

The dilemma of prying



Hitchcock's classic thriller 'Rear Window' demonstrates the perception that people should look into themselves to solve an issue, instead of focusing attention on others. For example, as Jeff becomes more involved with spying on others, he crosses the boundaries of what is morally acceptable. Jeff's deliberate desire to delve into the lives of his neighbors is a ploy to distract himself from his impending commitment to Lisa. Furthermore, Hitchcock's techniques of cinematography positions the viewer to share the protagonist's perspective.

Hitchcock uses the protagonist Jeff to portray the ethical dilemma of voyeurism and its serious consequences. This is first foreshadowed by Stella, as she warns Jeff he is becoming a "race of Peeping Toms". Her critical analysis lays first impressions of Jeff to the viewers. Through the specially crafted scene, Hitchcock explicitly demonstrates that although Jeff is physically restrained, his attention is clearly elsewhere, outside his apartment. For example, in the introduction scene, the audience is shown Jeff's disorganized apartment and his professional photojournalist equipment, cuing into his later use of the long focus lens. This idea is further supported by the mise-en-scene, that Jeff is always on the right side of the scene which is closer to his windows, showing his endless curiosity and desire to explore the outside world. However, Jeff's recreation does not come without a price, where his own moral judgement is constantly being questioned. This is first demonstrated as Jeff admits and questions himself "if it's ethical to watch..." Through Jeff's dilemma, Hitchcock challenges the viewers of what is right or wrong, that if there is no murder, Jeff would be considered an unethical stalker. On the other hand, if murder is disclosed

and Thorwald is sent to jail, then Jeff's unethical 'monitoring' action will be forgiven or even honoured. In addition, the climactic scene where Jeff almost gets himself killed by Thorwald, and as a result, suffers two broken legs. Questioning the readers about the values between risking themselves for the better good or ignorance of immoral behaviour. Hitchcock poses the question challenging the morality of voyeurism and it's overall benefit to the community.

The protagonist Jeff deliberately ignores his close surroundings to avoid introspection. Throughout the film, Jeff is endlessly observing out of his window to the detriment of people that are actually communicating with him inside his apartment. He is first warned by Stella, that he should "get outside... and look in for a change" which is Stella's suggestion to Jeff to settle down and marry his ideal fit, Lisa. However, Jeff instantly dismisses the idea, using "too perfect" as his excuse to reject Lisa, showing his enthusiasm to the outside world, instead of his more important life commitment. Furthermore, when Lisa is initially mentioned, Jeff turns his attention to his neighbors, especially Mr Thorwald's nagging wife, which reflects inwardly Jeff's fear of what might become of their relationship. The Thorwalds' marriage further confirms his belief that marriage is a negative option, resulting in a containment and the end of his career. Moreover, unlike a typical male, when Jeff is being seduced by Lisa, his attention remains on the mystery of Anna Thorwald's disappearance. Jeff's dismissive behavior, confirms to the audience that Jeff is purposely refuting Lisa, choosing to obsess over his neighbors rather than his girlfriend. Nonetheless, as soon as Lisa accepts his suspicion of murder, Jeff can no longer use voyeurism as an

excuse to ignore Lisa; instead, he acknowledges her accompany and become relies on Lisa to gain extra information about the case. As the suspense continues, Lisa's uses her "feminine intuition" to work along with Jeff and in an attempt to convince detective Doyle. Therefore, Hitchcock clearly suggests that, as Lisa shares Jeff's curiosity and the firm ambition to proof the murder, Jeff has no choice but to accept her as he urgently needs her support.

Hitchcock carefully crafts the scenes to position the viewers to share the concerns of the main protagonists. The film starts with the credits scene, where the neighborhood and Jeff are slowly being revealed. Hitchcock intentionally positions the camera as if it is monitoring Jeff "like a bug under a glass", this positions the viewers to perform the exact same action as Jeff. Additionally, the special panning effect and the diversely interesting neighbors, this quickly immerses the viewers to form a similar judgement as Jeff, who firmly believes that Thorwald is guilty. Furthermore, Hitchcock's short scene of Mr Thorwald leaving the apartment with an unknown woman gives critical information only to the viewers. The suspense is further elevated, with information from Doyle, suggesting that "Thorwald is no more a murderer than [him]". Viewers are swayed to share Jeff's confusion, as the evidence is presented. Most importantly, at this point, the viewers are unknowingly repeating Jeff's action, which is voyeuring on others and becoming concerned about other people's business. Hitchcock uses this method to sarcastically reflect on the 1950s American society, where some individuals accused others of being communist sympathisers. Therefore, Hitchcock evokes the same issues that the protagonists in the film

experience to the audience and forces them to consider more about their own lives instead of always focusing on what others are doing.

In conclusion, Hitchcock uses the character of Jeff, to explain the moral dilemma that arises from prying upon others. Additionally, as the film progresses, characters become more and more acceptable to each other and begin to perform actions that they initially considered unethical.

Furthermore, Hitchcock positions the audience to share Jeff's perspective, by involving them through the suspense of the film, challenging the audience to consider redirecting their attention towards their own lives.