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## **Rear Window**

The two main protagonists in *Rear Window* embody the very nature of seeing in their professions. Jefferies is a photographer and he is paid for his views. Fremont is a model who is constantly under public scrutiny. Their professional relationship encompasses both the seeing, by the photographer, and being seen, as the subject. Hitchcock's film suggests that nearly all manner of looking is intrusive. The nature of casual glances into someone's apartment across the garden may change if, during that glance, something is noticed that warrants further study.

Watching, as an active process in *Rear Window*, is compared to studying bugs under glass, or other specimens in a bottle. Jefferies "looking" can be described as necessary in order to better understand his neighbors the same way entomologist look at specimens in order to better understand them. Jefferies also looks at others as a means of introspection. This is most evident in the case of the newlyweds and to a lesser extent the ballet dancer.

The only characters besides Jefferies immediate interactions that have names are Lars and Emma Thorwald. The other tenants are only known by how they are seen. In addition to Miss Lonelyhearts there is Miss Torso, Miss Hearing Aid, the newlyweds, and the man and woman on the fire escape. Faced with Fremont's insistence on moving their relationship to the next level he looks out and finds evidence of his own perceptions of marriage among his neighbors. He spends less time focused on Miss Lonelyhearts because that is the scenario that he wishes to not see, even as he is dangerously close to

recreating in his own life. It is in the apartment of Lars Thorwald where Jeffries first finds evidence of the nagging wife scenario as he described it to Fremont.

What is most striking about the neighbors in *Rear Window* is that many of them are in some way part of public or stage life. Parts of their lives involve being on display for others. There is a sculptor who creates objects to be looked at, the ballet dancer who, through performance, is an object to be looked at, and even Lars' inventory of costume jewelry means he has to show them to people and in return his customers use the jewelry to draw attention to themselves. The commodity of looking is a theme that runs through nearly every aspect of the film.

Early in the film Jeffries is a casual observer of his neighbors, he only sees what they are showing. As his suspicion grows he turns to the tools of his trade to aid his sight. With the help of his camera's telephoto lens and binoculars he has moved from "seeing" to "looking." Stella, Jeffries' nurse, describes Jeffries instruments as "portable keyholes." This is not a flippant description as looking through a keyhole requires the one looking to be in close proximity to what they wish to see. The ability to have "keyhole spying" closeness from safely across a garden is important to Jeffries in particular as his broken leg keeps him confined to his apartment. Looking from a distance is less dangerous.

To get closer to Lars Jeffries utilizes another form of technology, that of the detective. Lieutenant Thomas Doyle is an army friend of Jeffries who flew the reconnaissance plane during the war. Their professional relationship was based on looking together. Doyle's position as a detective is similar to Jeffries work as a photographer as they are both paid to "look." The major difference between the two is that results of Doyle's investigations are consumed by fewer individuals than Jeffries'

magazine published photographs, and each for very different reasons. Doyle cannot (will not) trespass on Lars' privacy without a search warrant. This adherence to the law actually renders Doyle as helpless in looking as Jeffries' cast does. This shifts the power dynamic towards Stella and Fremont having a more active role in the looking when and where the men cannot.

The danger in looking mounts when Fremont and Stella go out to check on the flower garden and Fremont decides to break into the Thorwald apartment. Fremont takes it upon herself to get to the *other* side of the keyhole. Here is where two different manners of looking come into play: photographic evidence and feminine intuition. Fremont's "intuition" tells her that Emma Thorwald would not leave her wedding ring or favorite bag and that something is definitely amiss. Looking at photographs of the garden taken two weeks early revealed that the heights of flowers had changed. The photograph showed an unchanged scene from the past that neither Stella nor Fremont has actively "seen." Fremont's intuition told her that something was wrong even without her "seeing" it. I suppose that this means that intuition and a photograph can both be described as "seeing without looking."

The final use of technology comes when Lars confronts Jeffries in the latter's apartment. While Lars is making his way towards Jeffries in the pitch-black apartment, Jeffries utilizes his camera's flash as an instrument of defense. Each time Jeffries flashes his camera Lars is temporarily blinded and is slowed down his assault on Jeffries long enough for Doyle and the police to arrive.

What is most interesting about the behaviors of both Lars and Jeffries is how their behaviors change when they become aware that they are under observation. It is striking

that Lars' behavior changes little as we see it from Jeffries point of view. Lars is trying to find out who sent the note and how they may have known. He looks down the hall after opening the door, but not necessarily across the garden. After he kills the dog he is the only one that does not come to the window after the woman screams. The audience sees a lit cigarette in a completely dark apartment.

Jeffries on the other hand gets more anxious just as his viewing gets more intimate. From the time he starts looking with his camera and binoculars he is more careful with staying in the shadows, and making sure Stella and Fremont do as well. During the last half of the movie Jeffries actually acts more suspicious than Lars, or at least suffers more anxiety at getting caught looking than Lars suffers from getting caught in a murder. Perhaps that is the true power of looking, seeing, and being seen.