

Rear Window

The film 'Rear Window' by British director Alfred Hitchcock was released in 1954 during the director's golden years in Hollywood. The film stars James Stewart, Grace Kelly and Raymond Burr. 'Rear Window' tells the story of L.B 'Jeff' Jeffries, a wheelchair bound photojournalist confined to his apartment. In an attempt to relieve his boredom he begins watching the actions of his neighbours. This mindless activity turns gruesome when he becomes suspicious of his neighbour Thorwald and suspects he has killed his wife. With the help of his girlfriend Lisa and his nurse Stella, they resolve the case of Mrs Thorwald's murder. Using the theme of voyeurism and his directing talents, Hitchcock draws the audience in and proves there is a nosy busybody within all of us. The opening sequence of the film is very effective as through a combination of camera shots, camera movement, music and mise-en-scene, Hitchcock manages to skilfully establish a number of key pieces of information about the film.

In the opening sequence of Rear Window the audience is presented to a static shot of a three paned window covered with blinds. As the credits play, each blind is opened. This slow reveal is very much like the raising of the curtains at the beginning of a theatre performance. It captures the audience's attention and creates a desire to see what happens next. It also relates to the theme of voyeurism in the plot, displayed in Jeffries' observation of his neighbours out of these windows. The non-diegetic music playing is jazz, upbeat but dislocated. There is nothing sinister or disconcerting about the music which lulls the audience into a false sense of security. They may even believe they are about to see a romantic comedy rather than a psychological thriller. This may intrigue the audience as this is not what they would expect from the master of suspense.

As the film begins the camera angle changes with a slow zoom forward, mirroring the action of a person rising out of their seat to gain a better view outside the window. The camera then pans around the courtyard and up the buildings allowing the audience to get a clear idea of the setting of the film. What Jeffries sees out of his window is important, the windows facing the courtyard give him an insight and a view into his neighbours' lives. During the opening sequence, Hitchcock is deliberately ambiguous and the audience is led to believe that any one of the characters introduced during this sequence could be a major part of the storyline, although it becomes clear that Jeffries is the main character.

The scene is set more fully as the camera moves inside the apartment, panning across a close-up shot of Jeffries' head drenched in sweat and then focusing on an extreme close-up of a thermometer. This is important as it establishes that the weather is very hot which means that in order to provide some relief from the sweltering heat all of the windows in the block have to be left open. The open windows in the surrounding apartments allow Jeffries access to see what his neighbours are doing. We see that Jeffries is wheelchair bound, trapped in his apartment during the hot summer. This is important for the development of the narrative because his boredom during his recovery is what causes him to spy on his neighbours and this is what leads him to suspect foul play has occurred in the apartment across the courtyard. As the camera slowly pans around the interior of Jeffries' apartment the audience has time to see things clearly and form the backstory for themselves. There's no dialogue in the opening sequence yet we learn a lot from the mise-en-scene consisting of close-ups of objects in the apartment. These next few seconds give context to the narrative and establish the character of Jeffries – he has been injured whilst working as a

photographer. He takes photos of car races and models. The photographic negative of a beautiful woman in his apartment also appears on the cover of a magazine and this establishes that he is in a romantic relationship with the glamorous model. The story of their changing relationship is told throughout the film and resolves in the closing sequence.

The opening sequence is important for what follows in the film as it establishes that we, the audience, will see what Jeffries sees every day, as he would see it and from his point of view. The objects of importance have been drawn to our attention and we have a backstory to explain his current circumstances.