

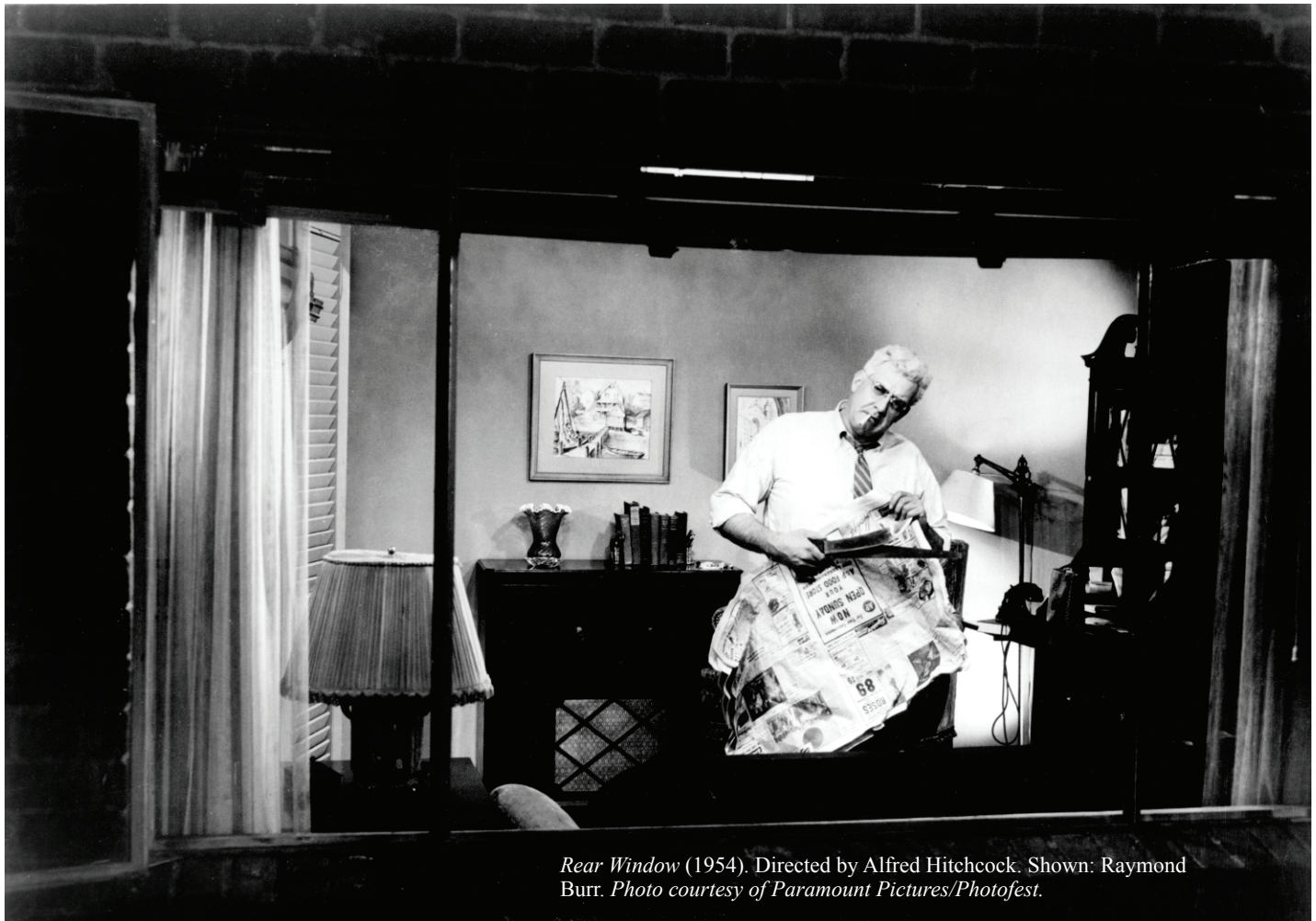
CHANNELING

Rear Window

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BY
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Rear Window (1954). Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Shown: Raymond Burr. Photo courtesy of Paramount Pictures/Photofest.

Abstract: *Rear Window* is usually interpreted as a metaphor for cinema and film spectatorship. However, the film's domestic setting, plural spectacles, and gendered spectators' conversations could also refer to television, which at the time was sweeping the nation, and which Hitchcock was on the verge of exploring creatively and financially.

Keywords: cinema apparatus, gendered spectator, Alfred Hitchcock, popular entertainment, television history

IT'S 1954, and a man accustomed to life as a globetrotting photojournalist finds himself laid up with a broken leg. His Greenwich Village apartment is hot, and on the phone with his editor he complains of profound boredom. We see a stack of copies of the magazine he works for, but there seem to be no newspapers or books, no phonograph or radio, and no sign of the newest form of home entertainment, television. What can L.B. "Jeff" Jefferies, the central figure in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, do to while away the time?

THIS IMAGE MIGHT BETTER APPLY NOT TO THE SINGULAR SPECTACLE THAT IS CINEMA, BUT INSTEAD TO THE SIMULTANEOUS/COMPETING STORIES ON THE CHANNELS OF TELEVISION, TO WHICH THE SPECTATOR CAN TURN AS HE *OR SHE* WISHES.

In 1954, the same year as the film's release, an estimated audience of forty-three million watched the March 25 telecast of the Oscars (Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor 2*), and the Army-McCarthy hearings were broadcast to twenty-two million daytime viewers from April to June that same year (Doherty, "Army-McCarthy Hearings"). But like most film directors in the 1950s, Hitchcock kept the *mise-en-scène* of *Rear Window* devoid of television. Or did he? As Jefferies' primary form of entertainment, he gazes out of the window that critics since the 1960s have interpreted as a metaphor for cinema. However, I would suggest that the domestic setting, the plural spectacles, and the interpretive conversations among the spectators in Jefferies' apartment can be seen as a reference to television, the mass medium that by the time of *Rear Window's* production was sweeping the nation, and a medium which Hitchcock himself was on the verge of exploring creatively and financially.

Rear Window, Another Look

The accepted interpretation of *Rear Window* has evolved from Jean Douchet's observations in "Hitch and His Public" (originally published in 1960, translated into English in 1961), which identifies Stewart/Jefferies as a spectator and a voyeur who "invents his own cinema" (19). Douchet's observations have been elaborated using Baudry's concept of the cinematic apparatus as the centerpiece, employing ideological and psychoanalytic approaches to get at the role of the spectator in cinema as he (note gender) makes sense of the spectacle. The rear window itself, some say, has the aspect ratio of wide-screen cinema (Curtis 28). The progressively larger lenses Jefferies uses for "close-ups," and his interpretations of

what he sees, suggest he is both desirous film spectator and "substitute director/auteur" (Stam and Pearson 201).

In several analyses of the film, this interpretation has become the theoretical "given," and is further developed in, for example, Mulvey's feminist observations on scopophilia and male dominance in mainstream Hollywood films (719–29). Stam and Pearson base their discussion of the film on this premise, but they also quote Foucault's description of the panopticon to describe the spectacle Jefferies observes: "so many cages, so many small theaters, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible" (203). This image might better apply not to the singular spectacle that is cinema, but instead to the simultaneous/competing stories on the channels of television, to which the spectator can turn as he *or she* wishes. Jefferies, seated in his living room, is watching not one movie, but an array of small windows, each revealing little stories to which he switches at will.

Only one writer has heretofore suggested that the viewing activity in Jeff's apartment could be understood as something other than cinematic. In *Hitchcock's Rear Window: The Well-Made Film* (2001), John Fawell offers two paragraphs, quoted here in their entirety to be clear:

In fact, it may be more to the point to see Jeff as a television watcher rather than a filmgoer. The set of *Rear Window* resembles a crude anticipation of the remote control, with Jeff going back and forth from one story to another. Jeff's habits are similar to those of someone watching television. Jeff uses the windows as an escape from his troubles. Twice after squabbles with Lisa, the night she leaves angrily and the night she goes off, hurt, to prepare dinner, Jeff seems sincerely troubled by their fights. But within moments, a cloud of guiltiness crosses over his face and his eyes sneak to the window. Like a television viewer, he eats while watching the windows. Stella chides him for falling asleep in front of the

windows just as a wife might chide a husband for falling asleep in front of the television, something Hitchcock confessed to doing regularly.

One might also consider the timing of *Rear Window*. The film was made in 1954, at the advent of the television era. It is plausible to see commentary in the film on the way the voyeurism of the cinema was seeping into the home, how America was entering an era of even more intense and isolated voyeurism. Hitchcock himself would discover television as a resource for marketing his brand of voyeurism the very next year when he would televise his *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* show. Consciously or unconsciously, *Rear Window* was made at a time when television was poised to do to millions of American [sic] just what Jeff's windows do to him: turn him into a Peeping Tom, who, as Stella says, needs to take a good look inside for a change. (130)

In proposing an interpretation of Jeff's activity as television watching rather than as a metaphor for cinema, Fawell identifies several elements to be discussed in this article. But even in opening up these possibilities, he limits his analysis to the standard critique of television (escapist, sleep-inducing, and because of its low-art connotations then and until recently, a guilty pleasure). Moreover, he makes no mention of Lisa or Stella as spectators. He then abandons this idea by the beginning of his next chapter, reaffirming that the film is, among other things, "a commentary... on the nature of film going and film viewing" (135).

However, Fawell's mention of the film's cultural and historical contexts in the above passage suggests the relevance of a television-oriented interpretation to our understanding of Hitchcock in 1950's America as director and producer. The following discussion will draw from scholarship in cultural histories of American media in the 1950s and theoretical work in media studies, as well as recent biographies of Hitchcock and his contemporaries.

The Context of *Rear Window*

By the time Hitchcock was shooting *Rear Window* he was poised to assume a central place in the shifting media landscape. As a result of his 1939 contract with producer David O. Selznick, the Selznick talent agency represented the director through the early 1940s. The agency was purchased by New York talent agent Leland Hayward,¹ whose Hayward-Deverich agency was in turn bought by the Music Corporation of America in 1945, bringing along major stars, writers, and directors, including Hitchcock and James Stewart (McGilligan 407). Originally a talent agency for live music and radio, MCA had established a practice of obtaining “blanket waivers” with the musicians’ union (American Federation of Musicians), allowing the agency to both represent individual artists and produce the radio programs on which they would appear (Wasko 143). The practice continued as MCA moved into the film industry. Lew Wasserman, president of the company by 1946, became “the matchmaker between Hitchcock and Stewart,” according to Hitchcock biographer Patrick McGilligan (407). Wasserman negotiated Stewart’s appearance in Hitchcock’s *Rope* in 1948, and eventually a nine-picture deal between Hitchcock and Paramount, which would include Stewart’s starring roles in *Rear Window*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, and *Vertigo* (see also McDougal 205).

By 1952, Wasserman oversaw the creation of Revue Productions, a new subsidiary of MCA, based at Universal Studios (Schatz, *Genius* 484). Revue produced many of television’s early anthology series, such as *General Electric Theater*, hosted by MCA client Ronald Reagan, who also was president of the Screen Actors Guild. Through these connections, Wasserman revived the sort of waiver that had proved so advantageous for MCA in the past, this time with stars of both film and television. He “packaged” series for television networks by providing program writers, directors, and stars from the MCA client list for programs that would then be produced



Rear Window (1954). Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Photo courtesy of Paramount Pictures/Photofest.

by its subsidiary, Revue. Wasserman worked with stars such as Jack Benny and Errol Flynn, as well as Hitchcock, to create independent production companies, “allowing [the stars] to minimize taxes while exploiting their star salaries and expanding their influence in movie production” (McDougal 252; Anderson 262–64; Schatz, *Genius* 470–72). It’s important to note that through his connection with Wasserman, Hitchcock would have seen the rapid development of television, as well as the financial benefits of the percentage deals and tax advantages Wasserman was able to negotiate in the new medium. In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, Hitchcock quipped, “I am entering television because I am the tip of a tendril. I am a slave to MCA” (qtd. in McGilligan 515). In turn, the director’s name was used by MCA when other clients balked at working in television; said one agent,

“If Hitchcock can do it, why can’t you?” (McDougal 252).

In the wake of the 1948 Paramount decision, which had forced the studios to eliminate long-term contracts with actors, writers, and directors, MCA moved into the void and “became known as ‘The Octopus’ because its tentacles extended into every aspect of the entertainment business” (McDougal 123). In addition, the FCC’s 1948 freeze on the issuance of new television station licenses was lifted in April, 1952, allowing for the rapid rise of television penetration into cities previously lacking access to TV programming (Barnouw 140). The programming climate of American television in the early-to-mid 1950s included musical and variety shows, sports, news, educational series, and of course fiction, which ranged from prestigious live anthology drama series to telefilmed Western and science



Rear Window (1954). Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Shown: Georgine Darcy. Photo courtesy of Paramount Pictures/Photofest.

fiction series to sitcoms. As Thomas Schatz, Janet Wasko, and Christopher Anderson have shown, the film industry was eager to get involved in the new medium. The Disney Studio was one of the earliest forays in October, 1954, with its ABC deal giving the network a 30% share of the new Disneyland theme park and the studio a weekly series (Anderson 133–55; Schatz, *The Genius* 477). By 1955, Warner Bros. had begun another weekly series with ABC, rotating programs of three different genres based on successful Warner Bros. films (Anderson 155–90).

Early in 1955, some seven months after *Rear Window* was released, Wasserman proposed to Hitchcock a TV series that would tie in with the recently (independently) launched *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*. After his original reluctance to become involved in the new, less prestigious medium, Hitchcock agreed to put his name on the mystery anthology series, act as on-air host,

serve as executive producer, and direct an “unspecified” number of episodes (McCarty and Kelleher 13–15). Shamley Productions, named after an English summer cottage Hitchcock and his wife owned for many years, became the production company for *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1955–1962) and later the *Alfred Hitchcock Hour* (1962–1965), as well as a short-lived series, *Suspicion* (1957–1958).

According to McGilligan, Hitchcock “wasn’t himself a big TV watcher (he liked quiz shows...and public affairs programs)...[and] saw the epidemic popularity of television as a threat to the film industry, to which he was unreservedly loyal” (514). But the climate was perfect for Hitchcock, already a brand name in a way few Hollywood directors were at the time, to bring his special blend of suspense and dark humor to TV, and Wasserman had little trouble setting up *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* on CBS. Premiering in the fall of 1955,

the show was “an immediate success” (Schatz, *The Genius* 484), soon to become “a mega-hit” (McDougal 253).

“Little Stories”

Rear Window was in production during this period of televisual excitement, but the cinematic analogy has dominated critics’ discussion of the film. Stam and Pearson acknowledge theatrical allusions in the script, but ultimately describe the characters viewed across the courtyard as having “strayed directly from the various genres of the classic Hollywood film” (201). Indeed, most critics seem to accept the many theatrical references (e.g. Lisa’s line, “the opening night of the last week of L.B. Jefferies in a cast”) as not incongruent with the cinema metaphor. John Belton observes *numerous* “spectacles... compris[ing] the film’s narrative,” however (3). Recalling Tom Gunning’s descriptions of pre-1906 films as “the cinema of attractions”—“a series of loosely connected acts or attractions, resembling, in part, the structure of a vaudeville show,” Belton argues the spectacle seen from L.B. Jefferies’s window is similar. Although *Rear Window* “has a strong narrative line,” he suggests the display of the apartment dwellers’ lives constitutes a “montage of attractions” (3). For Belton, then, the cinema metaphor doesn’t apply to cinema as we have come to know it, but to the more presentational mode of cinema’s earliest years—a mode more often associated with television.

Such evidence allows expansion on Fawell’s suggestion that Hitchcock, whether conscious or unconscious of the new television venture he would embark upon in the following year, might have been exploring the nature of the new medium. Barnouw and Spigel have each described TV content of the early 1950s as ranging from the prestigious live anthology dramas to the vaudeville-based

EARLY IN 1955, SOME SEVEN MONTHS AFTER *REAR WINDOW* WAS RELEASED, WASSERMAN PROPOSED TO HITCHCOCK A TV SERIES THAT WOULD TIE IN WITH THE RECENTLY (INDEPENDENTLY) LAUNCHED *ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY MAGAZINE*.

AS JEFFERIES LOOKS OUT HIS WINDOW, HE TURNS, REPEATEDLY—ONE MIGHT SAY OBSESSIVELY—NOT TO ONE GRAND, CINEMATIC SPECTACLE, BUT TO MANY SMALLER ENTERTAINMENTS, LITTLE STORIES IN LIGHTED FRAMED ROOMS ...

variety shows, as well as narrative series from Westerns to sitcoms, increasingly produced as “telefilm.” Schatz describes the programming as “genre-bound,” noting the ratings show “how heavily TV’s genres were keyed to certain East Coast entertainment forms, particularly the ‘culture industries’ based in and around New York City—not only radio and advertising but also theater, vaudeville, music, and publishing” (“Desilu” 119). The Greenwich Village setting of *Rear Window*, with its cast of minor characters, many of whom are associated with the arts, captures cultural aspects of New York, but neither cinema nor television is mentioned directly. Broadcasting is represented only by the “radio” elements of the film’s soundtrack, even though Manhattan was the hub of both live radio and television production at the time.

According to McGilligan, Grace Kelly recalled during the production of *Dial M for Murder* (in 1953) that Hitchcock “sat and talked to me about [*Rear Window*] all the time...He talked to me about the people who could be seen in other apartments opposite the ‘rear window,’ and their little stories, and how they would emerge as characters and what would be revealed” (McGilligan 471–72). “Little stories” was Hitchcock’s own term for the vignettes of the apartment dwellers (McGilligan 483). Later, in an interview regarding *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, he told the *Los Angeles Times* “I have always wanted to work in the short story...The small, simple tale of a single idea building to a turn, a twist at the end. A little shocker. The story that’s lost, when stretched to the length of a movie” (McGilligan 523).

Cultural critic Raymond Williams, speaking of television two decades later, offered a description that both echoes Hitchcock and expounds upon the television viewer’s experience. He remarked that television had contributed to the dramatization of society, and

through television, drama had become habit: “The slice of life, once a project of naturalist drama, is now a voluntary, habitual, internal rhythm...that of a basic need” (4). He observes, too, that the naturalist dramatists:

created, above all, rooms...rooms in which life was centered, but inside which people waited for the knock on the door, the letter or the message, the shout from the street, to know what would happen to them...There is a direct cultural continuity...from those enclosed rooms, enclosed and lighted framed rooms, to the rooms in which we watch the framed images of television: at home, in our own lives, but *needing to watch* what is happening, as we say, “out there.”... (6, my emphasis)

As Jefferies looks out his window, he turns, repeatedly—one might say obsessively—not to one grand, cinematic spectacle, but to many smaller entertainments, little stories in lighted framed rooms, “representations and performances,” as Williams says, of different

genres. The dancing Miss Torso and the music composer come from the world of the variety and musical shows that were popular at the time, both of which are narrativized in the film with a “turn” at their stories’ conclusion; the newlywed couple and the couple on the terrace with their dog suggest sitcoms which take different turns toward the end; Miss Lonelyhearts is the sort of downbeat melodrama that Barnouw says led to the demise of the anthology drama—indeed, Stam and Pearson compare Miss Lonelyhearts to the “social realist film *Marty*” (201), which was a television drama before it was adapted to feature film. The most compelling story seen from Jefferies’ window concerns the disappearance of Mrs. Thorwald and her husband’s bizarre behavior the night she disappears.

This is, of course, a murder mystery—not one that unfolds seamlessly, in the tradition of Hollywood cinema, but still the genre that *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* would employ beginning with



Rear Window (1954). Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Shown from left: Thelma Ritter, Grace Kelly, James Stewart. Photo courtesy of Paramount Pictures/Photofest.

AS JEFF WATCHES, THE THORWALD PLOTLINE IS INTERRUPTED NO LESS THAN EIGHTEEN TIMES, SOMETIMES BY INTRUSIONS FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD (SUCH AS STELLA'S OR LISA'S ARRIVAL), AND SOMETIMES BY JEFFERIES HIMSELF, AS HE *SWITCHES* HIS ATTENTION TO OTHER WINDOWS.

its premiere in 1955. Indeed, like a television program it is punctuated by interruptions, for us, the spectators of *Rear Window*; and for Jefferies as he intermittently watches, dozes, converses with various visitors, eats and drinks, and checks on the “stories” of the other residents simultaneously occurring across the way. It is the “distracted” mode of watching ascribed to television as early as the 1960s by Williams. The narrative interruptions from commercials would, in fact, become a running joke on *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (McCarty and Kelleher 33).

The Domestic/ Domesticated Spectator(s)

Because of visits from Stella, Doyle, and especially Lisa, Jeff isn't the ideal *cinematic* spectator. Not only is he frequently interrupted, but rather than watching in a darkened theater, he does his viewing from a domestic setting, which in the 1950s had become the domain of commercial television and a site of female-dominated consumption, as Lynn Spigel has argued. In the film's opening scene, Jeff tells his editor on the phone that his boredom may lead him to “do something drastic like get married,” and he recites a list of appliances he would undoubtedly acquire along with a wife. In her first scene with Jeff, Lisa proves to be the consumer par excellence, modeling her \$1,100 gown and discussing its marketability, identifying Jeff's need for a new cigarette case, the “simple silver” replacement for which she has already purchased, and ordering a lobster dinner from the iconic 21, delivered to Jeff's home. Later she will show off her Mark Cross case, mentioning the brand name as a savvy consumer would. The marriage she seeks with Jeff would no doubt require Lisa's tastes to

expand to the new labor-saving appliances that were so much a part of married life in the fifties, just as Jeff feared.

Spigel notes television became “the most sought-after appliance for sale in post-war America” (3), but the television is conspicuously absent from Jeff's list as he speaks to his editor. Significantly, Spigel pairs the acceptance of TV into the postwar home with the “central preoccupation” of domesticity among the middle class (33): “[t]elevision was typically welcomed as a catalyst for renewed social values” (2). The new “home theater,” with television as the new “hearth” (38), became central to the domestic space over which the woman of the house had control, a power Lisa is already demonstrating, but hoping to make official through marriage.

Homebound as he is, Jeff is doubly emasculated, confined to feminine space and with his leg in a cast. Modleski has further observed that the standing Lisa towers over chair-bound Jeff in nearly every shot (77), and becomes the active agent in confronting Thorwald. Jeff and Lisa's initial conflict over the feasibility of marriage—a tense conversation held face to face, with the window appearing only at the edges of the frame in all shots of the scene—echoes postwar negotiations between returning soldiers who had seen combat and male camaraderie, and women who had moved into the workforce in the war years, but who now also desired a home and family. Only when Jeff and Lisa begin focusing on the spectacle they watch together from the home does their relationship begin to move beyond the “status quo” Jeff had requested. Modleski observes that Lisa stays the night at Jeff's apartment on the same night she becomes convinced of his theory (78).

Looking out his window, piecing together what he is convinced is a murder story, Jeff becomes part of an interpretive community with Stella and Lisa, both of whom, as Modleski notes, see

“different things” than Jeff. Nevertheless, Jeff's new disability makes him a domesticated spectator—part of the home theater audience and part of the 1950s “family” in which the emasculated male figure participated in the “low culture” of television (Spigel 61).

As Jeff watches, the Thorwald plotline is interrupted no less than eighteen times, sometimes by intrusions from the outside world (such as Stella's or Lisa's arrival), and sometimes by Jefferies himself, as he *switches* his attention to other windows. Fawell's reference to the remote control is anachronistic, as he admits, but the ability to switch easily from one station's fare to another was a commonly observed (and ridiculed) feature of the new medium. In the film, the rhythm of viewing and interruption slows as Lisa and Stella become engrossed in the mystery along with Jeff and focus on what we might call “The Thorwald Story.” Watching the ongoing “story,” usually in the daytime after Thorwald's initial nocturnal comings and goings, Jeff is often flanked by one or both of the female spectators in the sort of “home theater” configuration Spigel describes (106), all gazing in the same direction rather than facing one another.

Engrossed as they are in puzzling out the murder mystery, Jeff, Lisa, and Stella are a bit like Joe and his friend Herb in Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt*, in both cases *enjoying* the discussion of a murderous crime from an apparently safe distance, even as a real murderer is nearby. When Lisa returns to Jeff's apartment after she has slipped Jeff's note (“What have you done with her?”) under Thorwald's door and escaped discovery, she is exhilarated, her eyes sparkling, and Jeff returns her gaze for the first time with a look that can only be described as love, desire, and joy. They are having *fun*, a previously disengaged couple now bonded over their shared viewing experience.

“Person to Person”

According to Spigel, the postwar demographic shift to the suburbs encouraged “a generalized sense of isolationism” (100) in which television and the new array of labor-saving appliances served to replace community-based activities: a refrigerator eliminated the need for daily shopping, a washing machine precluded trips to more communal laundry facilities, and so on. Spigel notes a 1955 survey by *Fortune* magazine which concluded:

[i]n the postwar years the community activity most affected was spectatorship. By far, the greatest [economic] slump was in the spectator amusements—most strikingly in movie attendance, but also in baseball, hockey, theater and concert admissions... American spectators had moved indoors where high fidelity sound and television promised more and better entertainment than in “the golden age of the box office.” (qtd. in Spigel 106)

Spigel argues that to counter the postwar family’s isolation television families, especially in sitcoms such as *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, provided weekly visits from “neighbors.” These television families “maintain[ed] the ideals of community but plac[ed] them at a fictional distance” (120–32). Another sort of television “visit” offered by CBS from 1953 to 1961 was Edward R. Murrow’s “Person to Person,” in which Murrow and the television audience were welcomed into the homes of celebrities including Frank Sinatra, Marilyn Monroe, and a young Senator John F. Kennedy and his wife. The show offered a bizarre simulacrum of neighborly closeness, in which millions of Americans got to see celebrities’ home décor, prized possessions, even their pets.

In the early scenes of *Rear Window*, neighborliness seems natural and unforced: the Sculptress says “Good morn-

ing!” to a woman leaning out of her window à la Molly Goldberg; a couple sleeps on their terrace—a humorous pair who lower their little dog to the courtyard in a clever basket contraption to the sound of her whistling (she is called the “Siffleuse”—the Whistler—in the screenplay). Even Thorwald, who has already told the Sculptress to “shut up” when she offers gardening advice, gently shoos the dog away from his flower garden. But later when the Siffleuse sees her little dog dead, strangled, her scream and grief-stricken address to the entire courtyard momentarily unites a community of strangers—everyone except Thorwald looks out their windows, but turn back to their own apartments as soon as the “show” is over:

Which one of you did it?...

You don’t know the meaning of the word “neighbor”! Neighbors like each other, speak to each other, care if anybody lives or dies. But none of you do...

Did you kill him because he liked you? Just because he liked you?

Clearly Hitchcock draws a distinction between real community relationships, which involve two-way interactions, and artificial “neighbors,” whether they are the isolated inhabitants visible from their windows, or, perhaps the electronic neighborhood provided by television (Jeff “names” his neighbors in part because he doesn’t know their real names, which is why Lisa dashes across the courtyard to get Thorwald’s from his mailbox). Responding to Jeff’s theories about Thorwald’s behavior, Doyle cautions him to keep his distance and not jump to conclusions: “That’s a secret, private world you’re looking at out there. People do a lot of things they can’t explain.” The dog’s murder and its owner’s confrontation with the isolated window watchers introduces another murder mystery and foreshadows the ending of the film when Thorwald will

at last confront the inhabitant who has been anonymously watching since the death of Anna Thorwald.

“Beat the Clock”

As Spigel has pointed out, because of its domestic setting, television of the fifties, especially daytime television, made every effort to appeal to female viewers. Daytime TV in the fifties included soap operas, as is often noted, but also game shows and talk/variety shows, which included celebrity guests, musical stars, and audience participation segments. Lisa and Stella are spectators who become audience participants. Jeff is able to persuade them of his hypothesis regarding Mrs. Thorwald’s murder, but it is the women who explore what they all agree is the related mystery of the murdered dog. When Jeff calls Thorwald to lure him out of the apartment, he is in the powerful position of creating the disturbance and seeing its result—he is not only a voyeur, but a *provocateur*, as Belton has noted (14), with the control of a film director or a TV producer.

Lisa and Stella examine the flower bed, with Lisa standing watch, and Stella digging among the flowers Jeff had observed became “shorter” over two weeks. The danger at this point is relatively minor—Thorwald is out following Jeff’s call, and the courtyard is empty of the Sculptress and the couple who lost their dog. Despite their grim motivation, Lisa and Stella, shovel at the ready, in some ways resemble Lucy and Ethel embarking on one of their schemes. Their femaleness invites the male cinema spectator of the 1950s to dismiss their activity as minor and somewhat amusing as they poke around the flower garden and mime their empty-handedness to Jefferies.

Finding nothing, Lisa crosses the courtyard to investigate the Thorwalds’

DAYTIME TV IN THE FIFTIES INCLUDED SOAP OPERAS, AS IS OFTEN NOTED, BUT ALSO GAME SHOWS AND TALK/VARIETY SHOWS, WHICH INCLUDED CELEBRITY GUESTS, MUSICAL STARS, AND AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION SEGMENTS. LISA AND STELLA ARE SPECTATORS WHO BECOME AUDIENCE PARTICIPANTS.

apartment, becoming an actor in the drama, as several critics have noted. Lisa, nimbly scaling the fire escape in her full skirt and heels, climbs into Thorwald's window—a swashbuckling maneuver suggesting the heroism and active subjectivity Modelski has observed—and enters as a participant in the murder mystery she, Jeff, and Stella had only previously been watching. Stella rejoins Jeff to watch the proceedings as Lisa is framed in the series of windows of the Thorwald apartment, Jeff writhing as he helplessly watches, but both he and Stella are temporarily distracted by the drama of Miss Lonelyhearts' near suicide in the apartment below. As music from the composer's apartment reaches both Lisa and Miss Lonelyhearts, however, both stop to listen, framed in two windows, one above the other. Although Modleski describes this as a “split screen” effect” (82), which would become popular in cinema in the later fifties and the sixties, the two “screens” here could also be seen as the competition between two television dramas, “on” at the same time.

When Thorwald appears in the street below and enters the apartment building, the suspense operates on two levels, for Jeff as Lisa's helpless spectator, and for us, watching both Jeff and Lisa, neither of them able to stop Thorwald. Unaware of her danger in Thorwald's apartment, Lisa breaks the “fourth wall” when she finds Mrs. Thorwald's purse, an item to which Lisa has attributed great value in feminine culture, and to which she is connected through her own Mark Cross bag, as Modelski notes (78); she looks directly at the spectator (Jeff, Stella, and us) to show her discovery of Anna Thorwald's purse. This gaze into the lens is a departure from classical Hollywood cinema as well as the conventions of television drama. It has an accepted place in theater as asides and narrators' addresses to the audience, and at the time was selectively used in film as a self-reflexive, often comic technique.

But direct address to the audience was, and continues to be, part of the language of presentational television, from newscasters and game show hosts to stand-up comedians (Spigel 143–44). It was also employed in many live television commercials of the day. Faye Emerson, another blonde, elegant actress, had her own talk show and became the glamorous spokesperson/model in appliance commercials, in both cases employing a direct address to the viewers at home. As Lisa did in the courtyard when she and Stella directly addressed Jeff's (and our) gaze, now in Thorwald's apartment she “demonstrates,” with exaggerated gestures and direct looks at the spectator, the emptiness of the purse.

When Thorwald enters, finds Lisa and begins to struggle with her, the drama takes a serious turn, and the fourth wall is reestablished. Ironically, Jeff calls out to the spectacle who can't hear, “Lisa, what are you doing?” Stam and Pearson argue that his is the action of the immobilized cinema spectator, but cinema etiquette frowns on such verbal involvement in the theater. That is not the case with television, however. Indeed, Liebes and Katz's study of conversation among *Dallas* viewers suggests *talk* during TV viewing is frequent and can be directed either to the TV characters, to fellow viewers, or both. Jeff, Lisa, and Stella's conversation during the unfolding drama has been a mutually accepted activity throughout, and as Lisa's situation becomes dire, Jeff speaks to the “screen” as television viewers often do.

When the police arrive in response to Jeff's call, their attention is first on Thorwald for manhandling Lisa, but turns to Lisa who is arrested for breaking and entering. Once safe from Thorwald, but still in the framed space of the Thorwald apartment, Lisa breaks the wall once more to “demonstrate” to her audience of Jeff and Stella her discovery of Mrs. Thorwald's wedding ring, which Lisa now “models” on her left hand. Thorwald follows Lisa's gaze, and from this

point the “Thorwald Story” becomes a different drama altogether, as he gazes directly at Jeff and us, his audience. As Fawell notes, Hitchcock uses this disconcerting gaze (a look through a window) in *Psycho* when Marion, who has just stolen \$40,000 from her employer and lied about a headache to leave work early, locks eyes with her boss through her car's windshield as he crosses the street at an intersection (132). This direct gaze breaks expectations and conventions of privacy or safety, such that the recipient feels caught, exposed.

When Thorwald looks out of his window, returning Jeff's and our gaze, the murder mystery contained in Thorwald's apartment—contained like all the other generic narratives we have been following in the course of *Rear Window*—breaks out of the “framed rooms” and into the “home theater” of Jeff's apartment. In addition to the accusatory exchange between Marion and her employer, Thorwald's gaze anticipates the final mad look of Norman Bates/Mother glowering into the lens, acknowledging, recognizing, *knowing* the spectator's presence.

In the confrontation between Jeff and Thorwald, then, *Rear Window* moves beyond what can comfortably be considered a film metaphor as the drama from Thorwald's apartment erupts from its framed space. After Jeff has conferred with Doyle on the phone about Lisa's arrest and hangs up, he answers the next call as if it were his old friend Doyle again. However, it is Thorwald in the aural version of his direct gaze, breaking through the safety and power Jeff had felt with his earlier anonymous call to the murderer. Thorwald's subsequent invasion of Jeff's apartment thus offers a horror of a new kind, a horror that was being fought among critics and legislators concerned about TV content “invading” the home, blurring the line between public and private (Spigel 117). When Thorwald enters Jeff's domestic space, he brings the reality of murder to

AS LISA DID IN THE COURTYARD WHEN SHE AND STELLA DIRECTLY ADDRESSED JEFF'S (AND OUR) GAZE, NOW IN THORWALD'S APARTMENT SHE “DEMONSTRATES,” WITH EXAGGERATED GESTURES AND DIRECT LOOKS AT THE SPECTATOR, THE EMPTINESS OF THE PURSE.

THORWALD'S GAZE ANTICIPATES THE FINAL MAD LOOK OF NORMAN BATES/MOTHER GLOWERING INTO THE LENS, ACKNOWLEDGING, RECOGNIZING, KNOWING THE SPECTATOR'S PRESENCE.

a spectator who heretofore has merely watched, speculated, and been *entertained*. Jeff's spectatorial immobility becomes a concrete reality, and Thorwald has become more than a character in an entertaining mystery. "The Thorwald Story" has come to life, the murderous character has become real, and he has entered Jeff's living room in a way that television, not cinema, was invading American homes. Jeff's attempt to fend off Thorwald with his only tool—a camera—barely slows down his attacker. And while the violence done to Mrs. Thorwald occurred out of sight, "offscreen," Jeff's struggle with the real Thorwald is a horrific culmination of the spectacular entertainment he has found from his rear window.

After Thorwald has pushed him from the window, Jeff's rescue by police takes place outside the window frames, seeming to reestablish life outside a mediated world. In the final scene, the camera pans around the courtyard to provide some closure to each of the other little stories we have been following in the film, with Jeff and Lisa sharing domestic space, no longer riveted to the window, but napping and reading, with Lisa now in jeans, also tailoring her entertainment depending on Jeff's attention. There is still no television in evidence.

Window on the World

Despite the seemingly timeless nature of the cinematic experience, the industrial and cultural context of *Rear Window* is bound to specific elements in America's media history. Hollywood film in the 1950s faced competition from domestic independent productions (such as those Hitchcock himself was planning in cooperation with Paramount), as well as an influx of foreign films. With the lifting of the freeze on television station licenses, TV, already on the rise in

some cities, had gained the capacity to become the dominant mass medium. The year after the release of *Rear Window*, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* would premiere, and it would occupy a popular spot in the Nielsen ratings for the next ten years.

At this point in his career, Hitchcock was a confident director and considered an expert on cinema who would later write the entry on "Film Production" for the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in 1965 (Auiler 21). Almost from the beginning of his career Hitchcock explored the nature of cinema in his films, as he certainly does in *Rear Window*. Given the timing of the production of *Rear Window*, however, it would also seem likely that he would be interested in exploring the similarities and differences among various forms of popular entertainment—*theater, film, and television*.

As a contributor to a weekly magazine, Jeff was part of a medium losing favor among advertisers and audiences (Spigel 7). In this context, *Rear Window* becomes a parable for the changes in American entertainment in the 1950s. In criticism of television during the fifties, Spigel notes, the new medium was thought to turn men "into passive homebodies" (61), a reasonable description of Jeff himself. His recent injury forces him to be a domesticated spectator—part of the television home theatre audience and part of a "family" in which the emasculated male figure participates in the newest form of popular culture.

From this perspective, a number of the film's themes can be seen in a new light. In the context of television's domesticity, the marriage Lisa desires and Jeff wishes to escape can be seen as a contrast not only to Jeff's adven-



Rear Window (1954). Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Shown: Raymond Burr. Photo courtesy of Paramount Pictures/Photofest.

[JEFF AND LISA'S] RELATIONSHIP GROWS AS THEY STAY IN HIS APARTMENT AND WATCH, FOLLOW, AND INTERPRET THE LITTLE STORIES IN FRAMED ROOMS.

turous, exotic career, but also to Lisa's life of glamour. They will both have to change for the relationship to work. The paradigm of couples we see in the film—"shows" about the various stages of marriage—emphasize the need for love, courage, humor, and imagination. Lisa has shown she is capable of adventure. Jeff, by circumstance, has become tamed, domesticated—his global lens reduced to the gaze of a restless homebody. Their relationship grows as they stay in his apartment and watch, follow, and interpret the little stories in framed rooms.

Spigel cites an episode from *Fire-side Theater* (also produced in 1954 by MCA's Revue Productions). The plot involves usurpation of a father's role despite his past as a successful film actor in Western films: "the images of masculine prowess so much a part of the classical Hollywood era (especially in genres like the western) are now remnants of a forgotten culture" (65). Hitchcock's casting of Stewart as Jefferies merges the image of the feminized, domesticated male with that of the A-list movie star who in the mid-1950s also starred in a number of violent Westerns directed by Anthony Mann. Jeff might indeed be the "substitute" for Hitchcock, armed with his photographic tools and storytelling tropes, but when he trains his lens through his rear window, he sees a new mediascape. His view may be privileged, but it is no longer exclusive, attended as he is by other, female spectators with different interpretations, judgments, behaviors. The spectacle he views from a safe distance becomes the specter of a new medium that would confront him and the American film industry, threatening its very existence.

NOTE

1. The name "Leland Hayward" is slipped into Lisa's chatter about her busy day in her first scene in *Rear Window*.

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