From: W. RAUBRICHECK & W. SREBNICK
HITCHCOCK'S RERELEASED FILMS:
FROM ROPE TO VERTIGO

(Wayne State UP, 1991)

THE SPACE OF REAR WINDOW

John Belton

In Book III of the Republic, Plato identifies two distinct and opposed modes of representation—imitation (or mimesis) and simple narration (or diegesis). Contemporary literary theory has inherited this distinction in the form of mimetic and diegetic theories of narration, which range in sophistication from the simple opposition of drama, which "shows" a narrative, and the novel, which "tells" it, to the more complex narrative theories of Wayne Booth and Gerard Genette, which view narration as a fusion of mimetic and diegetic techniques. Though the cinema has traditionally been regarded as a dramatic form because it presents itself to its viewers as pure "story" rather than mediated "discourse" (to borrow Emile Benveniste's terms), it clearly mixes narrative modes. Classical narrative cinema tells as it shows; indeed, it can only tell through showing. Dramatic spectacles are staged for and then "read" by the camera, and this reading narrativizes them.

Cinematic narrative techniques clearly rely upon certain codes of representation that were previously developed in the plastic arts, the theater, and literary narratives. Any notion of "pure" cinema—of a mode of expression that is unique to the cinema and that has evolved autonomously out of the singular nature of the medium's raw materials—must be qualified by the essential impurity of a quasi-theatrical, quasi-novelistic mode of narration. The figure most frequently identified with the notion of "pure cinema" within classical Hollywood filmmaking is Alfred Hitchcock, who often cites Rear Window as his "most cinematic" work because it "is told only in visual terms." Yet Rear Window is arguably one of Hitchcock's most "theatrical" films. In what follows, I want to map out the representation of space in Rear Window in terms of its quasi-theatrical, quasi-cinematic nature and to suggest that the film, as a limit-text, explores the parameters of theatrical and cinematic modes of narration.

The space of Rear Window is set against three windows whose bamboo blinds rise in succession to reveal a Greenwich Village courtyard and the apartment buildings which enclose it. The film ends (that is, before the current distributor, Universal, replaced Paramount's original logo and end titles with its own) with a similar theatrical effect—the successive lowering of these same shades. Beyond the curtained windows lies a space that serves as both a stage and a screen, a space controlled by the authorial presence of Alfred Hitchcock, who invisibly raises and lowers the bamboo shades to open and close the film's narrative. This space is quasi-theatrical in its profilmic unity and three-dimensionality and yet also cinematic in the flat, multi-windowed design of the apartment complex across the way, which resembles nothing other than a series of little movie screens. In front of the shades lies another space that, though architecturally segregated from that of the courtyard, is similarly theatrical and cinematic. The apartment interior is not merely a spectatorial space from which the main action beyond the window is seen, but serves as a space for the playing out of another drama. Both spaces invoke notions of the theater and the cinema and use them as metaphors through which spectators are asked to read the action that takes place within these spaces.

The overall organization of the film, whose action is divided into distinct, temporally continuous units by a series of fades, resembles the act structure of the theater, which breaks down the action into discrete "blocks" of time. In this way the structure of the narrative suggests that of a drama built around scene or act divisions. Even the device of the fade is theatrical, resembling the lighting techniques of the Curtain-less theater, which raises and dims the lights in lieu of the raising and lowering of a curtain. The fade is clearly a "filmic" device which draws upon theatrical convention; Hitchcock's
use of it here, in the context of other theatricalisms, gives further support to the notion that the film is engaged in a playful acknowledgement of its own constructedness, an acknowledgement which it shares with its audience.

Within the film itself, the shades are once again lowered (and later raised) - this time by a character within the fiction, Lisa, who first announces “show’s over for tonight,” then picks up an overnight case with her lingerie in it and carries it to an adjoining room to change. Displaying the nightwear to Jeff, she describes it as a “preview of coming attractions.” Lisa’s dramatic gesture with the curtains and her comments about “coming attractions” function, like the credit sequences themselves which acknowledge Hitchcock’s magisterial presence as narrator, to lay bare the film’s devices. Hitchcock playfully uses Lisa to unmask the film’s status as staged spectacle by having her call attention to the narrative’s two central “attractions”—the murder mystery plot that is “playing” across the courtyard (the show that is over) and the love story that is being acted out within Jeff’s apartment (the coming attractions)—and to characterize them as “constructions.” Not only are the film’s two main playing spaces thus metaphorically identified as sites for fictional spectacle, but Lisa consciously identifies herself here (and elsewhere) as a construction similar to that created for the stage or the screen and presents herself as a spectacle for the male gaze. Earlier, her introduction in step-printed close-up as she kisses Jeff in his darkened room presents her as a magical materialization of male erotic fantasy, appearing, as it were, out of the dreams of the still-sleeping Jefferies. Then, wearing an eleven hundred dollar Parisian dress, Lisa introduces herself, dramatically turning on lamp after lamp as she recites each of her three names—Lisa, Carol, Fremont. In both instances, Lisa’s self-spectacularization directs Jeff’s (and our) attention away from the space of the courtyard and toward that of the interior of the apartment, effectively opposing the lure of one space with that of another.

In general, the film’s narrative is built around a pattern of alternation from story-space to story-space, from scenes in Jeff’s apartment which foreground the action taking place there to scenes playing out across the way, from Jeff as “actor” to Jeff as “spectator.” And Lisa herself openly competes for Jeff’s attention with the space across the way. Indeed, as she lowers the shades, she jokingly threatens “to move into an apartment across the way and do the dance of the seven veils every hour” in order to catch Jeff’s eye. By the end of the film, with Lisa’s entry into Thorwald’s space and Thorwald’s into Jeff’s, the film’s spaces have been revealed as continuous rather than segregated and its stories as intertwined rather than opposed. The love story can only find resolution through the solution of the murder mystery by Jeff and Lisa acting together as a team. Though still object of spectacle for Jeff, Lisa has inserted herself, as spectacle, within the space of the murder plot, i.e., Thorwald’s apartment, where she herself is in danger. In a dramatic turnabout, Jeff’s space suddenly becomes the object of Thorwald’s gaze, and, dangling out of his own rear window, Jeff is himself inserted into this same plot; and, much as he earlier watched helplessly as Thorwald attacked Lisa, so she now watches as Thorwald attacks him, their relationship thus perversely sealed through this exchange of roles and places.

Given this spatial portrait of the film as a whole, I will both examine in greater detail how one part of that larger space—that which is seen through Jeff’s rear window—relates to the other and explore that relationship in terms of the film’s overall construction and narrativization of space. At the same time, I want to discuss the way in which the film plays with the differences between theatrical and cinematic notions of space and, through this process, calls attention to its own construction of space. In this way, the film explores and lays bare the nature of cinematic space, revealing it to be an amalgam of theatrical and cinematic qualities.

Much as the curtain-effect conjoins notions of theater and cinema (in that both traditional, legitimate theaters and first-run movie houses regularly used curtains to open and close their programs in the 1950’s), so are the spaces in Rear Window both theatrical and cinematic. I am using the term “theatrical” metaphorically to describe a certain kind of cinematic space, a space that resembles but is not identical to that found in classical theater. Traditional theatrical space is the product of architecture; it is defined by the proscenium, beyond which space does not exist for the viewer. Though, as Andre Bazin and Christian Metz point out, the convention of the footlights may tend to separate the spectacle from the spectator, the two, like Jeff and his courtyard within the film, must necessarily share the same overall space. This unity of space is literalized in
Rear Window through its single-set construction, which imposes certain theatrical constraints upon the action.

At the other end of the film's spatial spectrum lies what I would call "cinematic" film space, a space that is "other" for the spectator, who is necessarily segregated from it, physically prohibited from entry into it. Not bound by the Aristotelian unities which dominate the traditional theater, cinematic film space is, with the exception of certain single-take films, such as Rope (whose space might be described, using the above distinction, as "theatrically cinematic"), constructed out of flat, temporally and spatially discontinuous images which the codes of classical narrative cinema have taught spectators to transform into an illusorily continuous space.

Rear Window plays with the differences between theatrical and cinematic film space, relying on set design and certain kinds of camera movements to establish a concrete, unified, theatrical space and on editing, framing, and camera movement to construct a more abstract, psychological, cinematic film space. At the same time, the film plays with the psychology of traditional theatrical and cinematic spaces, i.e., with spectators' attitudes towards and understandings of those spaces. In particular, the film exploits traditional notions of theatrical space as resistant to and cinematic space as conducive to manipulation for purposes of narrativization and then collapses the two, rendering both kinds of space equally manipulable and narrativizable, though this is achieved in different ways. The theatrical-cinematic distinction is most commonly articulated in terms of the concepts "showing" versus "telling" (see Booth, or Scholes and Kellogg), mimesis versus diegesis (Plato), and/or spectacle versus narrative (Mulvey). This distinction is in need of qualification in that showing and telling, mimesis and diegesis, and spectacle and narrative are discursive modes which differ in degree, not in essential nature; drama is diegetic as well as mimetic, telling as it shows, and cinema involves "both the presentation of actions and their mediation." But what concerns me here are not so much theories of narration as the psychologies of different kinds of space in terms of their conduciveness to narrativization. In this context, space in the classical theater is, as Eikhenbaum argues, understood as a given, something to-be-filled-in, and resistant (though not entirely invulnerable) to attempts to reshape it. It presents the narrator with an obstacle of sorts which must be overcome by the forceful presence of an authorial voice which directs spectatorial attention within a fixed space. Space in the cinema, inasmuch as it is flat and, through montage, discontinuous, is seen less as a given than as a construction; it is a transformation of the real, bearing the marks of an intervening discursive presence.

Both of the spaces that I wish to discuss are constructed: theatrical film space is a literal construction, a feature of the pro-filmic set design, while cinematic film space is a more figurative construction, the result of medium-specific techniques such as framing, camera movement, and editing. The nature of their construction determines, in large part, the role these spaces play in the film's production of meaning.

The set on which Rear Window was shot consisted of seven apartment buildings, most of which were, at least, five or six stories in height. The apartment houses were built with a slight forcing of perspective in order to enhance, through changes in scale, the illusion of depth. "At least thirty of the apartments worked—that is, they were lit and furnished to suit the characters of their occupants." The sets are designed to satisfy narrative demands. Miss Torso, for example, is provided with a fairly open space because she is a dancer and her movements require it; the shape of her windows permits us to see her dance. The space of her apartment is continuous, unlike that of the Thorwalds. The Thorwald set, though apparently identical to that of the couple with the dog (above them) and that of Miss Lonelyhearts (below them), emphasizes the couple's estrangement; they occupy separate rooms—he, the living room; she, the bedroom; even the color of the paint on the walls of these two rooms differs, which is not the case for walls in any other apartment. The couple with the dog are routinely seen together, on the fire escape for example, while Miss Lonelyhearts, though alone, repeatedly moves from room to room, unifying, to some extent, her space by moving easily through it. Hitchcock's set design and staging turns the Thorwalds' windows into fixed framing devices which dramatize their isolation from one another and their discordance as a couple.

Each working apartment in the elaborate set was individually wired so that it could be lit separately. The lighting board with its control switches was located in Jeff's apartment, behind the camera, enabling Hitchcock to direct the lighting from a central location. The unique nature of the set and Hitchcock's decision to shoot the
The confined space of the courtyard mirrors Jeff's confinement to his apartment and to his wheelchair. As in the theater, there is no space beyond the parameters of the set. The exception which proves the rule is the narrow section of the "outside" world which is seen through the alleyway next to the Sculptress's apartment. Though it suggests access to an "elsewhere," through which we can see traffic and anonymous pedestrians, it is as contained a space as that of the courtyard. Indeed, Miss Lonelyhearts's entry into that outside space—she goes to a bar across the street where she picks up a young man—reveals its essentially confining nature; it provides no escape for her but returns her to an even more desperate isolation. The young man's aggressive sexual advances are more than she had bargained for. Though she successfully fights him off, her failure to find "her true love" in this foray into the outside world leads eventually to her decision to attempt to take her own life later in the film.

This spatial restriction and Hitchcock's reliance upon a single, more or less fixed camera perspective, which is firmly rooted in Jeff's apartment for the bulk of the film, would normally tend to limit narrative complexity, preventing, for example, cut-aways to other events taking place elsewhere in the city or preventing entry into other spaces or perspectives which might facilitate narrative exposition or broaden point of view. It would also seem to restrict the...
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role of sub-plots, that is, of other characters and stories which might serve as foils for the central characters and their story. What Hitchcock has done is build his sub-plots into his set design, using the neighbors across the way as foils for his central romantic couple.

At the same time, this fixed camera perspective tends to limit the film's narrative perspectives on the action, such as we might find in the more spatially open work of Renoir or Altman. In Rear Window, all other narrative perspectives, such as those of Stella, Lisa, and Doyle, which initially differ from Jeff's in their refusal to believe him, ultimately give way to his perceptions, in large part because their characters are forced to share this spatial position, to see events from the single perspective which is his own. For Jeff, trapped at a fixed station point, there is only one possible way of interpreting what he has heard and seen; his stubborn adherence to his reading of events is partially understood in terms of his immobilization in space, which prohibits him, unlike the other characters, from gaining other perspectives on what is happening. Denied the mobility of others, his position in space forces him to see something that has been, as it were, anamorphically encoded into a larger representation, like the death's head in Hans Holbein's The Ambassadors (1533). One might argue, then, that the film presents us with two psycho-spatial systems; by "psycho-spatial," I mean that the spaces exist as perceived from different subjective perspectives - 1) Jeff's and 2) that of the characters around him. In this way, Jeff, who is figuratively de-centered in his variance from the perspective of other, more mobile (and thus presumably more "objective") characters, attempts to re-center the views of others around his deviant, de-centered view. Thus the more that the other characters come to share his space - such as Lisa who moves in on him and spends the night - the more able they are to share his understanding of what has and is still taking place across the courtyard.

The film not only overcomes the potential restriction imposed on it by the set's unity of space, but it actually uses that restriction, transforming it into a productive limitation, which serves to further reinforce the confined nature of Jeff's perspective and our forced identification with it - without sacrificing the narrative diversity of more conventional screenplays. In short, Hitchcock's script makes the film's spaces and the set design perform double duty: the set both establishes a concrete playing space for the immediate action and, at the same time, functions abstractly, referring to other, unseen spaces. For example, although we never get to see Lisa's fashionable, uptown apartment, it nonetheless exists for us, metaphorically displaced (and down-graded in status) in the apartments of Miss Torso and Miss Lonelyhearts.

As Lisa prepares dinner from "21" for Jeff, Jeff watches Miss Lonelyhearts welcome and toast an imaginary male guest. She drinks alone by herself, starts to cry, and then buries her head in her arms. Unaware of the implicit similarity between Miss Lonelyhearts and Lisa, who is also preparing a dinner for a man (Jeff) who is "not really there" for her, i.e., who has withdrawn from any emotional commitment to her, Jeff comments that "at least that's something you'll never have to worry about." Lisa, acknowledging her kinship with Miss Lonelyhearts, replies: "Oh? You can see my apartment from here, all the way up on 63rd Street?"

Jeff, in turn, likens Lisa to Miss Torso instead, who is entertaining three men in her flat: "No, not exactly," he replies, "but we have a little apartment here that's probably as popular as yours. You remember, of course, Miss Torso?"

When Jeff cynically comments that Miss Torso has chosen the most prosperous-looking man for her date, Lisa informs Jeff that "she's not in love with him - or any of them."

Jeff: "Oh - how can you tell that from here?"
Lisa: "You said it resembled my apartment, didn't you?"

In correcting Jeff's reading of the action, Lisa identifies her own, empty socializing with Miss Torso's, using the latter's space and activity to temporarily "stand in" for her own, off-screen activities. In this way, the courtyard set takes on a metaphorical function, and its spaces become sites for the vicarious playing out of fantasy scenarios projected upon it from another space, that of the interior of Jeff's apartment.

It has become by now a critical commonplace to connect the activities in Jeff's apartment with those in the apartments across the way. Jean Douchet, for example, interprets what Jeff sees in the apartments opposite him as projections of his own desires. Robin Wood views each character or story as functioning to comment on Jeff's relationship with Lisa. The squabbling Thorwalds and the
overly amorous newlyweds thus become projected options for Jeff if he were to marry Lisa, and both options are portrayed as equally unacceptable. Hitchcock's direction often supports this notion of projected options. For instance, in their first scene together, Lisa asks Jeff to leave his job at the magazine and the single, vagabond-like existence it promotes. As she seductively pleads “isn't it time you came home,” the camera dolly in and reframes the couple to include the newlyweds' closed window in the background, associating her indirect proposal of marriage with them.

By the same token, it is surely no coincidence that the Thorwalds' apartment is directly opposite Jeff's and at a level that is approximately the same as his own. Indeed, its frequent presence in the background of scenes that take place in Jeff's apartment subtly colors our reading of those scenes. Most significantly, it provides a crucial point of reference at the conclusion of Jeff's first argument with Lisa, when he refuses to leave the magazine and become a fashion photographer. As Lisa begins to set the table for dinner, Jeff looks at the Thorwald apartment which is also engaged in dinner activity. The mirroring that takes place here is rather complex. Thorwald, who in several respects reflects Jeff's notion of marriage as entrapment and whose plight is compounded by the fact that his wife is an invalid, serves her dinner in bed. She openly rejects this husbandly gesture by tossing aside the flower which he had put on her tray. Meanwhile, Lisa, whom Jeff has just rebuffed, prepares and serves dinner to Jeff, who is also, like Mrs. Thorwald, an invalid. Though Jeff seems to identify himself with Thorwald as the hen-pecked husband in a bad marriage, Hitchcock complicates this identification by likening Jeff, as ungrateful, cranky invalid, to Mrs. Thorwald. The sequence clearly confounds any simple theory of projection, that is, it is made significant for narrative purposes. One example from early in the film will illustrate what I mean.

In the first shot after the credit sequence, the camera dolly in out of Jeff's rear window to explore the set. Though somewhat narrativized by the camera movement which "reads" the set, the set exists largely as pure spectacle—something to be looked at and admired before the story proper begins. Subsequently, two elaborate crane shots survey the courtyard, moving from right to left. The first surveys the overall space, and the second introduces specific characters such as the composer, the couple sleeping on the fire escape, Miss Torso, and Jeff. All these characters are engaged in apparently random, morning activities. The camera movement that presents this activity is as much descriptive as narrative in effect. The movement functions merely to describe, as it were, an equilibrium, a state nec-
via point-of-view and reaction shot editing patterns. While also implicitly bound up in this stylistic device, Hitchcock, as omniscient narrator, reads/narrates via camera movement. For example, the film's first act of "narration" occurs while Jeff sleeps, well before the coincidence of dialogue and action discussed above. After one of the initial crane shots which surveys the courtyard, the camera tracks from Jeff's face to his cast and from there to the various objects in his room (smashed camera, action photographs), which serve to explain the cause of Jeff's injury: he presumably broke his leg taking photographs of a crash at a car race when his attempts to get something "dramatically different" brought him too close to the action. Hitchcock's camera movement engages us in a cause and effect logic through which we assemble Jeff's "story." Thus implicated in the logic of detection and positioned/addressed as readers of clues, we readily identify with Jeff's attempt to do the same later in the film. This "narration," however, differs from that which begins with the introduction of point-of-view editing moments later—not only in its privileging of Hitchcock as narrator but also in its essentially descriptive function. It tells us about Jeff's character by engaging us in an active reconstruction of past events, of a previous story that will relate only indirectly to the Thorwald murder mystery or the love story. In other words, it does not cause these other stories or set them in motion in as direct a way as Thorwald's (or Lisa's) entry does. One might conclude, then, that Hitchcock plays with different kinds of narration, exploring the relationship between omniscient and subjective narrators, which are, in turn, seen in terms of the different "psychologies" of camera movement and editing. His use of these different narrative voices produces a layered narration, which constantly shuttles the spectator back and forth from one level to another and from identification with one narrative voice to that with another. In playing with different kinds of narration, Hitchcock foregrounds the process of narration itself, making us aware of the various mediating agencies through which the story is told.

The interplay between omniscient and subjective narration finds resolution in the final shot of the film, in which the omniscient narrator is seen to contain and override all other narrative voices. The crane shot which surveys the courtyard and those whose apartments open onto it echoes the film's initial crane shots, providing a closure of sorts. Yet that closure is over-determined, characterized by an implausible simultaneity in the resolution of the film's various subplots. The composer and Miss Lonelyhearts listen together to his recording of "Lisa"; the childless couple have a new dog; Miss Torso welcomes home her short, fat, soldier boyfriend; and the newlyweds squabble. Meanwhile, the Thorwald apartment is being repainted; the new paint covers over the bloodstained narrative that is past and presents a fresh surface (a blank canvas, as it were) for the playing out of a new story. The crane concludes its circular survey of the major characters in the film with a return to Jeff's apartment, where he is found asleep and with both legs in plaster casts, a comic doubling which functions as something of a "topper"—a gag which recalls and extends the slow disclosure of the courtyard space and final revelation of Jeff in a cast that structured the crane shot which opens the film. This gag is itself topped by the final image of Lisa, dressed for a globe-trotting adventure and reading (apparently) a book whose title, Beyond the High Himalayas, suggests her capitulation to Jeff's way of life. Yet this image is soon revealed as a deception, a piece of theater complete with costume (her "male" attire) and props, which has been staged for Jeff's benefit. She picks up a copy of Harper's Bazaar, a magazine identified with the "old" Lisa, and begins to read it. Her "act," which is designed to deceive Jeff, recapitulates the narrator's own "act"-ivity in manipulating/misleading the film's spectators.

The neatness of the narrative resolutions which we see in the final crane shot becomes something of a joke on Hitchcock's part and draws attention to his own arbitrariness as narrator. Like Lisa who offers Jeff a preview of coming attractions and presents herself as spectacle for his gaze, Hitchcock ultimately spectacleizes his own presence as narrator. It is as much Hitchcock whom we have come to see as it is the story which he tells. The concrete playing spaces of Rear Window thus finally refer us to another, more abstract space—that of Hitchcock's narration.

Notes

1. Plato, Republic, 393a.
2. See Wayne Booth's "Telling as Showing" in his The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 211-240; and Gerard Genette's "Frontiers of
5. The film's reflexivity has, of course, been discussed by virtually every critic that
has dealt with the film from Jean Douchet and Robin Wood to Robert Stam (Re-
flexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard, Ann Ar-
bor: UMI Research Press, 1985) and David Bordwell Narration in the Fiction
Film, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985). My interest here lies with
the reflexive aspects of the film's activity. Thus, I will treat Rear Window largely
in terms of its exploration of the nature of cinematic space, hopefully comple-
menting the work of others on the film.

6. Myerhold's Constructivist theater did away with the curtain and the proscenium
shortly after the turn of the century, and the modern theater of Brecht and others
repeatedly plays with the notion of the proscenium and with Aristotelian unities.
I have used the term "traditional theatrical space" to distinguish the classical tech-
niques I refer to here from modernist practice, in which a non-traditional, theatri-
cal space is created.

I would like to thank Tom Gunning whose comments on the ms. led to a rewriting
of the discussion of the theatrical space.

7. Andre Bazin, What Is Cinema?, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of Cali-
ifornia Press, 1967), 1: 100-102, and Christian Metz, Film Language: A Semiotics
9-10.

8. Indeed, only spectators within the film may enter into it, as in Sherlock Jr. and Pur-
ple Rose of Cairo.

9. Boris Eikhenaibem makes this distinction between the resistance of theatrical
space and the conduciveness of cinematic space to manipulation in "Problems of

Eikhenaibem argues the time and space in the cinema are constructions and that
the cinema does not merely reproduce the time and space of phenomenal reality,
but actively constructs them. In the theater, however, time and space are more
or less "naturalistic," i.e., determined by the actual time and space of the perfor-
mancredence rules; they are passive blocks of theater which resist all effort to shape them. For him, cinematic time and space are not merely filled but built (through montage, camera movement, and other medium-specific devices).

Though Eikhenaibem exaggerates the resistance of theatrical time and space to
manipulation, his distinction becomes useful in describing the "psychologies" of
the different times and spaces in the traditional theater and in montage cinema.

York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 4; Plato, The Republic, Book III and see dis-
cussions of mimesis and diegesis in Andre Gaudreault's "Recit Scriptural, Recit
Theatral, Recit Filmique: Prologomenes a une Theorie Narratologique du Cinema,
"Doctoral Thesis, University of Paris-III, 1983, 57-138; Bordwell, 3-26; Laura Mulvey,

and Industry Organization in Biograph Films, 1908-1909," Doctoral Dissertation,
New York University, 1986, 36-37.


13. Gunning considers the issue of film narration in a way which is relevant here. For
him, narration takes place on three levels—the organization and staging of the
pre-filnic event, the reading of that event by the camera (framing, distance,
angle, movement), and the final reconstruction of this camera-generated footage
in the editing. See Gunning, 37-40.


15. Frank Scully, "Scully's Scrapbook," n.d., newspaper column in clippings file on
Rear Window at the Film Study Center of the Museum of Modern Art.

16. See, for example, Comolli's "Technique and Ideology," Baudry's "Ideological Ef-
effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," both in Movies and Methods,
vol. 2, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), and Heath's
"Narrative Space" in his Questions of Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana University
Press, 1981), as well as Noel Carroll's section on Renaissance perspective in "Ad-
dress to the Youth," October No. 23 (Winter 1982).

17. Jean Douchet, "Hitch and His Public," trans. Verona Conley in A Hitchcock Reader,
ed. by Marshall Deutelbaum and Leland Poague (Ames: Iowa University

18. One person has suggested to me that the array of screens resembles a bank of
several television sets on display in the window of an electronics store, a display practice
that persists from the 1950's to the present day.

19. See, for example, the Annabelle dance films (Edison, 1894), Fatima (1897), From
Shanghai to Burlesque Queen (Biograph, 1903), or Pull the Curtains Down, Susie
(1904).

20. Stimm, 44.

21. Here, I am referring to Hitchcock in a somewhat different way than I have before.
For him, his art director has nothing to do with his status as impelled author, narrative presence, or enunciator; it is merely part of what David Bordwell
would call his "biographical legend." The relevance of biographical information
here, like that of on-set production information earlier, can be argued only on a
figurative not on a literal level. His biographical legend informs our reading of
the film without literally existing within it. By the same token, a critical discussion
of the film's set design ought to acknowledge any extra-filmic criteria that led the
critic to focus upon it in the first place.

22. The sense of claustrophobia produced by the courtyard design is enhanced by
the shooting of the film within the confines of a studio sound stage. Shooting
on location (without sets whose physical spaces have been forced) would have resulted
in a less centered space and one possessing less sense of being controlled. Cer-
tainly the sound that was recorded during production on location would have had
a different, perhaps more open, spatial quality.


25. A similar conjunction of camera movement and spectacular set design occurs in
the Babylonian sequence of Intolerance; in both instances, the crane shots have
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a descriptive rather than a narrative function. Indeed, Griffith brings his multi-storied narrative to a halt in order to display his fabulous set.

In early cinema, camera movement is initially associated with non-narrative material, e.g., panoramas, and it acquired a narrative function only in the post-1908, Griffith period (though even Griffith, as in the sequence above, continues to recognize its descriptive status and associations with pure spectacle).

26. That is, it is the descriptive element of narrative process, not something that falls outside of narrative itself.

27. This coincidence of dialogue and action immediately follows Hitchcock's cameo appearance in the composer's apartment. Bellour argues that these appearances occur "at the point in the chain of events where what could be called the film-wish is condensed." See Raymond Bellour, "Hitchcock: the Enunciator," Camera Obscura no. 2 (Fall 1977), 73. Ruth Johnston made a similar point in her paper on Rear Window at the Pace conference on Hitchcock in June of 1986. Hitchcock's gesture of winding the clock here might be seen as a setting of the narrative in motion since it is followed, more or less promptly, by Thorwald's entry.


29. Hitchcock's objectivity here clashes with Jeff's subjectivity, where elsewhere the two narrative voices seem to coincide or agree. Interestingly, this "objectivity" shot initially serves to prevent the audience from seeing the truth of Thorwald's guilt, while Jeff's limited subjectivity provides a more accurate understanding of what has happened. It is important to note, however, that Hitchcock's "objectivity" is ultimately redeemed; we discover that we, like Thorwald's eyewitnesses, have been had; we misread what we saw. In this way, "objectivity" has been revealed to be accessible only through a problematic subjectivity (our own misreading).

30. Closure takes place through two successive gestures, the crane shot and the dropping of the bamboo shades, which answer the film's opening and give the film a chiastic (abba) structure.

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"They Should Be Treated Like Cattle"

Hitchcock and the Question of Performance

Doug Tomlinson

Walt Disney has the best answer to the actor problem. He makes cartoons, and if he doesn't like the actors he tears them up.

(Hitchcock, 1962)

In the documentary the basic material has been created by God, whereas in the fictional film the director is the god; he must create life.

(Hitchcock, 1967)

In his inimitable way, Alfred Hitchcock generally played to the oft-repeated myth that actors should be treated like cattle, delighting in the confrontations it provoked with journalists as well as the attention it ultimately brought his name. Ever the shrewd businessman, Hitchcock acknowledged that such press coverage was effective publicity for his films.

Across his career, Alfred Hitchcock presided over the creation of hundreds of performances, many of them startling in their depiction of psychological perverseness and/or emotional abnormality. Throughout most of that career, Hitchcock cast performers capable of credibly embodying such characters; ingeniously, he sought effec-