penises—"bereft of sexuality, helpless, incapable."¹⁰ Lurie's words certainly describe the situation of Jeff, whose impotence is suggested by the enormous cast on his leg and his consequent inability to move about, so that ultimately he is unable to rescue the woman he loves from danger. By contrast, Lisa Freemont is anything but helpless and incapable, despite Mulvey's characterization of her as a "passive image of visual perfection"—and this is where the "problem" lies.

In our very first view of her, Lisa is experienced as an overwhelmingly powerful presence. Jeff is asleep in his chair, the camera positioned over him, when suddenly an ominous shadow crosses his face. There is a cut to a closeup of Grace Kelly, a vision of loveliness, bending down toward him and us: the princess-to-be waking Sleeping Beauty with a kiss. These two shots—shadow and vibrant image—suggest the underlying threat posed by the desirable woman and recall the negative and positive images of the woman on the cover of *Life*. When Jeff jokingly inquires, "Who are you?" Lisa turns on three lamps, replies, "Reading from top to bottom, Lisa . . . Carol . . . Freemont," and strikes a pose. While the pose confirms the view of her as exhibitionist, her confident nomination of herself reveals her to be extremely self-possessed—in contrast to the man who is known by only one of *his* three names. The two engage in small talk as Lisa sets about preparing the dinner brought in from the Twenty One Club, and Jeff makes continual jibes about married life. Lisa ends the conversation by claiming, "At least you can't say the dinner's not alright," and over a shot of a very appetizing meal, Jeff replies, exasperated, "Lisa, it's perfect, as *always*." In the meantime we have witnessed Thorwald taking dinner in to his wife, who pushes it from her in disgust and flings away the rose he has placed on the tray.

Important parallels are thus set up between Lisa and Thorwald, on the one hand, and Jeff and the wife, on the other. Critics have seldom picked up on this parallelism, preferring instead to stress a symmetry along sexual lines—that is, Jeff's similarity to

Thorwald and Lisa's resemblance to the blonde wife. Interestingly, Hitchcock himself was quite explicit about the gender reversal: "The symmetry is the same as in *Shadow of a Doubt*. On one side of the yard you have the Stewart-Kelly couple, with him immobilized by his leg in a cast, while she can move about freely. And on the other side there is a sick woman who's confined to her bed, while the husband comes and goes."¹¹ Raymond Bellour has shown how in classic cinema a binary opposition between movement and stasis generally works to establish male superiority in classical narrative cinema.¹² In *Rear Window*, however, the *woman* is continually shown to be physically superior to the hero, not only in her physical movements but also in her dominance within the frame: she towers over Jeff in nearly every shot in which they both appear.

Given this emphasis on the woman's mobility, freedom, and power, it seems odd that an astute critic like Mulvey sees in the image of Lisa Freemont only a passive object of the male gaze. Mulvey bases her judgment on the fact that Lisa appears to be "obsessed with dress and style," continually putting herself on visual display for Jeff so that he will notice her and turn his gaze away from the neighbors.¹³ (In this respect, the "project" of the film resembles that of *Rebecca*, which also deals with a woman's efforts to get the man she loves to look at her.) It is important, however, not to dismiss out of hand Lisa's professional and personal involvement with fashion but to consider all the ways this involvement *functions* in the narrative. This is no simple matter. For if, on the one hand, woman's concern with fashion quite obviously serves patriarchal interests, on the other hand, this very concern is often denigrated and ridiculed by men (as it is by Jeff throughout the film)—thus putting women in a familiar double bind by which they are first assigned a restricted place in patriarchy and then condemned for occupying it. For feminist criticism to ignore the full complexity of woman's contradictory situation is to risk acquiescing in masculine contempt for female activities. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf suggested that a necessary, if not sufficient, feminist strategy must be to reclaim and revalue women's actual experience under patriarchy. The example Woolf gives of the double literary standard operating against this experience is telling, and relevant to our discussion here: "Speaking crudely, football and sport are important, the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes trivial, and these values are inevitably transferred from life to fiction."¹⁴ Certainly these two sets of values are counterpoised in the fiction of *Rear Window* (Jeff has, after all, broken his leg at a *sporting* event, where he stepped in front of an oncoming race car to get a spectacular photograph) and are the source of the couple's quarrels. Jeff dwells on the hardships of his manly life style and belittles Lisa's work when she enthusiastically describes her day to him. In the film, then, "fashion" is far from representing woman's unproblematic assimilation to the patriarchal system, but functions to some extent as a signifier of feminine desire and female sexual difference.

⁸A constant theme in the writings of Stephen Heath is the way cinema works to "remember" (the male) spectator: e.g., "the historical reality it encounters [is] a permanent crisis of identity that must be permanently resolved by remembering the history of the individual subject." "Film Performance," *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 125.

⁹Ruth Perlmutter, "Rear Window: A Construction Story," *Journal of Film and Video* 37 (Spring 1985): 59.

¹⁰Susan Lurie, "Pornography and the Dread of Women: The Male Sexual Dilemma," *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography*, ed. Laure Lederer (New York: William Morrow, 1980), p. 166.

¹¹François Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 166.

¹²This point is developed at great length in Raymond Bellour, "The Birds: Analysis of a Sequence," Mimeo-graph, The British Film Institute Advisory Service, n. d.

¹³That he is so reluctant to do so provides an interesting confirmation of Christian Metz's thesis that in narrative cinema, it is the story, rather than any particular character, that "exhibits itself." "History/discourse: a note on two voyeurisms," *Theories of Authorship*, ed. John Caughie (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 231.

¹⁴Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harbinger, 1957), p. 77.

Throughout the film, Lisa's exquisite costumes give her the appearance of an alien presence in Jeff's milieu, more strange and marvelous than the various exotic wonders he has encountered in his travels—a strangeness that is fascinating and threatening at the same time. The threat becomes especially evident in the sequence in which Lisa boldly acts on her desire for Jeff and comes to spend the night with him. Significantly, this is the night when she becomes convinced of the truth of Thorwald's guilt. Jeff has just observed Thorwald talking on the phone and sorting through some jewelry, which includes a wedding ring, in his wife's purse. In Hitchcock's films, women's purses (and their jewelry) take on a vulgar Freudian significance relating to female sexuality and to men's attempts to investigate it. One might think, for example, of the purse in the opening closeup shot of *Marnie* (1964) that contains Marnie's "identity" cards and the booty of her theft from patriarchy. In *Rear Window*, Lisa concludes that Mrs. Thorwald *must* have been murdered rather than, as Tom Doyle believes, sent on a trip because no woman would leave behind her favorite purse (to say nothing of her wedding ring). As she muses, Lisa picks up her own designer purse, which we discover is a kind of "trick" purse; it is really a tiny suitcase, and in one of her many lines that sound like sexual double entendres (this one unwittingly echoing the Freudian notion of male and female sexuality, but reversing their values since it takes the latter as the standard), she says, "I'll bet *yours* isn't this small." When she opens the case, an elaborate and expensive negligee comes tumbling out, along with a pair of lovely slippers. The purse connects Lisa to the victimized woman, as does the negligee, since the invalid Mrs. Thorwald was always seen wearing a nightgown; but it also, importantly, connects her to the criminal, Lars Thorwald, and so is an overdetermined image like the images in the Freudian dreamwork. Thus when Tom Doyle comes to Jeff's apartment later in the evening, he keeps casting meaningful glances at the nightgown as if it were an incriminating object; when Jeff asks why Thorwald didn't tell his landlord where he was going, Doyle looks at the suitcase and asks pointedly, "Do you tell *your* landlord everything?" After Doyle has gone, Lisa picks up the suitcase, offering Jeff a "preview of coming attractions," and as she goes into the bathroom to change, she asks, "Do you think Mr. Doyle thought I stole this case?"

Lisa's aggressive sexuality, which is thus humorously labelled "criminal," would seem to provoke in Jeff and the male spectator a retaliatory aggression that finds an outlet in Thorwald's acts of murder and dismemberment. The interpretation of *Rear Window* which critics like Robin Wood take to be primary—that Lars Thorwald's murder of his wife enacts a wish on the part of Jeff to be rid of Lisa—is persuasive as far as it goes, but this wish may further be analyzed as a response to the male fear of impotence and lack. Jeff's impairment—his helplessness, passivity, and invalidism—impel him to construct a story that, in the words of Kaja Silverman (describing the male's psychic trajectory), attempts to "resituate . . . loss at the level of the female anatomy, thereby restoring to the [male] an imaginary wholeness."¹⁵ Hence the fan-

¹⁵Kaja Silverman, "Lost Objects and Mistaken Subjects: Film Theory's Structuring Lack," *Wide Angle* 7, nos. 1–2 (1985): 24. In many respects, Silverman's position is close to Lurie's. However, Lurie, in common with many "American" feminists (as opposed to French or French-influenced feminists), seems to share to some extent the little boy's fantasy, which he comes to deny, of woman's "wholeness," whereas for Silverman all subjects are inevitably divided, but in patriarchal culture men are able to project division on to women, thus maintaining the illusion of their own completeness.

tasy of female dismemberment that pervades the film: not only are there many gruesome jokes about Lars Thorwald's cutting up his wife's body, but Jeff also names the women across the way according to body parts: Miss Lonelyhearts and Miss Torso—yet another decapitated woman.¹⁶

This response is a psychic consequence of Jeff's placement at the mirror stage of development, a placement that, as critics like to point out, makes him very much like Christian Metz's cinematic spectator, who occupies a transcendent, godlike position in relation to the screen.¹⁷ To some extent, however, this analogy between the windows across the way and the cinema screen is misleading, since it is the very *difference* between the world observed by Jeff and the larger-than-life-world of most films that accounts for the strong effect of transcendence evoked by *Rear Window*. For Jeff's world is a miniature one, like a dollhouse—a world, as Susan Stewart writes, "of inversion [wherein] contamination and crudeness are controlled . . . by an absolute manipulation of space and time."¹⁸ Resembling other fantasy structures, . . . even sleep," the miniature, according to Stewart, "tends toward tableau rather than narrative" and "is against speech, particularly as speech reveals an inner dialectical, or dialogic, nature. . . . All senses are reduced to the visual, a sense which in its transcendence remains ironically and tragically remote" (pp. 66–67).¹⁹ It is significant that in *Rear Window* only little snatches of conversation may be heard across the way; generally the events proceed mutely, with diegetic noises and music filling the soundtrack (one song even proclaims the primacy of the visual: Bing Crosby's "To See You is to Love You," playing, ironically, while Miss Lonelyhearts entertains a phantom lover). Moreover, the tableau-like spaces of the microscreens across the way find their temporal equivalent in the device of the fade which punctuates the film, likewise creating a sense of a sealed-off fantasy world impervious to the dialogic, "contaminated" world of lived experience.

Just as the cinema, in its resemblance to the mirror at the mirror stage, offers the viewer an image of wholeness and plenitude, so too does the dollhouse world of the apartment buildings Jeff watches. In fact, one of the reasons the miniature is so appealing is that it suggests completeness and "perfection," as in the description of Tom Thumb quoted by Stewart: "No mis-shapen limbs, no contorted features were there, but all was sweet and beautiful" (p. 46; unlike, say, Gulliver's ugly Brobdingnags, whose every imperfection is magnified a hundredfold). But just as this passage must raise the spectre of physical mutilation in order to banish it, the mirror phase—

¹⁶On this point see Perlmutter, "Rear Window: A Construction Story," p. 58.

¹⁷Metz speaks of "that *other mirror*, the cinema screen, in this respect a veritable psychical substitute, a prosthesis for our primally dislocated limbs." Quoted in Stam and Pearson, "Hitchcock's *Rear Window*: Reflexivity," p. 138.

¹⁸Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 63. It is important to recognize, as John Belton has pointed out, that Jeff does not merely watch, but actively manipulates his neighbors, "writing a blackmail letter ('What have you done with her?') which keeps the suspected killer from leaving town and later luring him out of his apartment with a phone call so that it can be searched." *Cinema Stylists* (Metuchen, N. J.: Scarecrow, 1983), p. 15. Stewart hereafter cited in the text.

¹⁹In his meditation on the miniature in *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard makes a similar point. However, unlike Stewart, Bachelard celebrates the tendency of the miniature to place us in a position of transcendence. See *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1964), pp. 148–82.

the phase at which the child first “anticipates . . . the apprehension and mastery of its bodily unity”—evokes retroactively in the child a phantasy of “*the-body-in pieces*.”²⁰ This fantasy, according to Lacan, corresponds to the autoerotic stage preceding the formation of the ego (precisely the stage evoked by the “quietly masturbatory” image of the “mutilated” Jeff at the film’s opening).²¹ On the one hand, then, there is the anticipation of bodily “perfection” and unity which is, importantly, first promised by the body of the woman; on the other hand, the fantasy of dismemberment, a fantasy that gets disavowed by projecting it onto the body of the woman, who, in an interpretation which reverses the state of affairs the male child most fears, eventually comes to be perceived as castrated, mutilated, “imperfect.”

Similarly, Jeff’s interpretation of the events he sees across the way—his piecing together the fragments of evidence he observes in the Thorwald apartment into a coherent narrative—is designed to reverse the situation in his own apartment, to invalidate the female and assure his own control and dominance. It is not enough, however, for him to construct an interpretation that victimizes woman; for patriarchal interpretations to work, they require her assent: man’s conviction must become woman’s conviction—in a double sense. Those critics who emphasize the film’s restriction of point of view to the male character neglect the fact that it increasingly stresses a *dual* point of view, with the reverse shots finding *both* Jeff and Lisa intently staring out the window at the neighbors across the way. It seems possible, then, to consider Lisa as a representative of the *female* spectator at the cinema. And through her, we can ask if it is true that the female spectator simply acquiesces in the male’s view or, if, on the contrary, her relationship to the spectacle and the narrative is different from his?

From the outset, Lisa is less interested than Jeff in spying on the neighbors and adopting a transcendent and controlling relation to the texts of their lives; rather, she relates to the “characters” through empathy and identification. Early in the film, Jeff jokingly points out a similarity between her apartment and that of Miss Torso, who at the time is seen entertaining several men. Jeff says, “she’s like a queen bee with her pick of the drones,” to which Lisa responds, “I’d say she’s doing a woman’s hardest job—juggling wolves.” Miss Torso accompanies one of the men onto the balcony where she kisses him briefly and tries to go back inside while he attempts to restrain her. Jeff says, “she sure picked the most prosperous looking one,” and Lisa disparages this notion, claiming, “she’s not in love with *him*—or with any of them for that matter.” When Jeff asks her how she can be so certain, she replies, “you *said* it resembled my apartment didn’t you?” Later the same man forces himself on Miss Torso, who has to fight him off, and still later—at the end of the film—Miss Torso’s true love, Stanley, will come to visit her. Thus despite critics’ emphasis on the film’s limited point of view, Lisa and Jeff have very *different* interpretations about the woman’s desire in this scene fraught with erotic and violent potential, and it is *Lisa’s* interpretation, arrived at through identification, that is ultimately validated.

²⁰Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, Trans. Donald Nicholson Smith (London: Hogarth, 1973), p. 251.

²¹Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 1–7.

Whereas Jeff sees Miss Torso as “queen bee,” Lisa significantly changes the metaphor: Miss Torso is prey to “wolves.” In fact, Lisa’s increasing absorption in Jeff’s story, her fascination with his murderous, misogynist tale, is accompanied by a corresponding discovery of women’s victimization at the hands of men. At one point in the film, Lisa can be seen staring even more intently than Jeff: that is, when Miss Lonelyhearts picks up a young man at a bar and brings him home, only to be assaulted by him. As Lisa stares and Jeff looks away in some embarrassment, the song “Mona Lisa” is heard, sung by drunken revellers at the musician’s party. The title of the song suggests an important link between the two women (“is it only cause you’re *lonely*, *Mona Lisa*”), and between the male fantasies that are projected onto woman (“Mona Lisa, Mona Lisa, men have named you”; and “many dreams have been brought to your doorstep”) and the brutal reality of male violence to which women are frequently subjected.

Of course, the most brutal act of all is Thorwald’s butchering of his wife’s body—an act devoutly desired by Jeff—and later, by Lisa herself. At one level, *Rear Window* may be seen as a parable of the dangers involved for women of becoming invested in male stories and male interpretations. Or perhaps we should say “overinvested”—unable, as Mary Ann Doane maintains, to adopt, as men do, the appropriate, voyeuristic distance from the text.²² Rather, women supposedly “enter into” films so thoroughly that they tend to confuse the very boundary between fantasy and reality—like Lisa crossing over and merging into the “screen” opposite Jeff’s window. This merger is a logical extension of her ready identification with the victimized woman, an identification that actually leads to the solution of the crime. Lisa is able to provide the missing evidence because she claims a special knowledge of women that men lack: the knowledge, in this case, that no woman would go on a trip and leave behind her purse and her wedding ring. Lisa appeals to the authority of Stella, asking her if she would ever go somewhere without her ring, and Stella replies, “They’d have to cut off my finger.”

Embarking on a search for this incriminating ring, Lisa becomes trapped in Thorwald’s apartment when he returns unobserved by Stella and Jeff, who have been preoccupied by the sight of Miss Lonelyhearts about to kill herself. Jeff alerts the police and then watches in agonized helplessness as Lisa is flung about the room by Thorwald. The police arrive in time to prevent another woman from being cut up, and as Lisa stands with her back to the screen—caught, like so many Hitchcock heroines, between the criminal and the legal authorities—she points to the wedding ring on her finger. François Truffaut has admired this touch:

One of the things I enjoyed in the film was the dual significance of that wedding ring. Grace Kelly wants to get married but James Stewart doesn’t see it that way. She breaks into the killer’s apartment to search for evidence and she finds the wedding ring. She puts it on her finger and waves her hand behind her back so that James Stewart, looking over from the other side of the yard with his spyglasses, can see it. To Grace Kelly, that ring

²²I again refer the reader to the opening pages of Mary Ann Doane’s *The Desire to Desire: The Woman’s Film of the 1940’s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

is a double victory; not only is it the evidence she was looking for, but who knows, it may inspire Stewart to propose to her. After all, she's already got the ring.²³

Thus speaks the male critic, who has habitually considered the film to be a reflection on marriage from the man's point of view. A female spectator of *Rear Window* may, however, use her special knowledge of women and their position in patriarchy to see another kind of significance in the ring; to the woman identifying, like Lisa herself, with the female protagonist of the story, the episode may be read as pointing up the victimization of women by men. Just as Miss Lonelyhearts, pictured right below Lisa in a kind of "split screen" effect, has gone looking for a little companionship and romance and ended up nearly being raped, so Lisa's ardent desire for marriage leads straight to a symbolic wedding with a wife-murderer. For so many women in Hitchcock—and this is the point of his continual reworking of the "female Gothic"—"wedlock is deadlock" indeed.²⁴

But it is not only the female spectator who is bound to identify with Lisa at this climactic moment in the story—the moment which seems actually to be the point of the film. Jeff himself—and, by extension, the male film viewer—is forced to identify with the woman and to become aware of his *own* passivity and helplessness in relation to the events unfolding before his eyes. Thus, all Jeff's efforts to repudiate the feminine identification the film originally sets up (Jeff and Anna Thorwald as mirror images) end in resounding failure, and he is forced to be, in turn, the victim of Hitchcock's cinematic manipulations of space and time. In a discussion with Truffaut about his theory of suspense, Hitchcock uses this scene with Grace Kelly as his chief example of how to create "the public's identification" with an endangered person, even when that person is an unlikable "snooper." "Of course," he explains, "when the character is attractive, as for instance Grace Kelly in *Rear Window*, the public's emotion is greatly intensified" (p. 73). The implication here is that in scenes of suspense, which in Hitchcock films, as in other thrillers, usually take woman as their object as well as their subject, our identification is generally with the imperiled woman. In this respect, we do in fact all become masochists at the cinema—and it is extremely interesting to note that Theodor Reik considered suspense to be a major factor in masochistic fantasies.²⁵

Suspense, Truffaut has claimed, "is simply the dramatization of a film's narrative material, or, if you will, the most intense presentation possible of dramatic situations"; suspense is not "a minor form of the spectacle," but "*the* spectacle in itself" (p. 15). Granted this equivalence between suspense and "*the* spectacle," *the* narrative, might we not then say that spectatorship and "narrativity" are themselves "feminine" (to the male psyche) in that they place the spectator in a passive position and in a submissive relation to the text? Robert Scholes has observed that "narrativity"—the

"process by which a perceiver actively constructs a story from the fictional data provided by any narrative medium,"²⁶ (the process, that is, which is inscribed in *Rear Window* through the character of Jeff)—is a situation of "licensed and benign paranoia" in that "it assumes a purposefulness in the activities of narration which, if it existed in the world, would be truly destructive of individuality and personality as we know them" (p. 396).²⁷ Narrativity involves, in Scholes's words, a "quality of submission and abandon" (we may recall the paranoid Dr. Schreber's attitude of "voluptuousness" toward God's grand narrative which featured a plot to impregnate the feminized doctor). This quality once noted by Scholes leads him to call for stories which reward the "most energetic and rigorous kinds of narrativity" as a means of exercising control over the text that seeks to manipulate and seduce its audience (p. 397). Of course, it is precisely Jeff's suspicion that there is a "purposefulness" to the activities across the way that impels him to adopt an "energetic and rigorous"—i.e., controlling, transcendent, and, above all, "*masculine*"—narrativity.

At this moment in the film the camera traces a triangular trajectory from Jeff's gaze at the ring to Thorwald, who sees the ring and then looks up at Jeff, returning the gaze for the first time. And then Thorwald proceeds to complete the "feminization" process by crossing over to Jeff's apartment and placing Jeff in the role previously played by Mrs. Thorwald and then by Lisa—that of victim to male violence. Jeff's "distancing" techniques, of course, no longer work, and the flashing bulbs only manage to slow Thorwald down a bit. Like Lisa, Jeff finally becomes a participant in his story, though *his* identification with the female character is involuntary, imposed on him by Thorwald, whose visit comes like the return of the repressed.

Although Jeff's interpretation of the Thorwald story has been validated by the end of the film, Jeff himself remains *invalided*, ending up with *two* broken legs, the body less "perfect" than ever, while Lisa, lounging on the bed, has become the mirror image of the man—dressed in masculine clothes and reading a book of male adventure. No longer representing sexual difference, nominating herself and speaking her own desire, Lisa is now spoken *by* the male artist—by the musician, whose completed song "Lisa" plays on the soundtrack ("men have named you," indeed), and ultimately by Hitchcock himself, who earlier made his appearance in the musician's apartment. More clearly than most, the film's ending and its "narrative image" of Lisa in masculine drag²⁸ reveals the way in which acceptable femininity is a construct of male narcissistic desire; despite Freud's claim that women tend to be more narcissistic than

²⁶Robert Scholes, "Narration and Narrativity in Film," in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 393. Hereafter cited in the text.

²⁷Peter Brooks speaks of the same activity in similar terms, terms recalling the way in which "femininity" is perceived and constructed under patriarchy: "The assumption of another's story, the entry into narratives not one's own, runs the risk of an alienation from self that in Balzac's work repeatedly evokes the threat of madness and aphasia." See his *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Vintage, 1985), p. 219.

²⁸Teresa de Lauretis borrows this term, "narrative image," from Stephen Heath: "In cinema . . . woman properly represents the fulfillment of the narrative promise (made, as we know, to the little boy), and that representation works to support the male status of the mythical subject. The female position, produced as the end result of narrativization, is the figure of narrative closure, the narrative image in which the film, as Heath says, 'comes together.'" *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 140.

²³Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p. 223. Hereafter cited in the text.

²⁴The phrase is taken from James B. McLaughlin's excellent discussion of Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt*, "All in the Family: Alfred Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt*," *Wide Angle* 4, no. 1 (1980): 18.

²⁵Theodor Reik, *Masochism and Modern Man*, trans. Margaret H. Biegel and Gertrud M. Kurth (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1941), pp. 59–71. On the primacy of masochism in human development, see Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 89.

men, who supposedly possess a greater capacity for object love.²⁹ The film has consistently shown the opposite state of affairs to be the case, and in particular has revealed Jeff to be unable to care for Lisa except insofar as she affirms and mirrors him: significantly, he becomes erotically attracted to her only when she begins to corroborate his interpretation of the world around him (the first time he looks at her with real desire is not, as Mulvey claims, when she goes into the Thorwald apartment and becomes the object of his voyeurism, but when she begins to supply arguments in favor of his version of events).

One of the most highly reflexive of films, *Rear Window* indicates that what Jean-Louis Baudry has argued to be characteristic of the cinematic apparatus as a whole—and in particular of *projection*—is also true at the level of narrative, which functions as masculine fantasy *projected* onto the body of woman. Baudry maintains that because film projection depends on negation of the individual image as such “we could say that film . . . lives on the denial of difference: the difference is necessary for it to live, but it lives on its negation.”³⁰ Similarly, much narrative cinema negates the *sexual* difference that nevertheless sustains it—negates it in the dual sense of transforming women into Woman and Woman into man’s mirror. (Thus Baudry’s analogy between cinema and woman is more revealing than he seems to know: speaking of our tendency to “go to movies before deciding which film we want to see,” Baudry writes that cinéphiles “seem just as blind in their passion as those lovers who imagine they love a woman because of her qualities or because of her beauty. They need good movies, but most of all, to rationalize their need for cinema.”³¹ Any woman, like any movie, will do to fulfill man’s “need.” Put a paper bag over their heads and all women are like Miss Torso or the headless “Hunger” sculpture of the female artist in Jeff’s courtyard, both of whom function, like the cinematic apparatus itself, to displace male fears of fragmentation. “What might one say,” Baudry asks, “of the function of the head in this captivation [of the spectator at the movies]: it suffices to recall that for Bataille materialism makes itself headless—like a wound that bleeds and thus transfuses.”³²)

That “difference is necessary” for cinema to live and therefore can never be destroyed, but only continually negated, is implied by the ending of *Rear Window*. Jeff is once again asleep, in the same position as he was at the film’s opening, and Lisa, after assuring herself that he is *not* watching her (in contrast to former times when she had worked so hard to attract his gaze), puts away his book and picks up her own magazine. As important as this gesture is, even more important is the fact that the film gives her the last look. This is, after all, the conclusion of a movie that all crit-

ics agree is about the power the man attempts to wield through exercising the gaze. We are left with the suspicion (a preview, perhaps, of coming attractions) that while men sleep and dream their dreams of omnipotence over a safely reduced world, women are not where they appear to be, locked into male “views” of them, imprisoned in their master’s dollhouse.

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²⁹Sigmund Freud, “On Narcissism: An Introduction,” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 14, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1974), pp. 88–89.

³⁰Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus,” trans. Alan Williams, *Apparatus: Cinematographic Apparatus: Selected Writings*, ed. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (New York: Tanam, 1980), p. 29.

³¹Jean-Louis Baudry, “Author and Analyzable Subject,” in *Apparatus*, p. 68.

³²Baudry, “Ideological Effects,” p. 32. In light of the “headless woman” motif in Hitchcock, consider the following remark by Joan Copjec, “We know that the dreamer dreams of himself when he dreams of a person whose head he cannot see.” “The Anxiety of the Influencing Machine,” *October* 23 (Winter 1982): 44.