

Rear Window (1954) directed by Alfred Hitchcock <http://thefilmspectrum.com/?p=241#C7> **Discussion Questions (25 points)**

By the late 1940s, **Hitchcock** had made roughly 40 films and entered into his “experimental phase”. The greatest in this experimental period was, of course, *Rear Window*. Here, Hitchcock concocted his most original, most challenging concept yet: to create an entire film from one vantage point, the rear window of a Greenwich Village apartment, and in turn, symbolize the very movie-watching experience and director-viewer relationship that made him a legend.

Discussion Questions after Viewing

1. This film has many elements in common with *film noir* but there is something that is different. Why isn't *Rear Window* *film noir*? Highlight and discuss some key differences using specific scenes and elements.
2. Define voyeurism. How does Hitchcock convey Jeff's voyeuristic nature? What do you think of Jeff's voyeurism? Why do you think he is so obsessed with the “murder”? How is the viewer drawn into the voyeurism?
3. Discuss the movie as a critique of **McCarthyism** using the quote on Historical/Social Significance

HISTORICAL/SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE :

"...deploys the techniques of the national security apparatus to spy on the neighbours of his Lower East Side apartment complex. He (Jeff) lacks the listening devices, hidden cameras, and microfilm of the FBI and the CIA, but his telephoto lens allows him to scrutinise even the remotest corners of his neighbors' apartments and to discover their most carefully guarded secrets. Implicit in the film's “confession” of its own tainted procedures is a critique of McCarthyism. "¹

4. It has been said that Hitchcock is a **misogynist** because of what happens to so many females in his movies. In this film how do the men compare to the women? Is Lisa portrayed as a stereotypical female? Critique *Rear Window* from a feminist perspective.
5. Stella says in the movie, " What people ought to do is get outside their own house and look in for a change". What message is she conveying specifically about Jeff and universally about Americans at the time?
6. How is the set a “living, breathing ecosystem”? How is the glimpse into each neighbor's apartment a carefully-chosen representation of Jeff? How are these people personifications of Jeff's fears and desires?
7. Explain how the frame of the rear window can be seen as the frame a metaphorical movie screen, and how is Jeff like a movie director?
8. Discuss Hitchcock's genius cinematic creation of a camera simultaneously acting as our eyes, the director's eyes and the main character's eyes. Give 1-2 examples of each and explain how this multi-layered vantage point helps us understand the mystery.

This “living, breathing ecosystem” is more than just a marvel of Hollywood set design. As Jeff spies on his neighbors to break this so-called boredom, we soon learn his spying is not only a perverted pleasure, but also his subconscious way of weighing his marriage decision. *Each neighbor is not a random supporting character, but a carefully-chosen representation of a possible future for Jeff.*

This is what Jeff sees when he looks out the window. They aren't merely people; they're personifications of his own fears and desires.

The Master's Metaphorical Frame- The elaborate set allows for Hitchcock's most genius thematic creation — using the frame of the rear window as the frame of a metaphorical movie screen.

As Jeff watches this “screen,” he decides which neighbors to watch. In doing so, he acts as a director would, cutting from one image to the next.

Taking the idea even further, each neighbor's apartment window serves as the frame of an additional movie screen within Jeff's rear window frame, which is inside Hitchcock's overall movie frame.

In other words, we get a bunch of movies within a movie within a movie, most of them silent, unfolding as pure visual cinema.

Hitchcock wastes no time in introducing us to this brilliant concept, showing us this rear window frame during the opening credits.

Then, in personified camera (the camera acting like an independent set of eyes), we move out through the window to survey the courtyard and ultimately return back inside the window where we started.

Hitchcock squeezes in all the necessary background info without dialogue, simply showing us various images in the apartment

Voyeurism and the Male Gaze- *“You can have a man look, you can have him see something, you can have him react to it,” Hitchcock explained. “You can make him react in various ways. You can make him look at one thing, look at another. Without him speaking, you can show his mind at work.” (G)*

Rear Window provides an unprecedented, and never since equaled, example of a camera simultaneously acting as our eyes, the director's eyes and the main character's eyes. Thus we are forced to see exactly what Jeff sees, and, in moments Jeff sleeps, what Hitchcock wants us to see in personified camera.