

REAR WINDOW'S HAUNTED MATERNAL SPACES

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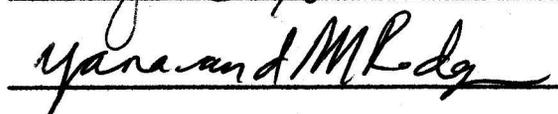
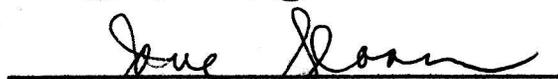
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

THE HAUNTED COURTYARD: *REAR WINDOW*'S LOST MATERNAL SPACES

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In this thesis, I explore the urban courtyard in Alfred Hitchcock's 1954 film *Rear Window* as a feminized space of personal transformation and potential social change. Using Tania Modleski's ideas about the possibilities of female spectatorship and the cinema, I examine the film from the perspective of Lisa, the beautiful and privileged socialite who is drawn not only to the diffident L.B. Jeffries, but to the neighbors in his modest Greenwich Village courtyard.

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The Haunted Courtyard: *Rear Window*'s Lost Maternal Spaces

Introduction

When the aristocracy of the great Olympian gods collapsed at the end of Antiquity, it did not take down with it “the mass of indigenous gods, the populace of gods that still possessed the immensity of fields, forests, woods, mountains, springs intimately associated with the life of the country [. . .] Where are they? [. . .] They live on in our most intimate of domestic habits.” But they also live on in our streets and in our apartments. They were perhaps, after all only the agile representatives of narrativity and of narrativity in its most delinquent form.¹

I didn't know their names. I'd never heard their voices. I didn't even know them by sight, strictly speaking, for their faces were too small to fill in with identifiable features at that distance. Yet I could have constructed a timetable of their comings and goings, their daily habits and activities. They were the *Rear Window* dwellers around me.²

The first time I saw *Rear Window* was in New York in the early 1970s, during a heat wave similar to the one that takes place in the film. My friends and I, all in our early twenties, would go to the film revival houses on the Upper West Side or downtown on weekends to escape our non-air conditioned apartments. Like the mainstream reviewers of the fifties, I was put off by the ostensible ordinariness of the film, but for my own reasons. I thought the James Stewart character, L.B. Jeffries, was old and unattractive. Stella, the nurse played by Thelma Ritter, also looked scarily old and wore the same dowdy dresses worn by my great-aunts in the Midwest. But most of all it was Lisa, the Park Avenue socialite and pursuer of Jeffries, who puzzled me the most. Why would a wealthy, beautiful young woman choose to spend her time in a dingy apartment with a diffident man like Jeffries? As we learn in the film, Lisa is a sophisticated woman with

¹ Michel de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 129 University of California Press, 1988

² Cornell Woolrich. *Rear Window and Other Stories*, NY: Penguin Books, 1984

access to wealth and celebrity who longs to be creative; in that case, why isn't she a few blocks away at the Cedar Bar rubbing elbows with abstract expressionist painters and beat poets instead of spending her time in a dingy, sweltering apartment with a middle-aged male photographer who repeatedly tells her in a passive aggressive way that he's not interested in her because she's "too perfect" for him? And why would a woman whose job it is to be fixated on celebrity and glamour feel drawn to an apartment that overlooks a courtyard occupied by people who live modest, anonymous lives in small rent-controlled apartments? To me at the time, the whole point of being in New York was to escape from the narrow provinciality of the Midwest. The courtyard struck me as a boring, parochial space. It was of no interest to me; so Lisa should be uninterested as well.

The true mystery of the film for me then, wasn't the solution to the murder of Mrs. Thorwald that takes place in the apartment across the courtyard—it was Lisa's presence in Jeffries' apartment itself. Could there be a hidden part of Lisa's character that compels her to linger in the apartment (despite Jeffries' hostility)?

Robin Woods writes, "Each apartment offers a variation on the man-woman relationship or the intolerable loneliness resulting from its absence, and only the one contented couple is passed over and forgotten."³ Lisa's perplexing relationship with Jeffries is echoed by the doomed married woman who is murdered across the courtyard by her husband. Maybe Lisa isn't so out of place after all.

³ Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, NY: Columbia University Press, 1989, p. 102

But could Lisa's presence in the film have another dimension? One of the themes I will explore in this paper is *Rear Window*'s courtyard as a paradoxical space. Certainly it's a space of male-female dysfunction (one woman is murdered and two others are assaulted during the course of the film), but it's also a space that simultaneously valorizes the rhythms of the everyday and nurtures individual creativity. And despite the dangers that the women in the courtyard face it is, in certain respects, a feminine space. It's a space that personifies not only feminine sexual and marital relationships, but something deeper and more generational, for Lisa and to a certain extent, Jeffries as well. The very qualities that irritated me about the courtyard—the fact of its being mired in the ordinary and everyday—were the qualities that attracted Lisa.

Adrienne Rich writes, “Re-vision, the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history; it is an act of survival.”⁴ In a way, this paper is an attempt on my part to look at *Rear Window* with “fresh eyes,” to write about the film from a personal and feminist perspective and answer the question about Lisa's presence in the film that perplexed me so long ago. What does the Greenwich Village courtyard offer Lisa emotionally that her life on the Upper East Side doesn't? When this film was originally released critics, as well as the general public, treated Jeffries, Lisa and Stella as part of an urban ensemble. And, in the end, they play a crucial role in the transformation of Lisa's emotional life more than her relationship with the emotionally sterile Jeffries.

⁴ Adrienne Rich, *When We Dead Awaken: Writing as a Re-Vision, On Lies, Secrets and Silence, Selected Prose, 1966-78*, New York: Norton, 1979, 35

Rear Window: The Backstory

In February 1942, the *Dime Detective Magazine* published a short story by Cornell Woolrich (under the pseudonym William Irish) called *It Had To Be Murder*. In it, a man with a broken leg trapped in a wheelchair in a back apartment suspects that a man in a neighboring apartment murdered his wife. Helped by his African-American “houseman” Sam, the protagonist confronts and exposes the murderer, who would have otherwise committed the perfect crime. Woolrich renamed the story *Rear Window*⁵ when it was republished in an anthology in 1944. Woolrich’s story attracted interest in Hollywood and ultimately Alfred Hitchcock acquired the film rights to the story as his first film for Paramount Pictures. A screenwriter, John Michael Hayes, was called in to write a seventy-six-page production treatment of the story and the film went into production starting in the end of 1953.

In Woolrich’s original story, a black man helps the protagonist in his search for the murderer. But Hitchcock had different ideas for the story. Hitchcock was intrigued by Hollywood gossip about the affair between the war photographer Robert Capa and the actress Ingrid Bergman. The couple met in Paris in 1945 and Capa photographed Bergman for *Life* magazine during the filming of *Notorious*. John Belton writes:

Hitchcock, according to biographer Donald Spoto, had become romantically obsessed with Bergman during the making of *Spellbound* (1945). Hitchcock noted Bergman’s passion for Capa as well as Capa’s noncommittal responses to her. Bergman clearly wanted to marry the photographer, but he refused, fearful of the commitment of marriage [. . .] The director deliberately set out to recreate this relationship several years later in *Rear*

⁵ *Rear Window and Other Stories*, Ameron Ltd., 1988

Window.⁶

Hitchcock gave Woolrich's anonymous protagonist a job as a photojournalist, who also did fashion photography. The character of Sam was transformed into a beautiful blonde woman with a romantic interest in the photographer. However Hayes, who wrote the eventual screenplay, claimed that Hitchcock never spoke to him about the Capa-Bergman connection to the eventual plot and Hitchcock never publicly referred to the affair in connection to the film. But as Belton points out, "Hitchcock was never one to refrain from including inside jokes or biographical allusions in his films."⁷

Having made the decision to shoot the film on a studio lot instead of on location, Hitchcock and his production designers were concerned with creating a studio set of an apartment courtyard with a sense of authenticity. In another allusion to the Capa-Bergman romance, Hitchcock chose to set the story the very street that Capa lived on—West Ninth Street in Greenwich Village. After making some preliminary sketches, Hitchcock sent a photographer to New York to shoot Village apartment courtyards that reflected the ideas in Hitchcock's storyboards for the film.

Find a rear court of this type of vista (sky and buildings in the background). This vista has to be north . . . Take courtyard and vista in all its moods, dawn, morning, noon, afternoon, last ray of sunlight on B.B. buildings, dusk and night . . . Shoot at least three different courts. Also shoot random color shots rear courtyards in the Village, for detail for color for the buildings, any time of day. I will use these in painting the set.⁸

The completed set was huge:

⁶ John Belton, *Introduction: Alfred Hitchcock's Rear Window*, Cambridge University Press Film Handbooks: 2000, p. 5

⁷ Belton, 6

⁸ Scott Curtis, *The Making of "Rear Window," Alfred Hitchcock's Rear Window*, Cambridge University Press Film Handbooks: 2000, 29-30

The completed set was 98 feet wide and 185 feet long. And 40 feet high with structures rising five and six stories . . . There were 31 apartments with most of the action occurring in eight completely furnished rooms, besides a labyrinth of fire escapes, roof gardens, an alley, a street and a skyline . . . Lighting the set turned into a daunting and expensive task. “More than 10000 giant arc lights were needed to light the set from overhead, while more than 2000 smaller variety of lamps were necessary for ordinary lighting . . . Actually lighting this composite set was the biggest electrical job undertaken on the lot by Paramount, not excepting even Cecil B. DeMille’s big spectacle sets.”⁹

In other words, it took a spectacular amount of work to re-create the ordinary. The actors Jimmy Stewart and Grace Kelly were Hitchcock’s first choices to play the roles of L.B. Jeffries, the photographer (the same as in the short story) and Lisa Fremont, his would-be fiancée. A third character, Stella, played by Thelma Ritter, is a nurse sent by the insurance company to care for Jeffries, was added to the story. Raymond Burr played Thorwald, the murdering husband and an assortment of character actors portrayed the courtyard inhabitants.

In Woolrich’s original story Sam, the black houseman, was both a companion and a caretaker for the protagonist. In *Rear Window*, his role is feminized and split between two different white women, both of whom were well-known actresses. This would certainly make the film more acceptable to mainstream audiences. Their presence also “brightens” Woolrich’s shadowy and disturbing short story with its homoerotic and racial undertones.

When *Rear Window* was released, it received mostly favorable reviews, but was considered a minor effort by Hitchcock. Bosley Crother, in his 1954 *New York Times*

⁹ Curtis, 30

review of Alfred Hitchcock's newly- released film *Rear Window*,¹⁰ assured his readers that it was an ingenious, but lightweight film: "Mr. Hitchcock's film is not "significant," he wrote. "What it has to say about people and human nature is superficial and glib." Crowther's objection to the film was its lack of action—in a subsequent review,¹¹ Crowther unfavorably compared the film to Hitchcock's previous films, *Spellbound* and *Notorious*, films in which "the 'chase' was the crux of the excitement . . . And the 'chase' was inevitably a matter of keeping his people on the move." *Time Magazine's* August 1954 review praised Hitchcock's skill, but made a similar point about the lack of concrete "action" in the film, comparing it to a "handkerchief trick"—"The trick, is simply to plant both feet on a standard-size pocket handkerchief, fold both hands behind the back, and fight a full three-minute round against a free-moving opponent without once taking the feet off the handkerchief." John McCarten, writing in the *New Yorker*,¹² went so far as to describe the film's plot as "claptrap":

I fear that *Rear Window* must be taken as another example of footless ambition to make a movie that stands absolutely still. In *Rope* and *Dial M for Murder*, he worked, to all intents and purposes, and in the current foolishness, he is confined to an implausible backyard. Maybe one of these days he's going to bust out the way he used to, and then we'll have some satisfactory films.

When it was released, *Rear Window* was considered entertaining and skillfully made, but slight. But its stature as a film has grown over the years; it raises issues about surveillance, sexuality, urbanity and creativity that remain pertinent and engaging.

¹⁰ Bosley Crowther. A "Rear Window" View Seen at the Rivoli, *The New York Times*, August 4, 1954

¹¹ *A Point of View: Hitchcock's Rear Window Provokes Contrast of This and Other Films*

¹² *New Yorker*, August 7, 1954

Opening Credits: Bamboo Blinds and the Unseen Hand

What the map cuts up, the story cuts across.—de Certeau¹³

Rear Window opens with a shot of a rectangular apartment window, seen from the inside, covered with three semi-transparent bamboo blinds. A jazzy and discordant musical soundtrack plays as one by one, the blinds are slowly rolled up to reveal an urban apartment courtyard consisting of apartment buildings of different sizes, ages and architectural styles on a summer day. Since the courtyard is visible through the flimsy bamboo blinds, there's something extraneous about the process. We're in a home—an intimate domestic space—but it's unclear who is raising the blinds.

“As a construction, *Rear Window* is classically Aristotelian. It has a beginning, a middle and an end; it observes the basic Aristotelian unities—unity of action, unity of place, and, given some ellipses, unity of time,” writes John Belton.¹⁴ To Belton, the opening of three blinds during the opening credits seems to formalize the film's linear, or as he puts it, Aristotelian construction and signify the beginning, middle and end of the film. The raising of the bamboo curtains is as if “it were a spectacle at the theater, where the raising and lowering of the curtain would punctuate the breaks between acts.”¹⁵ Belton, who titled his essay about *Rear Window*, “Spectacle and Narrative,” is intent on downplaying what he refers to as the film's “deceptive” obviousness—“Though its subject matter lacks the epic proportions of that era's [1954] big budget Biblical

¹³ de Certeau, 129

¹⁴ John Belton, *Introduction: Alfred Hitchcock's Rear Window*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Film Handbooks: 2000, p.5

¹⁵ Belton, 13

spectacles, costume pictures or Westerns, its basic situation is pure spectacle.”¹⁶ But Tania Modleski writes, “Indeed, there are many questions that I think begin to look very different when seen by a woman [. . .] how do the theatrical motifs so common in Hitchcock’s films change their meaning when considered in light of Western culture’s association of femininity with theater and spectacle?”¹⁷ And what does the implied spectacle of the opening credits tell us about the femininity of not only Lisa, but of the women in the courtyard? And does it imply that the courtyard itself is a “feminized” space? Michel Chion refers to the Jeffries’ apartment as a “little theater of the living room,” and writes that “Jeff’s apartment is obviously constructed and filmed as a *theatrical set with four sides*,”¹⁸ of which only three are visible. Chion’s “fourth” side, which is hidden from the viewers for most of the film, is the exterior wall of Jeffries’ apartment. This unseen “side” of the courtyard is what Chion refers to as an “absent field;” an implied space whose construction is supplied imaginatively by the film’s viewers: “It is this process that constitutes the spectator in the construction of cinematic space.”¹⁹ And could this fourth, unseen theatrical space carry the association with femininity suggested by Modleski?

In the opening credits, Hitchcock is evoking the idea of theater and spectacle while simultaneously undermining it. In contrast to a theatrical curtain, the bamboo curtains are almost completely transparent. And there are no surprises in store once the

¹⁶ Belton, 1

¹⁷ Tania Modleski, *Introduction, The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory*, New York: Routledge 2005, 13-14

¹⁸ Michel Chion, *Hitchcock’s ‘Rear Window’: The Fourth Side. Alfred Hitchcock’s Rear Window*, Cambridge Film Handbooks. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 115

¹⁹ Chion, 116

blinds are completely open—the urban courtyard is visible through the flimsy slats in the blinds from the first frame. And could there be a more humble and less theatrical window covering than bamboo? To me, the anonymous opening of the semi-transparent bamboo curtains implies an inverted spectacle in the same way the courtyard presents an inverted urban landscape.²⁰ If, as Belton suggests, the opening of the blinds has to do with spectacle and if, as Modleski suggests, spectacle is associated with femininity, then the femininity in *Rear Window* is a femininity connected with the domestic and everyday.

The Camera Flaneur

After the bamboo blinds completely open in the oppositional opening credits (i.e., revealing what we can already see), the camera's lazy eye literally jumps out of this anonymous interior space and roams around the courtyard. In *Celluloid City*, James Sanders writes of this sequence,

The camera moves toward the window and then into the courtyard, executing a broad sweeping pan of the place it had revealed as framed and distant just a moment before . . . The shift between the two shots is profound, and resonates throughout the film. It is not just that static theatrical view, having been firmly established, gives way to a dynamic, filmic way of seeing. It is also the notion of a single privileged vantage point—Stewart's apartment—has been counterbalanced with that of an omniscient roving eye that will occasionally go where Stewart himself cannot, passing into the courtyard itself to explore every corner of the place.²¹

²⁰ “‘*Rear Window*,’ as the title suggests, is a view onto unconscious desire: it looks into the back of the mind and at what it conceals. The eye is traditionally, for poets at least, a window into the soul; it is the ‘front’ window,” as it were. The unconscious mind, which opens onto a different terrain of desire, functions as a ‘rear’ window: It sees what the eye does not.”—Belton, 9

²¹ James Saunders, *Fifty Windows, Celluloid Skyline: New York and the Movies*. New York: Knopf, 2003, 231

The camera roams in a random way out into the courtyard and observes the urban geography. The courtyard consists of a hodgepodge of buildings of different sizes and ages—

Their walls do not hew to a consistent line but are set forward and back, offering a richly sculptural quality in place of the relatively flat alignment that would be found on the street. They evidence all sorts of accretions and changes over time, having sprouted additions (like the glass-walled studio, or the wooden porch) that sometimes extend a considerable distance into the yard, as they could never do onto a sidewalk. They are, in short, the informal backs of the of the city's buildings, as opposed to their formal fronts.²²

Just as the opening credits with the bamboo blinds inverted the traditional “spectacle” of the opening credits, we’re introduced to an urban scene through the “back door,” so to speak. We’re presented with an inverted view of the city.²³ The camera zooms in on a small two-story older building that’s obviously the smallest and oldest building in the courtyard, one that somehow escaped being torn down. The disembodied head of a young blond woman is visible as she combs her hair in the bathroom window. On the upper balcony of a contemporary apartment building are a mother, father and child. While the family can look down and see the courtyard, they’re remote and apart from it. Sanders writes,

Although we have yet to meet anyone, we have already learned a great deal about what this place is—and still more about what it is not. It is not the street. As that meandering cat first showed us, the courtyard floor is a series of different levels, divided by fences and walls of all kinds, that could not possibly accept any through traffic. Enclosed almost entirely by buildings, the space is connected to nothing else in the city—unlike a street, which is by definition connected to everything else. Though located in the middle of New York, the courtyard is a place apart, a quiet and isolated landscape that

²² Sanders, 231

²³ Sanders, 231

is shared only by the people who face it.²⁴

The isolated space of the courtyard itself has a uterine quality; it's enclosed on three sides with only a narrow exit to an impersonal city street. This sense of the courtyard as a gestational space is reinforced by the close up of a thermometer showing the temperature at ninety degrees, even though it's still early in the morning. This "quiet and isolated landscape" is a space that offers its inhabitants the possibility of growth and rebirth. But that's not immediately apparent as the camera returns to the interior of the apartment with the bamboo blinds and a close-up of a sleeping, sweating, middle-aged man just inside the window. In its first "look" around the courtyard, the camera gave us a chance to look at the "bones" or the architecture of its space. In its second revolution, we are introduced to the people that live there:

Last time, we now realize, we were shown the courtyard's form; now, just as deliberately, we get to see its function. Not just the court, but the people who inhabit it, not just the place, but the way in which it is lived.²⁵

After the camera pans away from the sleeping man, L. B. Jeffries, one of the film's protagonists, it looks into the studio of contrasting middle-aged man—who, we will learn, is a songwriter. He is wide-awake and busily preparing to shave himself with an old-fashioned razor blade. On his radio, a male announcer asks, "Men, are you over forty? When you wake up in the morning do you feel tired and run down? Do you have that listless feeling?" The question of masculine inadequacy or lack is one of the central themes of the film. As if to underscore this theme of male impoverishment, an alarm clock goes off on the fire escape of the postwar building directly across from the

²⁴ Sanders, 231

²⁵ Sanders, 232

camera's vantage point. A third middle-aged man sits up and turns the clock off; his appearance reiterates the idea of the courtyard being a space of objects (and people) hidden in plain sight. A pair of arms materializes alongside him—it's his wife. They're a second married couple, and unlike the family on the high floor, they don't have children. And the fact that the camera passed over them twice before they became visible suggests that their childlessness has marginalized and disempowered them, in contrast to the very visible couple and their child in the neighboring building. Like its varied architecture, the courtyard is a place of personal contrast. There's a difference between the conventional family (who remain "above it all" throughout the film) and the childless couple. The dancer may live in the most humble building in the courtyard but she's young and lively, unlike the middle-aged neighbors who surround her.

Jeffries is asleep in his wheelchair with his back to the window. He's either cut off or has cut himself off from the everyday activities of the courtyard.²⁶ Or his sleep could be attributed to the masculine malaise that the radio announcer just referred to. His injuries are more than physical. On a cluttered table alongside Jeffries, there's a smashed news camera in front of a photograph of a racecar crash; that must be how Jeffries broke his leg. He's a photojournalist. There is an intact camera next to the full-sized framed negative of the woman and a magazine with the positive image of her on the cover. What can we speculate from this? That his relations with women are imbued with negativity and are a disaster waiting to happen—or one that has already happened?

²⁶ "Our gaze traverses this space as Stewart might hear it in his sleep, with its echoing din of radio sounds, children's cries, automobile horns and boat whistles. At the same time, this scene appears as a kind of extension of his dreaming head."—Chion, 111

From what we can see of it, Jeffries' apartment looks makeshift and chaotic. There are stacks of his photographic portfolios and various knickknacks that he's picked up on his travels haphazardly stuck on the walls or put on shelves. He only lives here in between assignments. But even though he's in a wheelchair, Jeffries could still be taking pictures (if he wanted to) of the life around him in the courtyard. After all, he is a professional photographer. But there aren't any examples of any recent work by him since his accident or any evidence of a home darkroom. So Jeffries is not only physically injured, his creativity and skill as a photographer are diminished as well.

So far, the camera has been lazily roaming the courtyard and Jeffries' apartment, but it quickly cuts to a shot of the now-awake Jeffries shaving in his wheelchair. The camera's in an "odd" place in this scene; it's suspended outside the window but close enough to be perched on the windowsill. The precariousness of the camera's position hints at the fact that Jeffries is a physically and emotionally vulnerable man, despite his bravado. This is one of the two scenes where viewers catch a glimpse of the "fourth wall," the wall that Chion refers to as an "absent field." Jeff talks on the phone to his Gunnison, his editor. Unlike his musician neighbor, who leisurely lathered his face with an old-fashioned shaving brush and mug, Jeffries busily shaves himself with an electric shaver. "You've got to get me out of this apartment," Jeffries tells his boss. "Six weeks sitting in a two-room apartment with nothing to do but look out at the neighbors. If you don't pull me out of this swamp of boredom, I'm gonna do something drastic." Here's more evidence of his lack of creativity—why should the activities in the courtyard be any more boring than any of his other assignments? Maybe it's not the courtyard itself that irritates him, it's his inability to walk away from it—his photojournalism is really just a

screen for an inability to commit himself to any one place or any one person. The camera's position in a designated "empty" or "absent" space during suggests that there's an unseen loss connected with Jeffries' querulous behavior.

Across the courtyard, in the apartment beneath the childless couple, a heavysset man about the same age as Jeffries comes home from work carrying a sample case and immediately starts arguing with his wife who, like Jeffries, is an invalid. The salesman, whose name we later learn is Lars Thorwald, and his irritation with his wife Anna, mirrors the irritation that Jeff feels about being forced to stay in his apartment "in a swamp of boredom" surrounded by women. The Thorwalds' arguments reinforce Jeffries's fear of marriage (and his fear of women's anger at him). But Jeffries has a dual identification here—like the salesman's wife, he's an invalid and housebound. She wears her nightgown during the day in the same way he's stuck all day in his pajamas.²⁷ They're both weak and immobile. Watching them, Jeffries shows real interest (for the first time), telling Gunnison that the drastic thing he's going to do is get married—and then "he won't be able to go anywhere." He complains that he'll coming home to the "sound of the electric washing machine, dishwasher, garbage disposal" and a "nagging wife." So, fond as he is of his electric razor, he begrudges women any modern appliance that might make their lives easier. No wonder photos of women and disasters share the same space in his apartment. Jeffries is afraid that marriage will mean he "won't be able to go anywhere," but isn't that's already the case for him? Emotionally and creatively,

²⁷ "A state of undress/nightwear can indicate vulnerability, as in the case of Mrs. Thorwald and her "double" in pajamas, Jeff."—Sara Street, "The Dresses Had Told Me, *Fashion and Femininity in Rear Window*, Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 2000, 93

he's paralyzed. And, to a certain extent, he's feminized by his disability; he is a self-styled "man of action" immobilized in a domestic space.

Stella

I can smell trouble right here in this apartment.—Stella

Stella, the nurse sent by the insurance company to care for Jeff, introduces herself to us with an accusation to Jeffries as she stands in the shadows inside Jeff's apartment door. Her figure casts an elongated shadow in the doorway. Stella is a middle-aged woman dressed in a serviceable print dress and a broad straw hat. She's wearing what used to be called a day dress. These were dresses that were meant for everyday wear; they were dressier than house dresses, so they could be worn outside the home for grocery shopping or running neighborhood errands, but they were too informal for luncheon dates or shopping trips that entailed a trip "downtown." Stella's dress has shoulder pads that evoke the 1940's; it's out of date, but a thrifty woman like Stella would wear dresses until they wore out instead of following the whims of fashion. Her dated dress and the monotonous, unchanging quality of its fabric suggest there's something archaic and archetypal, as well as something impersonal about Stella.

Stella's wide straw hat makes her shadow against the apartment wall all the more dramatic. For women of Stella's generation, wearing a hat outside the home connoted respectability. She wears sensible shoes and totes a sturdy carryall. Her broad straw hat emphasizes the dramatic shadow she casts on Jeff's apartment wall and can't help evoking the image of a witch. Stella, in her day dress, is a representation of the ordinary

and everyday, but her shadowy entrance suggests she (or what she unconsciously represents to Jeff) has a dark side. Since we are introduced to her alongside Jeff's disaster pictures, it's another intimation of Jeff's problematic relationships with women.

Stella's divided presence as a middle-aged female caretaker calls attention to the absence of Jeff's actual mother. Psychologically, we can say that Jeff is an orphan; otherwise his "real" mother would be looking after him instead of a paid caretaker. Jeff's "real" mother is absent; either she's dead, too weak or far away to look after him or she doesn't care enough for him to be willing to perform the maternal tasks that Stella does for Jeff as part of her job. As a traveling nurse, she's used to making herself at home in diverse spaces. In the process of stepping out of the shadows Stella is transformed from a negative to a positive maternal figure—similar to the way we see the photographic negative of the woman transformed into a positive image on the magazine cover. Stella enters the scene as a shadowy and negative maternal figure alongside Jeff's disaster photographs. She evokes Jeffries' dead/lost/missing/absent/unloving biological mother. Could it be that this maternal loss is the real disaster that Jeff is unconsciously reenacting as he seeks out danger in his work as a photojournalist?

Stella and Jeff have two different ideas about the "trouble" that's about to break out in his apartment. Stella thinks Jeff spends too much time looking out the window at women and not responding to them. Jeff's idea of "trouble" isn't the women outside the apartment; it's the demands of a woman inside his apartment—his would-be fiancée, Lisa Fremont—"she expects me to marry her." Jeff complains that Lisa belongs to the "rarified" world of Park Avenue. "People with sense belong wherever they're put," replies the Stella. This is obviously true of Stella herself; in her work she has to

accommodate herself to all kinds of people and places. Through most of this scene, the songwriter is playing soothing songs on the piano that reflects Stella's a positive presence in Jeff's life. But, as they talk about Lisa, the music stops and the courtyard falls silent. Even talking about Lisa takes Jeff beyond his comfort level.

After Stella leaves, Jeffries looks over at the apartment building perpendicular to his, where a newly married couple has just moved in. They are shown in the window framed by trees—their marriage and sexuality reflect the “natural” order. They notice the open shade and the husband walks over and closes it; the cultural normality and (seeming) emotional completion they represent is emotionally “off-limits” to Jeffries. Jeffries has emotionally disengaged himself off from the domesticity the courtyard represents; to him, it's a “swamp of boredom.”

Lisa

*The goddess can be recognized by her step.—Virgil*²⁸

If she was only ordinary!—L.B. Jeffries

It's dusk in the courtyard. An unseen female voice²⁹ sings vocal scales as the camera scans the courtyard yet again. In a way, this voice is an aural, “fourth wall” that hints at a hidden female presence. The childless husband walks into his living room as he wearily comes home from work; his wife opens up the windows to air out the apartment.

²⁸ Aeneid, 1, 405. quoted by DeCerteau, *Walking in the City, The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 97

²⁹ “But there is at least one ambient sound, which plays an all-the-more-secret and important role because it is not attributable to an identifiable tenant across the way—and so it is, in relation to the other sounds, outside of space: the musical scales sung by an invisible female singer. I like to think that this woman's voice brings a free element, escaping all requirement of spatialization, to the localized, everyday fabric of the music and noises that arrives from the courtyard as if from an enormous burial pit of sounds.”—Chion, 114

She's wearing a day dress reminiscent of Stella's—practical, but slightly more stylish. Since she doesn't have a child, there's no need for her to stay home. For the dancer next door though, the evening has just begun. Her hair is done and it looks like she has plans for the evening. The older woman (a sculptor) in the apartment beneath her is home for the night, but she's also been home all day. She, Jeffries and the invalid Mrs. Thorwald are the constant presences in the courtyard.

The invisible woman continues to sing scales which mingle with the sound of children playing in the street; but both suddenly fall silent as a shadow crosses over Jeffries face. The camera cuts to a close-up of the smiling face of a beautiful young woman with a pearl necklace looming towards him—it's the terrifyingly perfect Lisa. In the scene with Stella, the sounds of courtyard and the city stopped at the mention of her name; now, at the sight of her, the film falls silent again. In the beginning of the film, a cat ran up into the courtyard from an underground space. Lisa echoes the cat's movements as she comes down from above. Lisa, whose introduction is as shadowed as Stella's, suggests that she too, has a dark side.³⁰ Lisa's entrance is preceded by a collage of other women—the conventional mother, the childless wife, the dancer and the sculptor and although Lisa is privileged by her beauty and alleged “perfection,” there's an interrelationship between them. As Lisa leans down over Jeffries to kiss him, her shadow covers both their faces; they share a common loss. At the end of the previous scene with

³⁰ “In our very first view of her, Lisa is experienced as an overwhelmingly powerful presence. Jeff is asleep in his chair, when suddenly an ominous shadow crosses his face. There is a cut to a close-up of Grace Kelly, a vision of loveliness, bending down toward him and us; the Princess-to-Be waking Sleeping Beauty with a kiss. These two shots—shadow and vibrant image—suggest the underlying threat posed by the desirable woman and recall the negative and positive images of the woman on the cover of *Life*.”—Modleski, 72

Stella, Jeffries watched the newlyweds in the adjoining apartment framed by trees; the husband swept his wife up in his arms and carried her over the threshold. In his relationship with Lisa, the roles are reversed. She's most physically powerful one of the couple.

Jeffries receives her kiss in passive silence. Lisa draws back from Jeffries and asks him series of banal questions about the different parts of his body: "How's your leg? And your stomach?" "Who are you?" he responds sarcastically. Even though she's his fiancée, Lisa is unknown to Jeffries.³¹ As she introduces herself, she turns on an attractive hanging lamp we haven't seen in the apartment before. She walks over to one of Jeffries disaster pictures; it appears to be of a fleeing person. Does it represent Jeffries and his flight from adult responsibility? Or is Lisa the one represented in the photo; what is she trying to get away from? She turns on table lamp; its base appears to be made from an oriental vase. Then, she walks to the back of the apartment towards the door (where we first saw Stella) and turns on a third lamp. This last lamp is heavier and less attractive than the first two lamps. It's alongside the negative of the woman's face. Like Stella in the previous scene who also paused before the same framed negative, Lisa calls attention to a divided (or shattered) femininity. Lisa's clothing reinforces this sense of dividedness, she's dressed completely in black and white.³²

³¹ "When Jeff jokingly inquires, "Who are you? Lisa turns on three lamps, replies, 'Reading from top to bottom, Lisa . . . Carol . . . Fremont,' and strikes a pose. While the pose confirms the view of her as an exhibitionist, her confident nomination of herself reveals her to be extremely self-possessed—in contrast to the man who is only known by one of his three names"—Modleski, 72

³² "Her outfit is a black, tight fitting top with a full, white layered net skirt, and a white chiffon shawl worn with a pearl choker. [. . .] This particular outfit is interesting because it encapsulates the broad spectrum of femininity that is evident in many of Lisa's other outfits and indeed, in her overall look. The tight black top

In the act of turning on the lights, Lisa illuminates hidden spaces. She “throws light” onto the reasons for Jeffries’ troubled personal life. Although we’ve been in Jeffries’ apartment throughout Stella’s visit, it isn’t until Lisa’s entrance that we really “see” the other half of his living room and it’s radically different from the half we’ve already seen. This other, unseen side of Jeffries’ living room has a decidedly different character to it; it has a marble fireplace with an antique clock and matching candlesticks on the mantelpiece. There is also an assortment of various knickknacks. A large framed painting of a conventional still life hangs above the (unused) fireplace. On either side of the painting, there are more of Jeffries’ framed disaster photographs.

The fireplace is flanked on one end by the hanging white lamp that Lisa first turns on and on the other, by the lamp made from an oriental vase. This side of the room is oddly feminine for a man who prides himself on being as ruggedly unconventional and masculine as Jeffries does. It’s hard to imagine him decorating the mantle piece in such a prosaic way, or buying himself a porcelain lamp. It’s almost as if there’s another invisible occupant in the apartment. Even though his apartment is tiny, Jeffries has carefully preserved this feminized space. He’s tried to incorporate it by hanging up his framed pictures in it, but hasn’t succeeded in integrating it into his life. In its unused, yet carefully preserved aspect, it resembles a shrine. Throughout the film, Jeffries carefully avoids this space and huddles in his wheelchair only in “his” side of the room.

This genteel space evokes the presence of an unknown woman who assembled the

connotes a ballerina’s athleticism while the full skirt and shawl present her femininity as a full larger-than-life construct. Hitchcock’s decision to introduce us to her “in bits” has a fascinating cumulative impact that would not have had the same force if we had simply seen her in a single shot. Instead we see her in close-up and then there is more, and more, and more of her.” Street, 95

objects on the fireplace mantel and hung the flowered still life above it. But she's no longer present.³³ The subject of the painting is a clue to her identity. The vase of flowers on a table demonstrates stability and conventional domesticity. The vase in the painting sits on a table indoors—it's an interior still life. Since it's inside Jeffries' apartment, we can say that it's an interior within an interior. This side of the room represents an externalization of Jeffries' missing maternal object, an object doubly hidden and interiorized in Jeffries' psyche, but at the same time, in "plain sight."

"Is this the Lisa Fremont who never wears the same dress twice?" asks Jeffries sarcastically. "Only because it's expected of her," Lisa replies. Like Stella, she's emerged from darkness into light. Unlike Stella, she hasn't immediately walked over to the window. Lisa's bathed in light, but it's artificial and she casts a deep shadow; she's a more powerful figure than Stella. And the darkness hints that there's something troubled behind her "perfect" exterior. Lisa twirls in the dress (giving us a chance to see all of her) and says, "It's right off the Paris plane. Do you think it will sell?" Lisa, who "never wears the same dress twice," has the capacity to change. Her dress has a pattern of leaves on it; she's also has the capacity to be in touch with her inner nature.³⁴ But what part of her nature leads her to become involved with a man like Jeffries? Lisa tells Jeff she's wearing the dress because tonight is a "big night . . . the opening night of the last depressing week of L.B. Jeffries in a cast." In other words, Jeffries in his cast is depressing for her to be around (yet she keeps coming back). She's hoping that once he loses his "plaster

³³ "It is striking here that the places that people live in are like presences of diverse absences. What can be seen designates what is no longer there . . ."—de Certeau, 108

³⁴ "In *Rear Window*, fashion is far from representing women's unproblematic assimilation to the patriarchal system, but functions to some extent as a signifier of feminine desire and difference."—Modleski, 78

cocoon” he’ll emerge a butterfly. Lisa is a beautiful woman who, one would think, would be with man who shares her good looks and ability to charm. But Lisa’s darkened entrance suggests that she too shares Jeffries’ emotional malaise. Maybe being the “perfect” girl who does “whatever is expected” of her is Lisa’s “plaster cocoon.”

To celebrate, Lisa has arranged for a waiter from “21” to deliver a lobster dinner to the apartment. Lisa goes back into the shadows to let in the waiter, a non-white man named Carl. The gracious way Lisa treats Carl demonstrates that she’s polite to people from different backgrounds than herself. After Lisa tips Carl and escorts him out the door with cab fare, she launches into a description of her workday. Lisa’s bubbly description of her day and her “spy work” about the latest Paris fashions with a Madame Dufre makes her attraction to a sluggish man like Jeffries all the more inexplicable. As she speaks to him, she walks over to the brighter, more feminine side of the room and perches on the windowsill. The maternal side of the apartment has an attraction for Lisa; there’s something missing in her life that keeps her coming back to Jeffries’ apartment. Lisa’s position also connects her to the courtyard (instead of Jeffries).

There’s another lamp on in the dancer’s apartment across the courtyard. Like Lisa, the dancer is an illuminating presence. She mirrors Lisa’s positive qualities; they’re both hard-working, creative and making their way on their own in the city. The dancer is putting on a black evening dress similar to Lisa’s. An older woman appears and helps her with her dress. Who is she? This silent and mysterious woman (who we can barely see and who comes out of nowhere) evokes again the image of an elusive and missing mother. Unlike Jeffries, the dancer has a mother (or mother surrogate) who is physically present to take care of her. Did Lisa have a similar figure to help her get dressed for the

evening? Jeffries isn't the only one who is missing an authentic mothering figure in his life. The maternal absence that permeates Jeffries' apartment feels familiar to her and perhaps that's why she's drawn to it despite its desolation.

Lisa moves towards Jeffries (and away from her "safe" space) and confronts him about their relationship. For the second time, she casts a shadow over him as she moves towards him. "Jeff, isn't it time you came home?" she asks. But clearly, Jeffries has no home. Lisa wants him to leave the newsmagazine and do portrait and fashion photography in New York. Jeffries tells Lisa to stop talking "nonsense," as she goes into the kitchen to "set up" for dinner. Unlike Stella, who used the kitchen to make a sandwich for Jeffries, Lisa obviously has no intention of actually preparing food for Jeffries. She's as uninterested in marital domesticity as he is.³⁵ Jeffries' disinterest in marriage could actually be reassuring to her. A melancholy song starts up in the courtyard as she leaves the room. It's completely dark now and Thorwald's invalid wife Anna is sitting up in bed eating alone. Is she lonely? Or is she relieved that her ill-tempered husband is elsewhere? The Thorwald's unhappy marriage is a cautionary tale for Lisa.

In the apartment directly beneath the Thorwalds, there's an older woman we haven't really seen before.³⁶ She's sitting at a dressing table in her bedroom nearsightedly putting on makeup. Her living room is also illuminated, and there's a table set with two place settings. A song is coming from the radio on her end table, where a crooner sings, "to see

³⁶ Or have we? Was she the woman we just saw helping the dancer? Their dresses are a similar color.

you is to love you.” As Lisa puts out a simple, checked tablecloth onto a card table,³⁷ Jeffries watches as the woman, in a dressy, but somewhat dowdy, green dress checks the place setting and walks into the otherwise empty kitchen and gets a bottle of wine. She walks to the door as if greeting a guest, but there’s no one there. But she can’t keep up her fantasy and breaks down in tears. “Miss Lonelyhearts,” says Jeffries sardonically to Lisa, “At least that’s something you’ll never have to worry about.” But Lisa replies, “Oh, you can see my apartment from here, all the way up on 63rd Street?” Lisa’s taken the candlesticks off the (maternal) mantelpiece and put them on what looks like a card table covered with the (equally maternal) green checked tablecloth. Miss Lonelyhearts has similar candlesticks on her small dining room table. She shares Jeffries’ emotional emptiness. And, in her loneliness, she resembles Lisa.³⁸

Jeffries tunes out what Lisa just said and points out that “Miss Torso,” the ballet dancer, has an apartment “as popular as yours.” Jeffries gives both “Miss Lonelyhearts” and “Miss Torso” denigrating nicknames based on their body parts, another indication of his fear and discomfort about women. But earlier in the film, Lisa addressed Jeffries the same way—“How’s your leg?” “How’s your stomach?” Both of them are psychically disjointed and incomplete.

The dancer is giving a party for three well-dressed men in her tiny studio apartment. She’s comfortable with her unconventionality. There’s a loose slipcover over her daybed

³⁷ Jeffries obviously didn’t buy this generic American tablecloth, it must have been “left” there by the same person who put all the knickknacks on the mantle piece; his empty kitchen is another place where a missing mother lurks.

³⁸ “Miss Lonelyhearts is represented as being of a lower class than Lisa by her costumes and particularly by their degree of color saturation. In many ways, Miss Lonelyhearts is a vulgar version of Lisa, often performing similar actions, but her actions are signified as cheaper and sadder.”—Street, 103

along with a matching screen covered in the same fabric. Maybe the motherly figure we saw helping her with her dress sewed these. There's a framed painting over the screen that looks contemporary (as opposed to drably conventional still-life in Jeffries apartment or the prosaic street scene that hangs on the wall in "Miss Lonelyhearts" living room). There are two mismatched contemporary lamps and a crowded bookcase stands along the back wall. There's a statue on the bookcase. Is it religious? This could be another side of her; she has spiritual as well as physical strengths in her life.

The dancer walks out onto her balcony with the oldest of the men, who kisses her, but she pushes him away. Lisa tells Jeffries that the dancer is not in love with him, or any of the men—"You said it resembles my apartment, didn't you?" So, Lisa herself has fought off men's unwanted sexual advances and her discomfort at the sight of the older man's behavior with the dancer suggests that Lisa suffers from paternal as well as maternal dysfunction. Not only may she have had an emotionally absent mother, she could have also suffered from an all too present and inappropriately intrusive father. The fact that Jeffries is immobilized in a wheelchair is actually the source of his attraction for her. She's not ready to enter into a relationship with a sexually able-bodied man.

In a reversal of Lisa serving Jeffries dinner, Thorwald brings his wife dinner on a tray. The wife, like Jeffries, is querulous and complaining, "I hope they're cooked this time," she grumbles. Maybe it's her marriage that's making her sick. She's as dismissive to her husband as Jeffries is to Lisa. Thorwald's anger at his wife echoes Jeffries' resentment of Lisa's attempts to "trap" him into marriage. Thorwald goes into the living room and makes a phone call he obviously doesn't want his wife to know about while a siren wails in the background. The problems in the Thorwald's marriage are a cause for

alarm. The wife hears him on the phone and gets out of bed and peers out the window to “spy” on her husband on the phone in the next room. Suddenly, she’s not as sick as she looks. Why is she bedridden? Her handbag hangs over the post of her twin bed as she mocks her husband, who angrily walks away. Anna Thorwald is seemingly healthy woman who is bedridden. Could she have had a miscarriage? Her handbag oddly hangs alongside her bed in the same space a newborn’s crib would be. If Jeffries’ apartment is a space of maternal absence, the Thorwalds’ bedroom brings to mind a missing child.

Then, incongruously amidst all the discord in the courtyard, the songwriter starts playing the piano. Alongside him, Hitchcock himself stands alongside him winding a clock. “I wish I could be creative,” says Lisa. The songwriter’s creativity offers a solution to the sad scenes we’ve just witnessed; Jeffries rejecting Lisa, the dancer being pawed by the man in the tuxedo, Miss Lonelyhearts and the infidelity of Thorwald and his invalid wife. Like the dancer, the songwriter mirrors the positive aspects of Lisa’s personality.

Certainly the songwriter has his own problems; there’s a large bottle of wine on the windowsill. Hitchcock’s presence winding the clock makes us conscious of the passage of time and the linear, filmic narrative that flows alongside the rambling, discursive actions we’ve seen so far. As Hitchcock winds the clock, he looks over at the songwriter who, continuing to play, looks back at him. “Lisa’s wish for creativity, coming as it does at a moment that echoes Hitchcock’s own gaze, seems an attempt by the director to undermine the power to which he and Jeff will ascribe—a power that, in the film, belongs exclusively to women,” writes Eleanor Lemire.³⁹ But, since the songwriter shares Lisa’s

³⁹ Lemire, 84

urbane sensibility, Hitchcock's gaze in fact points the way to a solution to Lisa's impasse. The songwriter patiently struggles with his personal and artistic dead ends to achieve his creative vision. The songwriter's living room is the most elegantly furnished of any in the courtyard; its decor is traditional, but sophisticated, with dark woods, an elegant antique lamp and a painting of what appears to be a still life on the wall above the antique clock. It reflects his rich inner life. The feminine side of Jeffries apartment has a similar painting with an old clock beneath it, but Jeffries doesn't take as good care of his possessions (or his artistic talent) as the songwriter does.

There's also a sense that the songwriter picked out the tasteful furniture in his apartment himself; it doesn't, as in Jeffries' case, stand for the ghost of a missing mother. And, for the songwriter, time hasn't stopped. He continues to be engaged with his work; Jeffries, on the other hand, hasn't taken any pictures since his accident and is oblivious to the journalistic possibilities the courtyard offers to him. The clock is running out on his abilities as a photographer. "What's that beautiful music?" Lisa asks, as she finishes setting the table. "It sounds as if it were written just for us." Like Miss Lonelyhearts, Lisa is spinning out a romantic scenario where none exists. They've both set the table for a man who isn't "there." Lisa's dinner date is a corpse ("Here lie the bones of L.B. Jeffries") and Miss Lonelyhearts is left with a vacant space. Miss Lonelyhearts represents the negative side of Lisa's psyche (but, as we'll see later in the film, it's negativity balanced with strength). We don't pity Lisa the way we do Miss Lonelyhearts, because she's beautiful and wealthy, but Lisa's beauty, vivacity and wealth mask her vulnerability.

In a jealous dig at the songwriter (and Lisa), Jeffries tells Lisa that the songwriter

lives alone and “probably had a very unhappy marriage.” He envies both Lisa and the songwriter’s ability to work creatively. He could still be working, but he isn’t. As Lisa puts the lobster dinner Carl bought on the table, Jeffries unappreciatively groans, “Lisa, it’s perfect . . . As always.” At least Miss Lonelyhearts’ phantom dinner partner couldn’t answer back.

This scene ends with a long fade out and the next scene begins with an equally long fade-in with Lisa and Jeffries continuing to talk about their relationship. Usually such a long fade out and fade in would lead to a change of scene, but when the camera fades in we’re still in the same space. It reflects the impasse that Lisa and Jeffries are in their relationship and how mutually dreary it is.⁴⁰ Lisa is curled up on the divan facing the window beneath the hanging lamp. Prosaic and remote as the maternal space is, it provides some comfort for Lisa. As they talk about their differences, Lisa concentrates on the human aspect of his work, “there can’t be that much of a difference between people and the way they live—What is it but traveling around taking pictures, it’s like being a tourist on an endless vacation.” Jeffries talks about his work not in terms of the people he encounters, but in terms of his own physical hardships. To Jeffries, his work is only about himself (and his relationship to his editor) and the various physical adversities he encounters. He ridicules Lisa’s saying, “In this job, you carry one suitcase.”

His obliviousness to the rich, human life (outside of his idle curiosity) in the courtyard and his brusque treatment of Carl (not to mention the way he repeatedly tells

⁴⁰ “Moreover, the tableau like spaces of the microscreens find their temporal equivalent in the device of the fade, which punctuates the film, likewise creating the sense of a sealed-off fantasy world impervious to the dialogic, “contaminated” world of lived experience.”—Modleski, 75

Lisa to “shut up”) suggest that maybe a lot of the hardships he encounters in his work are due to his own difficult personality and not the job itself. Whatever talents he’s had in the past certainly aren’t manifest now. Even though, as Jeffries says Lisa “has the town in the palm of her hands,” she keeps coming back to his dingy apartment with its gruesome images on the walls. Jeff’s rejection of Lisa and his rude behavior towards her carries its own hint of violence. But, to invoke the inverted theatricality of the film, the stage has been set for the possibility for Lisa to change.

The Murder

*. . . death is an elsewhere*⁴¹

*. . . it is my belief that the crime of matricide is destined to occur over and over again (on the psychic plane) until woman’s voice allows itself to be heard—in women and men alike.*⁴²

Later that evening, as Jeffries sleeps in his wheelchair, there’s a crash and the sound of a woman’s scream. Jeffries awakes, perplexed, but falls back asleep. There’s another long fade out and fade in of Jeffries sleeping, that’s similar to the fade in and out we saw with him and Lisa. Jeffries is alone in his static emotional and physical space.

Jeffries wakes up at again at two in the morning to the sound of thunder, rain and music from a faraway radio. The childless couple on the fire escape get caught in the rain

⁴¹ DeCerteau, 192

⁴² Modleski, 14

and comically stuff their mattresses back into their apartment. In contrast to the couple's comic and benign powerlessness, the camera pans down to the ominous Thorwald leaving his apartment carrying his sample case and wearing a black slicker; he walks out on to the street and past an Italian restaurant closing for the night. A half hour later, the songwriter comes home drunk and staggers over to his piano, throws his music aside, and collapses into a chair. He's definitely got an alcohol problem.

In the meantime, Thorwald has been going back and forth with his sample case. The dancer comes home, but has to slam the door in the face of one of her men friends saying, "You can't come in! It's much too late!" She slams the door and ostentatiously locks it. Lisa has trouble setting boundaries with "a roomful of wolves," but the dancer certainly doesn't. Jeffries dozes off again, and doesn't see when Thorwald leaves the apartment with an anonymous woman. Her face isn't visible, so there's no way of knowing if it's Anna Thorwald or Thorwald's mistress. Like the woman's voice that can be heard singing scales in the courtyard, she's unseen and unknown. Jeffries doesn't see her, because he's incapable of truly seeing and differentiating between different women. The same could be said of Thorwald, who has exchanged one woman for another.

The next day, the courtyard is in full swing. There's jazzy music playing and the scene opens with the sculptor on her terrace carving a large Henry Moore-like modern sculpture on her terrace. An iceman,⁴³ walking into the courtyard asks her what it's supposed to be and she replies, "It's called *Hunger*." The sculpture resembles a human torso with a hole in the middle of it. It's an unconventional female image and a witty

⁴³ The female sculptor's archaic male counterpart.

reflection of the sculptor's own unconventional female life (as well as those of as her neighbors). And the sculpture presents this unconventionality in a positive light. The childless wife is home for the day and, dressed in a ruffled housedress and apron, she lowers the couple's dog down from the fire escape to the courtyard in a little basket. They pour their parental feelings onto their dog and each other. This is in contrast to the anger and violence in the Thorwalds' equally childless marriage.

Back in Jeffries' apartment, Stella is giving him a backrub. A woman's voice is singing scales the same way she did the last time Stella was in the apartment. However imperfectly, Stella's a nurturing figure to Jeffries. Maybe he had his "accident" as a way of filling his yearning to be mothered and taken care of. Jeffries tells Stella his suspicions about Thorwald. They back off as Thorwald looks out the window with as Jeffries puts it, "no ordinary look." The dog starts digging in the garden and the sculptor shoos the dog away, saying "he'll be after you, again!" In the meantime, Thorwald carefully wipes out his sample case and carefully rehangs his jewelry samples.

This scene reveals more about Jeffries than Thorwald. He backs his wheelchair into shadows so Thorwald can't see him watching. There's a longing there, for a father? Thorwald walks into his kitchen which, like Miss Lonelyheart's, is completely barren. Jeffries gets out a single lens reflex camera with a telephoto lens to get a better "look" at Thorwald in his kitchen. His actions are similar to Thorwald's in the sense that it's no "ordinary look." Since he's so suspicious, and he is a photojournalist, it's surprising that he doesn't load the camera with film and take pictures. He's after more than the mere "facts" of the case. And as Chion points out, shouldn't the other tenants on Jeffries' "side" (the "fourth wall") of the courtyard also see Thorwald and come to their own

conclusions? Thorwald wraps a butcher knife and a saw in newspaper and then lies down on the couch to take a nap. The scene ends with a close-up of Jeffries face behind the camera. For the first time in the film, he appears to be truly emotionally engaged. Lisa couldn't get through to him, but Thorwald has.

The evening opens with a shot of the songwriter in his bathing suit mopping the floor of his studio. He occasionally stops to pick out a few notes on the piano. Maybe his drunken collapse the night before is a sign that he's hit bottom. The childless couple drag their mattress out onto the fire escape and retrieve their dog. Miss Lonelyhearts is sitting in her bathrobe at the sewing machine. For once, she doesn't look tormented. Listening to music and doing productive work takes her mind off her problems. The sculptor continues to work on her sculpture and for the first time, we get a good look into her apartment. It's sparsely furnished with only a few small tables and chairs and an old-fashioned wood-burning stove. This is a woman who lives simply; like Stella, there's also something archaic and unchanging about her. But unlike Stella, who "belongs wherever she's put," the sculptor is embedded in the space of the courtyard.

Back in Jeffries' apartment, Lisa's nuzzling with Jeffries asking, "What does a girl have to do to get noticed?" Jeffries replies, "I'm not exactly on the other side of the room." Jeffries' broken leg externalizes the psychic wound that keeps him from crossing to the "other" side of his living room, the feminine side, and connecting with his unresolved issues related to his mother, women and sexuality. Jeff tells Lisa he's got a "problem—why would a man leave his apartment with a suitcase and come back three times?" "He went out a few minutes ago in his undershirt and hasn't come back," says Jeffries. Thorwald, now that his wife is out of the way, seems happy to shed his outward

respectability and leave the apartment in his undershirt. Maybe that's why he chose to live in Greenwich Village. His violation of conventional norms doesn't have the positive aspect of the dancer, the sculptor and songwriter's unconventionality. Instead, it's ominous and disturbing.

Lisa's wearing a black dress in this scene; it's sophisticated and dressy with semi-transparent sleeves that invoke the bamboo curtains and their aspect of semi-concealment. Her dress's blackness invokes a sense of mourning; she tells Jeffries his obsession with Thorwald's apartment is "diseased," asking him, "What are you looking for?" Obviously, Jeffries obsessive "looking" indicates he has a deep sense of longing, a sense so compelling that he abandons his instincts as a photographer even though, in terms of solving the actual crime, documenting Thorwald's movements with his camera would be the most practical thing to do. The fact that he follows Thorwald with his camera, but doesn't put film in it, shows that his emotional concerns go beyond the actual "crime" in question.

"Lots of men don't speak to their wives all day. Lots of wives nag and men hate them and trouble starts, but very, very few of them end up in murder, if that's what you mean," says Lisa. Could she be talking about her own parents' marriage (and Jeffries)? Could this be the not-so-hidden wound that lies behind Lisa's external perfection and her futile pursuit of Jeffries—the need to fix her parents' broken marriage?

Lisa says, "A murderer would never parade his crime in front of an open window," in other words, "in plain sight." But, as Thorwald bundles up his wife's empty mattress and straps closed a large steamer trunk, Lisa falls silent. The songwriter's piano music continues through her silence as she slowly stands up. Jeffries, in his wheelchair, is more

physically dwarfed by her than ever. “Let’s start from the beginning, again, Jeff.” The sight of Anna Thorwald’s empty bedroom has empowered her. The missing mother has made herself present through her absence. For the first time in the film, she stops continuously fixating on the ineffectual Jeff. Lisa’s ready to go back to the beginning, her beginning.

That night, (a dangerous time for women in the courtyard), Lisa sneaks into Thorwald’s building to learn his identity. Thorwald is sitting alone in the dark; all we can see is the glow of his cigarette. If Anna Thorwald stands for the disembodied and absent mother that both Jeff and Lisa yearn for, Thorwald is the all-too-present angry and murderous father. Jeffries is actually polite to Lisa saying, “Thank you, dear,” to her on the phone. This is a far cry from him telling her to “just shut up,” when she tried to talk to him about their relationship. Lisa humors him by replying, “OK chief, what’s my next assignment?” They’re acting like children—more like a brother and sister than actual adults. They’re using each other to recreate an idyllic childhood neither of them ever had.

Detectives

The girl detective’s mother is missing.

*The girl detective’s mother has been missing a long time.*⁴⁴

The next morning, Jeff calls his detective friend Doyle, while Stella bustles around the apartment. The apartment is brightly lit and appears slightly less desolate than usual. Stella’s made Jeffries’ breakfast (two pieces of toast and a fried egg) and set it on what

⁴⁴ Kelly Link, *Stranger Things Happen: The Girl Detective*, Brooklyn: Small Beer Press, 2001, p. 241

looks like a drab bed table. The boyish aspect we saw in Jeffries the night before continues when he says, “Gee whiz, Stella, this looks great!” at the sight of the food.

Jeffries has asked his old army buddy Detective Doyle to come over and investigate the possible murder. Lieutenant Doyle is introduced in a scene that opens with the camera in the back of the apartment facing away from the door. The apartment’s windows dominate the screen with the blinds fully opened. It shows how large the windows really are. It’s midday and the courtyard is evenly lit. Both Stella and Lisa emerged out of the darkness when they made their initial entrances, but Doyle’s already inside. The camera’s flat depth of field suggests that Jeffries’ relationship with Doyle doesn’t carry the same ambivalence and anxiety (so far) that he has in his relationship with Stella and Lisa. Doyle is wearing a grey-ish beige suit that’s similar to the color of the apartment’s walls and it gives him a tendency to “fade into the woodwork.” Like Stella, he’s obviously a “person with sense who’s at home wherever they are.” And like Lisa, he’s attractive, successful and well dressed.

Doyle is standing over the divan by the window in the same place where Lisa stood in the previous scene. We can see the balcony of the conventional nuclear family in the courtyard alongside him. He reflects conventional values similar to theirs. But he’s also comfortable in the apartment’s feminized spaces. As they talk Doyle casually sits down and makes himself comfortable on the divan in a way similar to the way Lisa does. Doyle represents the kind of man Lisa *should* be attracted to but can’t because of her uneasiness when confronted with male sexuality. But the fact that Doyle is so comfortable in “her” space on the divan shows there’s the possibility of deep compatibility between Lisa and a truly available man.

Doyle returns to the apartment later in the day and stands in front of Jeffries' cluttered bookcase by (yet another) cluttered entrance to the darkened kitchen. In the last scene, we saw him casually lounging on "Lisa's" divan. Now he's leaning on the bookcase on Jeffries side of the room with a drink. Lisa and Stella aren't comfortable in this area of the apartment. They may put their bags and hats on the table (and Lisa may rummage around there doing "spy work" to learn more about Jeffries), but they don't really linger there. Stella gravitates towards the kitchen and Lisa towards the window and the feminine side of the room. But Doyle's comfortable in both sides. As they talk about the murder, Doyle walks over to the window and gazes in to the dancer's apartment, fascinated. Like Lisa, he behaves in way that suggests that he finds Jeffries boring. He's sexually attracted to the dancer, but knows she's off-limits because he's married. Like the dancer, he has healthy emotional boundaries.

As he continues to talk to Jeffries, Doyle walks over to the fireplace with its decorated mantel; the door to the bedroom is visible behind him. Jeffries is begging Doyle to search Thorwald's apartment for clues about the missing woman while Doyle stands comfortably in the space that signifies Jeffries' yearning for his missing mother. "Not even a detective can walk into an apartment and search it," Doyle says, standing in this bright and illuminated space. Jeffries and Doyle shared the cockpit of a small plane for three years during the war. Jeffries may long for that closeness with Doyle again (the bedroom door), but the darkened kitchen we saw when the scene opened suggests that Doyle's not interested in any kind of domestic relationship with Jeffries. Doyle is more emotionally evolved than either Lisa or Jeff; he's aware of the legal ramifications of Jeffries' suspicions about Thorwald (he talks about the need for a search warrant); he can

be attracted to the dancer, but recognize that she's unavailable to him. Doyle is both Jeffries' and Thorwald's opposite. As he talks to Jeffries, he gazes at the painting over the fireplace. Even though he and Jeffries are friends, it doesn't look as if he's been in the apartment before. As he and Jeffries talk, we hear the woman's voice practicing scales again in the courtyard in the same way we hear it when Stella's in the apartment. Like Stella, Doyle is an impersonal nurturing presence in Jeffries' life.

That night, eating a sandwich by the window, Jeffries spies on Miss Lonelyhearts as she puts on her makeup and prepares to go out. She's wearing a well-made but garishly colored green dress. The songwriter's giving a party and the two "bathing beauties" from upstairs are there to help out. The dancer, hard-working as usual, is practicing with a male partner while her female dance teacher sits on the daybed directing them. The dancer has the ability to attract helpful maternal figures into her life. Downstairs, the sculptor contentedly cooks dinner for herself on her primitive stove. Miss Lonelyhearts (fortified with alcohol) timidly leaves the courtyard for the Italian restaurant visible across the street. She doesn't have the dancer or the sculptor's emotional autonomy. A woman's voice on the radio sings, "many dreams ago I dreamed many dreams waiting for my true love to appear." It could be both her and Lisa's theme song.

Lisa reiterates again her commonality with Miss Lonelyhearts when she enters the apartment also wearing green, but in her case, it's a chic suit.⁴⁵ Jeffries has been watching Thorwald paw through the contents of his wife's alligator handbag. Evidently, after he murdered her he took off her jewelry and dumped it into the handbag that hung from the

⁴⁵ "The greenish hue of the suit provides a color link with Miss Lonelyhearts, symbolic perhaps of a deeper affinity between the two women, recognized by Lisa but rejected by Jeff as nonsense."—Street, 97

bedpost. Earlier, he carefully replaced all his jewelry samples back into his case. But in this scene, he handles his wife's jewelry in a rough and offhand way. It's out of character with his job as a jewelry salesman, but it shows the extent of his anger at his wife. Anna Thorwald's bag, which she kept by her bedside (and which Thorwald treats rough and dismissively), symbolizes not only her missing body, but also the body of a lost or missing child.

Lisa announces she's going to stay all night and reveals a white nightgown packed into a tiny suitcase, which she leaves on his cluttered table. More than ever, she's staking a claim on his intimate space and paradoxically soliciting his rejection. Lisa's overstuffed dressing case evokes Thorwald's dismembering of his wife and stuffing her body parts into his sample case. Lisa's dressing case is a kind of Pandora's box of feminine sexuality:

The overnight case is an excellent example of the handbag as a sexual symbol. In many Hitchcock films a woman's handbag functions as a private space, often containing secrets or evidence of multiple identities.⁴⁶

What does the dressing case reveal about Lisa? It shows that she's shrewd and ingenious and has an eye for quality (and the means to pay for it). It also belies Jeffries claim that she couldn't do a job like his where, "you only get one suitcase." But it also conveys her ambivalence about entering into an adult sexual relationship with a man. Part of her is packed away and carefully concealed from Jeffries (and unconsciously even concealed from herself). And the small size of the bag is also a sign of her fear; it will be easy for her to pack up and leave if Jeffries actually responds to her advances.

⁴⁶ Street, 97

Doyle re-enters just after Lisa's gone into the kitchen to make some coffee (fortunately, Stella had left Jeffries a sandwich before she left). This is the first time we actually see Doyle enter the apartment. In the previous scene he was already "there." His entrance this time is as shadowy as the women's and like them, he enters without knocking. By returning to the apartment again and entering into Jeffries' world, he darkens himself. He's becoming unintentionally implicated in Jeff and Lisa's mutually destructive relationship. Jeffries looks apprehensive as Doyle hears Lisa humming the songwriter's tune in the kitchen. It's as if the three of them are in a romantic triangle. "Careful, Tom," Jeff says warningly. Is Jeffries being possessive about Lisa, or is he worried that Lisa's presence might jeopardize his longing for the closeness he and Doyle had during the war? Jeff introduces Lisa to Doyle and the three of them stand uncomfortably together by the window. In the same way Stella models an impersonal maternity, Doyle models an impersonal, healthy male sexuality. Doyle tells them that his investigation shows that Thorwald is "no more of a murderer than I am." After he leaves, the atmosphere in the apartment feels flat. Doyle provided the sexual tension that's missing when Jeffries and Lisa are alone together. Doyle's presence (and the absence he creates when he leaves) underscores Jeff and Lisa's emotional problems.

As Lisa and Jeffries sit together disappointed (disappointed that Thorwald is actually innocent—or that Doyle's gone?), Miss Lonelyhearts comes back to the apartment with a younger man. For the first time, she puts down the blinds in her apartment, but doesn't fully close them. Her lowering of the see-through blinds is reminiscent of the transparent blinds opening in the beginning of the film, with their promise, as Belton suggests, of imminent spectacle. Anna Thorwald was murdered

behind fully closed blinds. Miss Lonelyhearts is assaulted behind semi-closed blinds. But Miss Lonelyhearts, unlike Anna Thorwald, is able to physically defend herself. She fights off the man and throws him out of the apartment. Lisa walks over to the fireplace, leans against it, and puts her face down on the mantel. She's having a regressive moment. Does the sight of Miss Lonelyhearts being attacked bring back memories of her own past experiences "juggling a roomful of wolves"? Doyle gave her the opportunity to be around an emotionally mature heterosexual man. Will she move emotionally forward towards a relationship with a man like Doyle? Or stay with her comfort zone with the inadequate Jeffries?

Lisa opts for the familiar. She walks over to the window and closes the bamboo blinds saying, "Show's over for tonight." Being a "Girl Friday" took her mind off her obsession with the emotionally unavailable Jeffries, enlarged her character and brought Lieutenant Doyle into her life. Her act of closing the blinds on the rich and complex life of the courtyard is symbolic of the way she has shut herself off from her own authentic sense of self. To Belton, Lisa's act of closing the blinds is part of the Aristotelian structure of the film. It represents the midpoint of the narrative. For Lisa, it's her emotional nadir. And, ominously, her act of closing the semi-transparent blinds repeats the action Miss Lonelyhearts took with her blinds just before she was assaulted. Jeffries' apartment could be an equally unsafe a space for Lisa.

Back in her (purposely) failed act of seduction, Lisa walks towards the bedroom

with her dressing case,⁴⁷ asking, “Does Mr. Doyle think I stole this case?” She reinvokes the unspoken romantic triangle that exists between the three of them. But when Lisa does make her entrance in her white negligee, it’s styled in a way that’s surprisingly chaste. Lisa’s negligee resembles the one worn by the Anna Thorwald.⁴⁸ Lisa’s feminine, but modest, nightdress sends a mixed message about whether she’s truly interested in a sexual relationship with Jeffries. And, as if to emphasize the impossibility of their intimacy, there’s a disturbance in the courtyard where the childless wife is on her fire escape screaming, “what happened to my dog?” Miss Lonelyhearts has the presence of mind to walk into the courtyard and check the dog’s body shouting, “It’s been strangled. The neck is broken.” Miss Lonelyhearts isn’t as fragile as she appears. If she hadn’t fought off the man in her apartment, her neck might have been broken, too.

Life in the courtyard stops as everyone takes notice of the childless woman, who was previously a non-entity to them. The newlyweds look out the window, the partygoers stop their celebration, the dancer peeks out her window, the happily married couple walk out onto their balcony and the sculptor runs into the courtyard. The camera cuts to a long shot of the entire courtyard as the childless wife cries out “why did you do it?” She accuses the entire courtyard of being responsible for the dog’s death because people are

⁴⁷ “The purse connects Lisa to the victimized woman, as does the negligee, since the invalid Mrs. Thorwald was always seen wearing a nightgown; but it also, importantly, connects her to the criminal Lars Thorwald, and so is an overdetermined image like the images in Freudian dreamwork.”—Modleski, 74

⁴⁸ “It’s interesting to contemplate at this stage to what extent Lisa’s white nightgown represents her promise of a ‘preview of coming attractions.’ As her fourth outfit, the nightgown is actually less threatening than the black dress with which Lisa so desperately tried to seduce Jeff. As I remarked earlier, the nightgown provides a link between Lisa and Mrs. Thorwald: although it is full and feminine, it also renders women vulnerable to male control, while of course, from Jeff’s point of view, it creates a disturbing link between Lisa and Mrs. Thorwald, who is portrayed as a nagging wife.”—Street, 99

supposed to “care for each other.”⁴⁹ The couple retrieve their dog’s body from Miss Lonelyhearts and everyone goes back to their business—“it’s just a dog,” says one of the partygoers. They’ve already tuned out the woman’s plea for suburban style neighborliness. Jeffries notices that only Thorwald, alone in the darkness with only the lip tip of his cigarette visible, didn’t come to the window. By refusing to engage in the collective life of the courtyard, he’s advertised his guilt.

Retrieving the Lost Mother

*Why did the girl detective cross the road? She thought she saw her mother.*⁵⁰

It’s Friday evening; Stella, Lisa and Jeffries are standing together at the window watching Thorwald. This is the first time Stella and Lisa are onscreen together. Previously, when we saw Stella, it was during the day and in her professional capacity. But now she’s “off the clock,” and there because of her interest in Thorwald. But she also has an important maternal aspect. Observing and speculating about Anna Thorwald has taken Lisa outside of her fixation on Jeffries; it’s had the effect of summoning the need to recover the maternal presence that had been missing in her otherwise “perfect” life. Stella is a stand-in for that presence for both Lisa and Jeffries (as Anna stands for their maternal absence), but in different ways. Jeffries needs from a mother are more infantile—food and physical care. Lisa, on the other hand, needs maternal affirmation for her intelligence

⁴⁹ “When the woman on the fire escape denounces the courtyard’s missing ideal of intimate neighbors, she is confusing city life with small town or suburban life. It is precisely the lack of involvement in each other’s daily affairs that is one of the great attractions of cities, the right to pursue one’s life without the petty approbation of one’s neighbors. Gathering in a real crisis, on the other hand, marks a robust city district, as the courtyard does on two occasions; when the couple’s dog is found dead and again at the film’s end when Jeffries is in trouble.”—Sanders, 240

⁵⁰ Link, 260

and independence; she needs to be loved for herself, not just for her attractiveness and ability to be charming. But Stella can't undo the effects of their original maternal abandonment.

Lisa's wearing a chic version of a day dress. It's the least pretentious outfit she's worn in the film so far. As she involves herself in Anna Thorwald's murder, she's gradually coming "down to earth" and her dress reflects this.⁵¹ They watch Thorwald as he washes down the walls of his bathroom, presumably to get his wife's blood off the walls. In this scene, he takes on a paternal aspect that complements Stella's maternal one. It's as if Stella, Lisa and Jeffries are a family and Thorwald's the angry and murderous father. The shot of them together watching Thorwald feels primal. Lisa and Jeffries are watching a psychic replay of their past—maybe their "real" mothers are absent/disappeared (the same way Anna Thorwald is now) as the result of paternal (or patriarchal) rage.

Jeffries asks Lisa to get him a box of slides from the bookcase. So, he has been taking pictures after all. "I hope there's something here besides leg art," as he opens up the box. It sounds like he's been surreptitiously photographing the dancer. This restates the negative side of the divided femininity that's the motif of the film; the murdered, disembodied Anna Thorwald and the emotionally divided Lisa, locked into a conventional femininity that's gone awry and left her obsessed with an unavailable man. Also, Jeffries' covert photography of the dancer is hardly the way a reputable

⁵¹ "Lisa's dress does not get in the way when she climbs through the window of Thorwald's apartment and does not encourage an impression of her as a sexual being to anything like the same extent as her previous costumes."—Street,101

photojournalist should behave. He's becoming a less and less trustworthy figure as the film goes on.

The three of them carefully examine Jeffries' banal photograph of the flowerbed for clues to the murder, speculating that the altered position of some yellow zinnias suggests "something" is buried there. Stella reminds Lisa that Anna Thorwald's body wouldn't fit into a "plot of ground about one foot square." The sexuality of Lisa's small dressing case and the female body in Thorwald's sample case suggests a kind of femininity that either does or doesn't "fit in." Or, it can only fit in if it's cunning and ingenious, like the way Lisa packed her case.

Jeffries writes Thorwald a note saying, "What have you done with her?" In this scene, the camera is in an unusual position—it's up by the ceiling looking down on the three of them as he writes the note. This camera angle disempowers him, and signifies a turning point for both Lisa and Stella. From now on, they're the ones who have the insight to solve the murder. Jeffries, who up to this point used his masculine privilege to "direct" the investigation into the murder is now on his way to becoming a bystander. Lisa slides the note under Thorwald's door and sneaks off. Stella asks to borrow Jeffries' camera to look at something for herself. Jeffries is forced to yield to the superior knowledge and insights of the women.⁵² What Stella wants to check out is Miss Lonelyhearts, who's counting out sleeping pills.

Lisa reenters, saying, "Did you see the expression on his face when he got the

⁵² "Modleski is right to note that the film contains other point of view shots besides those motivated by Jeffries. What she fails to note however, is that there is a shift in the film from Jeff's point of view to point-of-view shots from both Lisa and Stella, a shift related directly to the film's increasing privileging of women's way of knowing."—Lemire, 80

note?” Instead, the camera cuts to the excited look on *Jeffries*’ face; it’s a reminder of the similarities between him and Thorwald. Jeffries is relieved that he doesn’t have to withdraw from Lisa emotionally now that she’s distracted by the murder. Miss Lonelyhearts lowers her blinds again as Stella and Lisa go out to dig in the flower garden for clues. Now that Lisa is becoming active in not only the murder investigation, but in the life of the courtyard, she’s less connected to Miss Lonelyhearts. Miss Lonelyhearts is not only a reflection of Lisa’s desolate inner life, she’s also represents a failed maternal image for Lisa. Lisa’s “real” mother failed her by being emotionally and/or physically absent. Miss Lonelyhearts stands for a mother who is physically present, but damaged.

Lisa and Stella find nothing digging in the garden, so Lisa impetuously climbs the fire escape into Thorwald’s apartment. She finds Anna Thorwald’s (uterine) bag, but it’s empty. Both a mother and child are missing. In the meantime, Miss Lonelyhearts sits down to take her sleeping pills, but stops when she hears the songwriter’s music. In the courtyard, creativity is the difference between life and death. Thorwald comes back and confronts Lisa. Jeffries and Stella are forced to look on helplessly as Thorwald attacks her. But not before Lisa surreptitiously waves her hand to show she’s found Anna Thorwald’s wedding ring. Modleski writes,

Just as Miss Lonelyhearts, pictured just below Lisa in a kind of “spit screen” effect, has gone looking for a little companionship and ended up nearly being raped, so Lisa’s ardent desire for marriage leads straight to a symbolic marriage with a wife-murderer. For so many women in Hitchcock—and this is the meaning of his continual reworking of the “Female Gothic”—”wedlock is deadlock” indeed.⁵³

But in this scene carries another meaning for Lisa. In the process of finding Anna

⁵³ Modleski, 78

Thorwald's missing wedding ring, she's also recovered the missing maternal presence that she needs in order to grow beyond her incomplete, fashionable facade. When Lisa is arrested for trespassing, Stella looks through her handbag for bail money. Jeffries has \$127 dollars, Stella has a \$20 dollar bill, but surprisingly, Lisa only has fifty cents in her bag.⁵⁴ If we think of the content of Lisa's handbag as an indication of her inner, or psychic resources, she comes up empty.

Thorwald slowly comes up the steps to Jeffries apartment as he sits alone in the dark. He's forced to face his demons. Jeffries attempts to blind him by shooting off flashbulbs from his camera. The camera has no film in it, it's like Lisa's empty handbag—Jeffries is psychically depleted. "The scene carries overtones of a confrontation with a *doppelganger*; or the eruption of a monstrous force from the underworld of the subconscious demanding recognition," writes Robin Wood:

As he bears down upon Jeffries, a great looming menacing shadow, Jeffries tries to fight him off with his only weapon of defense—his camera, repeatedly loaded with dazzling flashbulbs—and alternately we are placed in the position of Jeffries and the murderer, emphasizing his position as a kind of potential alter ego. The flashbulbs become symbolic: Jeffries' camera is his means of keeping life (which includes his knowledge of himself) at a distance, of remaining a spectator, of preserving his detachment.⁵⁵

As Thorwald tries to strangle him, Jeffries dangles out the window. For the first time, the camera shifts and we can see Jeffries' apartment from the outside. The camera appears to be in the vicinity of the songwriter's apartment. In this scene, the camera is

⁵⁴ "This seems surprising considering that in an earlier scene she had enough money to pay for an entire dinner from '21' plus the waiter's tip and cab fare! Having carried so much significance throughout the film, purses come up virtually empty. The difference seems to be who is looking in the purses. When men look into women's purses, they find things they can load with significance, in this case, sexuality and guilt. When women look into women's purses, they come up empty."—Lemire, 84

⁵⁵ Wood, 105

gravitating to a “privileged” spot in the courtyard; unlike Jeffries, the songwriter has the capacity to overcome his “lack of energy” and “listless” feelings as both a man and in his work. As in the scene with the dead dog, the courtyard inhabitants stop their activities and take notice. But the apartment beneath Jeffries is dark and obviously unoccupied. Jeffries’ This wall (Chion’s “fourth” side) of the courtyard is a space of absence.

Jeffries is both physically and cinematically overpowered. The police grab Thorwald from behind and Jeffries falls into the courtyard. Lisa cradles him in her arms, but Doyle is the one who gets to him first. He’s wearing a luminous white tuxedo jacket (he’s Jeffries’ knight in shining armor) and in the process of capturing Thorwald, he’s cleansed himself from any need to involve himself in Jeffries’ life. Lisa holds Jeff chastely and he finally is able to admit to a small amount of affection for her. But it’s uncertain if it’s enough to turn their relationship around.

The Haunted City

*Haunted places are the only ones people can live in.*⁵⁶

*The girl detective looked at her reflection in the mirror. This was a different girl. This was a girl who would chew gum.*⁵⁷

In the final scene, the heat wave is over. The camera is back inside the apartment. But we don’t see Jeffries immediately. Instead, the camera pans to the songwriter’s

⁵⁶ DeCerteau.108

⁵⁷ Link, 241

apartment where's he's playing his latest song for Miss Lonelyhearts on his stereo. During his party, we saw him looking sadly out the window amidst his guests. He was lonely, too. She, for the first time, is wearing a genuinely attractive, blue-flowered dress instead of the biliously colored clothing she's worn throughout the film. The songwriter wears trousers in a similar shade of blue. The large wine bottle is still on his windowsill; hopefully, he and Miss Lonelyhearts can both overcome their drinking problems.

The childless couple has a new little dog. In a surprise, it turns out that the dancer is married; her soldier husband has just come home on leave. He's a dumpy little man who immediately goes over to the icebox and looks for food. Since the dancer has hardly eaten throughout the film, it's unlikely that he'll find much food there. The dancer is loving towards him, but she'll leave him to fend for himself. Trouble is brewing in the newlywed's apartment. The husband's just quit his job and his wife is overheard saying if she'd known he'd do that, she'd never have married him. Maybe the husband has been seduced away from conventionality by the unconventionality of the courtyard. And the courtyard may be giving the wife a chance to question her choices in life as well.

The songwriter's latest song is called "Lisa." Was the film really about her, and not Jeffries, all along? When the camera finally comes to rest, it's on Jeffries asleep in his wheelchair with not one, but two casts on his legs. When we first saw him, he was psychically dead with an epitaph inscribed on his "plaster cocoon;" he's now doubly dead. "I thought I'd never wake but dream in your arms forever—Lisa," sings the male crooner on the songwriter's phonograph. But, chances are, he hasn't really grown emotionally from his encounter with Thorwald. This butterfly may never emerge.

But Lisa has changed; she's wearing blue jeans and an oversized shirt, along with

penny loafers and bobby sox. She's dressed in the teenage uniform of the fifties. She's allowing herself to regress to a younger and more rebellious self—a girl who no longer does “what's expected of her.” Maybe her fashionable clothing served as the “cocoon” that she needed to shed. But it's unlikely it will be enough to placate the emotionally troubled Jeffries:

Her bravery has proved that she has the guts, but in light of Jeff's own crisis of masculinity it is feasible that he would want her out of the way [. . .] Her active role in the frame *and* in the narrative is indeed “a preview of coming attractions,” although for Jeff the “attractions” in question—female assertiveness and independence—might not be so appealing. From this standpoint, Lisa is a double threat to Jeff in both her ultrafeminine costumes *and* in her guise as an action woman: both paralyze him with anxiety about his masculinity.⁵⁸

Lisa is in her usual cozy spot on the divan and like the bridegroom in the building next door, she may have quit her job. Unlike her uptown apartment, this is a space where she truly feels “at home.”⁵⁹ Stella said that “people with sense belong wherever they're put;” but what about people without sense? Perhaps, like Lisa, they need to be safe and connected to a specific space in order to come to their “senses.”

Lisa is reading a book about the Himalayas, but seeing that Jeffries is asleep, she puts aside the book and pulls out a copy of *Harper's Bazaar*. As Robin Wood has pointed out, Lisa can only be herself when Jeffries is asleep.⁶⁰ She's smart enough not to burn all her bridges and emotionally flexible enough to travel between her old and new worlds.

⁵⁸ Street, 102

⁵⁹ “There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can evoke or not. [. . .] Places are fragmentary and inward turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded, but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state, symbolization encysted in the pain or pleasure of the body. ‘I feel good here,’ the well-being under-expressed in the language it appears like a fleeting glimmer in a spatial practice.”—de Certeau, 109

⁶⁰ Wood, 104

“Whereas the opening of the film showed us Jeff in the same sleeping position but alone, accompanied only by the negative of a woman’s glamorous photograph, the film ends with Jeff next to a woman not only powerfully real but also just plain powerful,” writes Modleski.⁶¹

Stella isn’t there, because on a psychological level, she’s no longer needed. Lisa has internalized her “good” mother and as her adolescent clothing shows, she’s ready to grow into true adulthood.⁶² Significantly, Lisa’s left hand is visible and she’s not wearing an engagement ring. If she and Jeffries aren’t planning to get married, why is she still there? Possibly, she’ll stay behind in the apartment and make it her own when Jeffries leaves on his next expedition. Jeffries may have to find someplace else to stay in the city between assignments.

Downstairs, the sculptor is outside sprawled asleep on a lawn chair. She’s wearing an outfit similar to Lisa’s—rolled up jeans and an oversized shirt. She could represent Lisa’s future. The blue jeans stand for adolescence, but also a kind of easy-going bohemianism. Lisa, who always wished she could be creative, might start taking art classes when she’s not having “spy sessions” with Madame Dufre or lunch at “21.”

Across the courtyard, housepainters are busily repainting the interior of the Thorwald’s apartment. Thorwald washed his wife’s blood off the wall in an attempt to conceal her murder and obliterate the truth of their marriage. The repainting of the walls in preparation for new tenants demonstrates the irrevocability of her murder, the certainty

of Thorwald's punishment and possibility of new life in the courtyard.

The women in the film, Anna Thorwald, Miss Lonelyhearts, the dancer, the sculptor—and finally—Lisa, represent a divided and marginalized femininity. It's fitting that they should feel so "at home" in the equally marginalized urban space of the courtyard. As the murder of Anna Thorwald shows however, they can pay a violent price for living on the edges of cultural norms. But their marginalization also holds the possibility of creativity and growth; like the sculptor's unfinished and porous creation, they represent a "work in progress."

The screen slowly fades to black as Lisa reads her fashion magazine on the divan. Earlier in the film, the device of the fade reinforced the idea of Lisa and Jeff's emotional inertia. Here the fade-out carries an element of uncertainty. Lisa still has a lot of emotional work ahead of her and her neighbors have their own unfinished business, as the final pan of the courtyard showed. Then, abruptly, after the film fades to black, another blind is lowered obliterating the scene. It's not a bamboo blind, but an opaque black one. Was this dark blind present and hidden in the apartment throughout the film? We only find out about its existence as the film ends. The theatricality that was inverted in the film's opening with the semi-transparent bamboo blinds is brusquely reversed after the long closing fade. "The final curtain "closes off" the narrative, signaling to audiences that all the various enigmas have been resolved," writes Belton.⁶³ But to me, the final curtain emphasizes Lisa and the other characters ambiguous and unknowable fate. The last black curtain seems deathlike; it was invisibly lurking in the apartment all along and

⁶³ Belton, 13

emerges to have the final word.

Feminine Spaces

The memorable is that which can be dreamed about a place. In this place that is a palimpsest, subjectivity is already linked to the absence that structures it as existence and makes it “be there,” *Dasein*. But, as we have seen, this being-there only acts in spatial practices, that is, *in ways of moving into something different (manieres de passer a l'autre)*. It must ultimately be seen as the repetition, in diverse metaphors, of a decisive and originary experience, that of the child’s differentiation from the mother’s body.⁶⁴

In the beginning of the film, it seemed odd that a fashionable young woman with a glamorous job and an apartment on the Upper East Side would be attracted to a dour man like Jeffries and his desolate apartment in a lower middle class part of Greenwich Village. Although ostensibly Jeffries’ apartment and his courtyard neighbors would seem to represent something *different* for Lisa, in fact, her attraction to Jeffries and the courtyard lay in the fact that internally for Lisa, they represent the *same*. The feminine “side” of Jeffries’ apartment and its evocation of the absence of an anonymous mother reflects Lisa’s own maternal loss. Jeffries’ disinterest in her and her work echoes a similar paternal neglect in her life. But in her father’s case, Lisa’s paternal loss is connected less with absence than with an inappropriate and intrusive *presence* connected to his sexuality. Because of this, Lisa is not only unable to enter into a relationship with a man who appreciates her talent and intelligence, she is unable to negotiate the boundaries involved in an adult sexual relationship with a “real” man. No wonder she’s attracted to a space occupied by a man who’s “tired and run down,” and has that “listless feeling.”

⁶⁴ De Certeau, 109

Jeffries' injury as well as his emotional lassitude makes him a sexually safe and psychically familiar figure to her.

But, unlike Jeffries who is emotionally immobilized (as his cast signifies), Lisa *does* have the capacity to change. The neighbors on the "other" side of the courtyard uncannily act out Lisa's emotional losses. The dancer is, like Lisa, a creative and hard-working young woman. Like Lisa, she may have been poorly mothered; but she's been able to bring positive maternal figures into her life. She's also asserts herself when men make unwanted sexual advances towards her. The songwriter, like Lisa, is sophisticated and urbane. He works hard to overcome his creative problems with steady and persistent work. Both the dancer and the songwriter model appropriate behavior for Lisa's present life. Miss Lonelyhearts has a dual identity; she mirrors not only Lisa's current loneliness and inability to choose appropriate men, but she's also a personification of a failed maternal figure from Lisa's past, a woman who may have been physically present but too troubled to be able to care for her. Thorwald too, represents both a cautionary tale for Lisa about the dangers of choosing the "wrong" man as well as a murderous and philandering father figure. Jeffries' apartment complements both the childless couple and the Thorwald's apartments in their sense of absence. While Jeffries' apartment is a place of maternal loss, a similarly missing child haunts the apartments of the childless couple and the Thorwalds. The urgency of finding Anna Thorwald mirrors Lisa's inner urgency to retrieve her own disembodied and shattered maternal object and make it (and herself) whole, even if it means risking her life. Lisa "finds" herself when she recovers Anna Thorwald's missing wedding ring.

In fact, with the exception of Jeffries, almost all the residents of the courtyard

seemed to have moved into a “*different*” personal space by the film’s end. The childless couple gets a new dog. The songwriter overcomes his musical block and has writes a hit song. Miss Lonelyhearts reaches out to a seemingly available man and has sewn herself a more flattering wardrobe. The dancer is entering a new phase of her married life, as are the newlyweds. The courtyard offered Lisa an opportunity to change and she took it; Jeffries, in contrast, has actually regressed. As the songwriter’s career flourishes, Jeffries’ career languishes; the lingering results of his injuries may foreclose any more meals of fish heads and rice in exotic locales. His editor no doubt has other photographers on file that he can hire to take Jeffries’ place. And it’s unlikely that Lisa will continue to cater to his whims. As for the sculptor, she sleeps peacefully in a lawn chair as the film ends. She’s another figure with dual identities; she represents the possibility of Lisa’s future creative life as well as a constant maternal body embedded in the courtyard—always present—but always separate and self-sufficient.

Economically modest and physically contained as it is, the urban courtyard in *Rear Window* is a surprisingly expansive space; it represents what de Certeau would call the “habitable city;”

These three symbolic mechanisms organize the topoi of a discourse on/of the city (legend, memory and dream) in a way that eludes urbanistic systemicity. [. . .] (by emptying themselves of their classifying power, they acquire that of “permitting” something else); they recall or suggest phantoms (the dead who are supposed to have disappeared) that still move about concealed in gestures and bodies in motion; and, by naming them, that is, by imposing an injunction proceeding from the other (a story) and by altering functionalist identity by detaching themselves from it, they create in the space itself that erosion or nowhere that the law of the other carves out within it.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ De Certeau, 105

The courtyard is not only a gestational space, it's an urban space of remembrance and re-invention:

Apparently, a city that can be habitable and make its dwellers have attachment to it is a city that does not purge itself of its own ghosts and phantoms. It would be a city full of memories, a city in which different identity positions and their histories are accepted within a more pluralistic milieu.⁶⁶

And the film's ambiguous ending suggest the political and social possibilities contained in these pocketed receptacles of loss and re-imagined pasts:

. . . this kind of mourning is politically charged because it refuses to purge history of its heterogeneity and ambivalence and to arrive at any place of fixity and permanence.⁶⁷

Lisa lingers in what is now “her” apartment on West Ninth Street, downtown from what was an apparently inhospitable home on East Sixty-Third. Although it seems macabre for Lisa to sit so contentedly across from an apartment where a woman was recently murdered, the fact of the murder might make her homey spot on the divan all the more meaningful. Lisa has rescued and re-incorporated the dismembered Anna Thorwald, who lives on in her psyche as a reclaimed maternal object. If previously Lisa's missing mother was “what can be seen [but] no longer there,” now the inverse is true—what is now truly “there,” can no longer be seen or heard.⁶⁸ Lisa has found her mother-land. In search of the same, Lisa unexpectedly ends up “*moving into something different.*” What that difference will be is left up to the viewer's imagination. *Rear Window*'s inconclusive ending leaves us hanging (maybe that's the real significance of the blinds) about Lisa's future.

⁶⁶ Jen-yi Hsu, *Ghosts in the City: Mourning and Melancholia in Shu Tianxin's The Old Capital*, *Comparative Literature Review*, 41.4, (2004) p. 560

⁶⁷ Hsu, 562

⁶⁸ The disembodied woman's voice singing scales in the courtyard is now silent and interiorized by Lisa.

Epilogue

As for my younger self, the movie-goer who was irritated that Lisa didn't take advantage of her social connections and instead wasted her time in Jeffries' apartment, I can see now how some of my irritation was based on the fact that Lisa, by the end of the film, has the privilege of being able to go between her two worlds of Upper East Side glamour and the mundane life of the courtyard. And, with her social connections, she can still meet up with Jackson Pollack at the Cedar Bar. That wasn't a privilege available to me or to her downtown neighbors, or even to Jeffries (as he is well aware). Lisa's social mobility that made me aware of my lack of it. I had more in common with the dancer and the songwriter who were probably grateful to have rent-controlled apartments and a chance to do their creative work.

Lisa, in a sense, "made use" of the courtyard, Anna Thorwald's murder and the hapless Jeffries as a vehicle for resolving emotional issues in her life. And her new, alternative life in the courtyard is one that she can easily walk away from. The Upper East Side and dinner at "21" is just a cab drive away. Lisa solved the problem of her maternal lack, but for viewers like myself, she made visible our social and financial lack. So, when the film was finished and I walked out onto the overheated sidewalks of the Upper West Side, it's no wonder I felt annoyed with the film.

As I've aged over the years however, I now approach the film filled with nostalgia, not only for my youthful self suffering through New York city summers in a hot, noisy apartment on the Upper West Side, but also for the vision of the vanished

urban milieu that *Rear Window* portrays. The courtyard and the surrounding city have a utopian aspect when I watch it today. The New York represented in *Rear Window* is a city of predominantly working-class and lower middle class inhabitants who, thanks to rent control, never have to worry about being evicted and losing their homes. It is a city where citizens of modest means can live relatively free of small-town prejudices against the artistic and/or unmarried. Here, a photographer like Jeffries can have adequate health insurance (despite having a high-risk job) and nurses like Stella travel the city caring for patients in their homes and even staying to make them sandwiches.

But by today's standards, *Rear Window*'s New York is an eerily white city. Woolrich's original short story pivoted on the actions of the black "houseman," Sam and his homoerotic relationship with Jeffries. Woolrich's courtyard was a space of urbanity, sexuality, race and gender. Hitchcock's courtyard is a racially and sexually cleansed space that provided contemporary audiences the cinematic exoticism of an urban locale without calling their racial and cultural prejudices into question. But despite its limitations, the courtyard still has a liberality that appeals to me. Instead of identifying with Lisa, I now empathize with the busybody sculptress frugally living in her ground floor apartment with its simple furniture and coal-burning stove. She is one of the last people we see as the film ends, asleep in a lawn chair with a newspaper over her face. I admire the way she is comfortable with her age, continues to work at her art, feels free to interfere with and comment on her neighbors' lives and allows herself the luxury of an afternoon nap. I can think of no better and satisfying way to spend my life than that.

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