elucidation of some affective experiences, for it would be unwise to reduce all pleasure to a single determinant, such as a person's psychology. However, again, research in British cultural studies has tended to assume acquiescence as regressive and opposition as progressive. If the text is progressive, then opposition might be undesirable. The problem here is knowing when contradictory texts and contradictory subjects ultimately produce in a process the kind of experience that British cultural studies or Fiske seeks.

This last problem will also plague any context-activated theory of reception that also seeks to evaluate the event studied. In the next chapter, some of the possibilities for a context-activated approach will be discussed, but many of the questions that I have raised about the current three approaches to the interpretation of moving images will remain unresolved. Contemporary linguistic theory, cognitive psychology, and British cultural studies offer many ideas, but a simple meshing together of the three is theoretically unacceptable. Contemporary linguistics and British cultural studies assume a language-based reading process, but the cognitive psychology approach uses schemata that may not be represented through language. Contemporary linguistics and British cultural studies differ on how to explain the affect of pleasure: while contemporary linguistics turns to psychoanalytical theories, British cultural studies has preferred using sociological ones. Cognitive psychology indicates a willingness to allow psychoanalysis to explain affect and emotion, but its metaphor of the game also appears in one of the British cultural studies models of pleasure. Contemporary linguistic theory has recently concentrated its efforts on the issue of pleasure; British cultural studies and cognitive psychology thrive best in areas of cognitive reception.

If these are some of the dissonances among the three models, a similarity also exists. The practical bias of each has been toward a text-activated or reader-activated model. However, I have tried to suggest how each of the three might be modified into a context-activated, historical model. In trying to do this, I hope that I have not distorted the integrity of any of the approaches, each of which holds promise for furthering reception studies research.

CHAPTER FOUR

Toward a Historical Materialist Approach to Reception Studies

> If the reader also remembers that [James] Stewart
> [in *Rear Window*] is first the spectator, he can
> conclude that the hero "invents his own cinema."
> But is that not the very definition of a "voyeur,"
> the very core of morose gratification?
> (*Jean Douchet, 1960*)

JEAN DOUCHET's comments[1] in the *Cahiers du cinéma* at the start of the 1960s seem strangely current, for Douchet cautions against privileging the spectator's impression that he or she controls interpretations of films (or events). This is the argument made consistently through one strand of contemporary film and television philosophy: a historical materialist epistemology assumes an interaction among context, text, and individual in which a perceiver's socially and historically developed mental concepts and language may be only partially available to self-reflection and are most certainly heterogeneous.

Because of this, a historical materialist reception studies that is self-reflective has to acknowledge a number of limitations. First of all, the researcher who is doing historical materialist reception studies is as susceptible to the subjective contexts of interpretation as are those individuals being studied. This is a common tenet in contemporary scientific research, and I hope that the process of a dialogue or dialectics between theory and sense-data can somewhat control the classical hermeneutic circle. At any rate, I am not yet ready to give up the production of knowledge in the face of a nihilism that may serve the interests of the dominant class. However, the researcher might also be reminded to be somewhat humble before the material of study.

In addition, reception studies research cannot claim to say as much about an actual reading or viewing experience by empirical readers or spectators as it might like. Several factors intervene between the event and any possible sense data available for its study. As any cognitive psychologist would point out, verbalized manifestations by a subject are not equal

to the original experience or its memory. Reporting, whether through a crafted ethnographical interview or a published review, is always subject to the problem of retrieval, as well as to language, schemata, or representations of the subject that mediate perception, comprehension, and interpretation.[2] In fact, memory might be considered a constructed representation of the past, an image as liable to manipulation as the photograph that seems to authenticate the android Rachel's existence in *Blade Runner*.

Furthermore, the souvenirs of evidence for interpretations and experiences by readers are tainted with the power struggles, contradictions, and overdeterminations existing in the superstructure. Evidence exists or does not exist partially by the whims of chance but much, much more because of the strategies of dominant ideologies. Recall Walter Benjamin's remarks:

> Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried along in the procession. They are called cultural treasures, and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment. For without exception the cultural treasures he surveys have an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror.[3]

Likewise, the policies of museums, archives, and libraries, of publishing houses and media channels, participate in retaining, maintaining, preserving, and foregrounding material culture in less than neutral ways. Historians have been aware of this for decades, but marxist historians recognize the political implications of those institutional choices for attempts to study questions from a radical perspective.

One more problem exists besides those of the researcher's subjectivity, the difficulties of interpreting evidence, and the bias of what evidence remains available for study. While surveying current audiences is an important activity, the meaning of the results requires historicization. Dialectical materialism insists that what is important is not the state in which the object appears, but the rate, direction, and probable outcome of the changes that have taken, and are taking, place as a result of the conflict of forces. To know what it means for a working-class audience to believe itself addressed in particular ways by "Nationwide" television requires a comparative and historical study. If context is an important determinant for the interaction, then what is salient in that context cannot be understood from idealized speculation. History is necessary.

Consequently, to work toward a historical materialist approach to reception studies requires, minimally, tracing as far as possible dominant and marginalized historical interpretive strategies as mediated by language and context. These should be considered as indicators of the range of strategies

available in particular social formations. The historical transformation of that range also requires analysis. Furthermore, a historical materialist approach means tracking as far as possible the historically constructed "imaginary selves," the subject positions taken up by individual readers and spectators. Finally, it means, without a doubt, acknowledging that the researcher is imbricated within the analytical results. As I suggested in chapter 1, the reception studies I seek would be historical, would recognize the dialectics of evidence and theory, and would take up a critical distance on the *relations* between spectators and texts. It would not interpret texts but would attempt a historical *explanation* of the event of interpreting a text.

This call for research remains abstract. To make it concrete, in this chapter I want to compare how a historical materialist reception studies would assess a case instance in contrast to the three contemporary approaches described in chapter 3. Following that, I will briefly make some general observations about what reception studies would do with a number of standing questions in the field of film and television studies. But what a historical materialist approach to reception might look like is also suggested in the six case studies that follow this chapter. It is there that I hope to indicate best its use-values to the philosophy, history, and criticism of moving images.

LOOKING THROUGH *REAR WINDOW*

The case instance I will use has been given to me by David Bordwell in his *Narration in the Fiction Film*.[4] To exemplify his cognitive psychology theory of film viewing, Bordwell analyzes *Rear Window*. However, his subtext is not too subtle; he wishes to contrast his commentary on the cognitive activities of viewing with the traditional psychoanalytical readings of the film offered by people such as Jean Douchet, as well as the film's initial reviewers in 1954, and such commentators as Alfred Hitchcock, Robin Wood, Alfred Appel, Jr., Laura Mulvey, Robert Stam and Roberta Pearson, and others.*[5] In brief, Bordwell rereads the film as a dissertation on cognition rather than "the positioning of the spectator within [the cinematic] apparatus" and a "critique of voyeurism."[6]

As Jonathan Culler points out, a deconstructionist might contend that a dispute over two interpretations is a reenactment of the conflict in the text which is being investigated.[7] In this case, the situation is quite twisted, since even the first reviewers thought the film had something of a reflexive turn. *Rear Window* was early on interpreted to be addressing questions about the epistemology of cinema. Consequently, the dispute I am about to examine might be partially attributed to features of textuality,

as well as to possible reading strategies of the mid-1950s that have developed as encrustations affecting the transformation of subsequent readings. Ironically, then, debates over interpretations of *Rear Window* have been over interpreting, something of a deconstructionist's paradise.

But I am anticipating what will be part of a historical materialist analysis of the film. Before I turn to that task, I want to review briefly some early analyses of the film. Then I will use a very recent contemporary linguistic interpretation of *Rear Window* to contrast with Bordwell's. Since no British cultural studies approach has been applied to the movie, I will have to speculate about how those scholars would handle the film. Finally, I will suggest what a historical materialist reception studies analysis would take, leave, and add to those three.

In the mid-1950s, psychoanalytical theory was a popularized discourse in the United States, available to explain human psychology, and had been so since the 1940s. So it is not surprising that John McCarten in the chic *New Yorker* writes of Jeff (James Stewart) that "our man, possibly because of the habit pattern induced by his calling [as a photographer], whiles away his immobile hours with a spot of voyeurism." Referring to a line of dialogue in the movie, McCarten also calls Jeff a "Peeping Tom."[8] Additional to the psychoanalytical motif in the first reviews is the reading strategy of authorship. All three period reviews under consideration here place the movie within Hitchcock's oeuvre, with Jesse Zunser calling the director a "grand master of the suspense melodrama."[9]

Several years later (1960), French writer Douchet, quoted in this chapter's epigraph, weaves a modern art discourse of textual reflexivity into the network: "It is [in *Rear Window*] that Hitchcock elaborates his very concept of cinema (that is to say of cinema in cinema), reveals his secrets, unveils his intentions." Furthermore, Jeff becomes a surrogate for the audience:

> James Stewart [*sic*], a newsphotographer, is before everything else a spectator. This is one of the reasons why he is seen bound to his wheelchair. Through him, Hitchcock intends to define the nature of the spectator and, especially, the nature of a Hitchcockian spectator. The latter is a "voyeur." He wants to experience (sexual) pleasure (*jouir*) through the spectacle. What he looks at on the screen (in other words, what Stewart watches in the building on the other side of the courtyard) is the very projection of himself. Only the latter is capable of interesting him. In one way or the other, it is himself that he comes to see. . . . From then on, his understanding is fixed on this idea which becomes an obsession. Reasoning and deduction are subordinated to subjectivity, to feelings of desire and fear. The more he desires or fears, the more his expectation will be rewarded and beyond all his hopes. . . . More than a therapy, cinema, here, is a truly magic art.[10]

When François Truffaut interviews Hitchcock in 1966, Hitchcock is also repeating interpretations using psychoanalytical, authorial, and modernist discourses. Jeff's "a real Peeping Tom"; "Sure, he's a snooper, but aren't we all?" The film "was a possibility of doing a purely cinematic film."[11]

Disagreeing in part with Douchet's analysis, Wood in 1969 adds narrative progress through the film as pertinent to his rereading: *Rear Window* is "the cleanest statement in Hitchcock of what I have called the therapeutic theme." Wood constructs his psychoanalytical version of the reception epistemology: "We tend to select from a film and stress, quite unconsciously, those aspects that are most relevant to us, to our own problems and our own attitude to life, and ignore or minimise the rest; and we tend to use such identification—again, usually unconsciously—as a means of working out our problems in fantasy form."*[12] Wood then offers the thesis that while the spectator identifies with Jeff, the director Hitchcock shows the spectator what Hitchcock wants the spectator to see, producing a confrontation for both Jeff and the spectator with "our unknown, unrecognized 'Under-nature'"[13]—hence, the therapy function.

By the early 1970s, these interpretations were being further elaborated but basically uncontested. In *Film Comment*, Appel expands the film-as-metafilm discourse by suggesting that "each window [in the buildings opposite Jeff's room] reveals (and conceals) a donnée for a feature-film of its own, from Honeymoon Farce to Murder Melodrama." The killer Thorwald asks, "What, indeed, *do* readers and viewers really want?"[14] Appel writes that the answer appears to be in the choice of windows. In 1975, taking a feminist point of view, Mulvey describes the activities of Lisa [Grace Kelly] as exhibitionist, with the consequence that Jeff is more attracted to her.

Later (1983), Wood responds, charging that while misogyny exists in Hitchcock's work, *Rear Window* and others of his films cannot be reduced to that. Furthermore, Hitchcock's movies may be about cinema, but only the idiosyncratic cinema of Hitchcock's own making. For instance, through their reflexivity and contradictions, they call into question "the male drives and fantasies that provide the films' initial impulse." In *Rear Window*, the spectator "inscribed in the film is by no means neutral: It is unambiguously male," but a male who is experiencing castration anxiety. This anxiety, Wood concludes, so troubles *Rear Window* that what the film "ultimately achieves is the calling into question of our culture's concept of 'potency' (masculinity), with the insupportable demands it makes on men and women alike."[15]

Wood's reading departs somewhat from earlier ones by reintroducing a social referentiality, something the critics in 1954 mention but that seems somewhat submerged until the feminist critique by Mulvey. That is, the first critics ask what the film is saying about society (i.e., its significance),

providing another discursive dimension to the interpretations. When the reflexivity motif enters, it seems to relocate interest from social questions to the individual: what the film is saying about a person's psychology in experiencing movies.

In the same year as the publication of Wood's 1983 "Fear of Spying" essay, Stam and Pearson's article appeared. Their essay's subtitle is "Reflexivity and the Critique of Voyeurism." Two epigraphs head their discussion: "'I choose this picture of all the films I have made, this to me is the most cinematic'—Alfred Hitchcock" and "'We've become a race of Peeping Toms'—Stella in *Rear Window*." Stam and Pearson take a straightforward contemporary linguistic approach, one that also repeats three of the dominant discourses threaded through the prior interpretations: psychoanalysis, authorship, and reflexivity. What they transform in their interpretation is what has already been altered in contextual theoretical discussions: the psychoanalytical and linguistic models of epistemology in use by the leading film philosophy. That is, their interpretation is the same as Douchet's, Wood's, Mulvey's, and so forth. The film's meaning and significance is as a reflexive text about cinematic epistemology. Their reading strategy is also the same. They seek an essence of the text. The difference is that Stam and Pearson employ the most recent version of psychoanalytical and linguistic film philosophy. *Rear Window* is reflexive about dominant cinema and Hitchcock's (the auteur's) own cinema, with its structures of scopophilia and identification. It is also "a multi-track inquiry concerning the cinematic apparatus, the positioning of the spectator within that apparatus, and the sexual, moral and even political implications of that positioning." Jeffries's function, both as director controlling the spectator's view and as "a relay for the spectator," is described through the authors' drawing comparisons between Jeffries and the immobile, "all-perceiving" film spectator of Jean-Louis Baudry's theses on the ideology and ego-gratification of dominant cinema. Stam and Pearson agree with some earlier writers that the film ultimately criticizes voyeurism through narrative structures, thematic motifs, and point-of-view techniques: Jeffries's "ordeal is also a cure, both social and sexual." They summarize:

> *Rear Window* provides an object lesson in the processes of spectatorship. "Tell me what you see and what you think it means," Lisa tells Jeffries, and her words evoke the constant process of vision and interpretation, inference and intellection, inherent in the "reading" of any fiction film. . . . Jeffries, Lisa, Stella and Doyle collaborate in producing the meaning of the spectacle before them, much as we collaborate in producing the signification of the film. . . .
>
> With its insistent inscription of scenarios of voyeurism, *Rear Window* poses the question that so preoccupies contemporary film theory and analysis: the question of the place of the desiring subject within the cinematic apparatus. This theory and analysis shifts interest from the question "What does the text mean?" to "What do we want from the text?" "What is it you want from me? . . . Tell me what you want!" Thorwald says to Jeffries, and his question, ostensibly addressed to the protagonist, might as well have been addressed to us. What indeed do we want from this film or from film in general?[17]

The answer for that question to Stam and Pearson is in affectivity: from seeing and identifying, "spectators want to experience certain 'subject effects.' They want to find themselves in a heightened state of pleasurable absorption and identification." Ultimately, however, the film "cures" the spectator through catharsis.[18]

What the spectator wants is quite different for Bordwell but also quite predictable: *Rear Window* is an exercise in inferencing. "The pattern is set: this film will encourage us to construct a story on the basis of visual information (objects, behavior) and then confirm or disconfirm that construction through verbal comment." "[Lisa's] remark concisely reiterates the film's strategy of supplying sensory information ([tell me] 'everything you saw') and then forcing Jeff (and us) to interpret it ('and what you think it means')."[19]

Since Bordwell has excluded affective experiences as being explained by his theory, he concentrates on cognitive work, particularly for this film, which he considers "at once typical in the job it hands the spectator and extraordinary in the explicitness with which tasks are spelled out." Bordwell makes the point that these cognitive duties occur for both a suspense and a romance plot. Besides the mission of making the best inferences—ones better than Jeffries's ("Note that Jeff's inferential process does not completely mirror our own"—spectators ought to discover that Jeffries tends to think in rigid binaries. "For example, the spectator must discover the absolute opposition which Jeff creates . . . is a false one; one can find adventure in the most mundane urban milieu"; "Jeff tends to utilize schemata that are strictly homogeneous: Thorwald killed/did not kill his wife; Lisa and Jeff are exactly alike/diametrically opposite."[20] Where Stam and Pearson concentrate on spectators looking and feeling, Bordwell emphasizes them looking and learning.

How would a British cultural studies researcher approach *Rear Window*? In the first phase of the scholarship, an ideological analysis would be done, particularly as to how the film's representations set up preferred readings useful to the dominant class since the film was a product of the Hollywood film industry.*[21] In the case of *Rear Window*, aspects of the film scarcely mentioned in other analyses come forward. For instance, while Lisa's and Jeff's personalities (passive versus active) are described in

the dialogue as the source of their conflict, their occupations and living habits are also at odds, making their class allocation different. In fact, the question of class distinctions seems symptomatically repressed, with the film attributing the couple's difficulties to personalities instead. Such an unstated problem surfaces through contradictions and overdeterminations.

Although Lisa works, she does not seem to need her job to support her life-style; she seems already to belong to the upper class. Instead, the work fills her days before she marries. It is truly for her just an occupation. Fortunately for viewers who enjoy spectacle, Lisa's job requires that she dress in high fashion, and Grace Kelly's appearance in the role helps make the watching pleasurable. Thus, the classy woman is both upper-class and an exhibition of feminine high class, doubly desirable in a capitalist and patriarchial social formation.

Lisa might also be defined as part of the "jet set," a common mid-1950s description of the leisured privileged class. That semantical terminology permits her to connect with Jeff, a world traveler and adventurer. Jeff obviously has lived dangerously but successfully, which gives him a strong masculine presence even if that is temporarily under seige through his recent accident and Lisa's marriage assault. Jeff, however, is not upper-class; he is a free-lance action photographer, a job apparently his livelihood. That type of income accounts for Jeff's small New York apartment, certainly not the home of one of Lisa's regular friends. Yet Jeff's rooms might also be considered as merely a stopping place between assignments to foreign and exotic climes. Thus, what Jeff lacks in value in terms of actual financial status is returned in assets of masculinity.

Lisa makes quite clear that Jeff could join her set by becoming a successful fashion photographer, an occupation Jeff considers boring (and castrating). On the one hand, then, their possible alliance represents something of a move upward for Jeff (into high society), which would not compromise Lisa's inherited position or her feminine value. Yet, contradictorily, Jeff's asset validating his entry might be lost. On the other hand, if Lisa were to follow Jeff, then she would have to give up the important pleasures of fine clothing and dinners at Sardi's. The conclusion of the film implies a subtle if uncertain victory by Lisa—perhaps because the terms of the romance have no simple resolution. Jeff is doubly immobile (both legs are broken now); Lisa covertly reads her fashion magazines behind the covers of adventure journals. Somehow or other, though, Jeff's loss seems also his gain. Class wins out. But so does at least one traditional gender role.

I have concentrated on the representations of the class theme as it relates to gender issues because British cultural studies has emphasized segmenting audiences by class and gender. The second phase of the research

would be to solicit audience reactions to *Rear Window* and analyze those findings, distributing them into hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional readings. From the point of view of British cultural studies, ethnographic or other forms of audience-interview research are a valuable source of evidence.

This obviously cannot be done for an older text's period audience, and the problem affects a historical materialist researcher as well. Two solutions exist: one is to attempt to constitute the era's reactions by historical research. The other is to use current audiences. Both solutions have associated problems. For the former, evidence of nondominant readings is likely difficult to find. Thus historians will have extensive work to do, ferreting out information from nonstandard historical sources (such as diaries, letters, small mimeographed newsletters, oral histories, etc.). Case studies may actually develop out of accidental findings of this sort. Likewise, though, many questions may be impossible to answer, even with considerable extrapolation from available information. I fear that will too often be the case.

For the latter (using current audiences), the historical disjunction makes conclusions about a period's audience difficult. How much have social formations changed in the past thirty-five years? How much are extraneous factors (such as changes in codes of masculinity and femininity or life-styles) distorting reactions? (An attempt to deal with this methodological problem informs the case study in chapter 8 on gays' readings of films in this same period.) Of course, what you could find out is what a current audience does with the text, which might have some value in terms of illuminating the present. Comparisons of reactions over a number of years (e.g., doing a series of studies five years apart) might also prove useful. However, since this is an example broadly comparing possible reception studies methods, I will just offer a hypothetical finding, cautioning that my own research and the studies already done by British cultural studies writers indicate that audiences are much more complicated and contradictory than expected.

A preferred reading of *Rear Window* would be one in which the audience members became involved in the suspense plot, enjoyed the moments of spectacle, identified with Jeff and Lisa, and found the ending satisfying. Negotiated and oppositional readings might have come from several audience categories. Depending on the success of dominant ideologies to forge a hegemonic point of view, lower or working class members, males and females, and other categories might have had degrees of interpellation into the class and gender subject positions offered.

Presumably the suspense plot could intrigue any class, but since a great deal of textual time is given over to the romance plot and its attendant spectacle, those more resistant to an American-dream ideology might have

either negotiated or resisted deep identification with Lisa and Jeff. Lisa and Jeff have at least two proairetic figurations: protagonists in the murder investigation and lovers in a courtship. Consequently, negotiating audiences probably endured the flirtation scenes, which emphasize clothes, foods, and activities inaccessible to them, while waiting for the mystery plot to pick back up. Those scenes were probably culturally explained as due to genre conventions: movies always have those kinds of scenes, and the resolution in favor of the dominant class most likely was read as the standard happy ending of a Hollywood film. (Similar negotiations occurred in Ien Ang's study, where audiences used the discourse of U.S. cultural imperialism to justify other people's attraction to "Dallas.")

Findings in the "Nationwide" study suggest that resistance can often appear through disavowal of address. "They were not talking to me"; "It does not have anything to do with me." The romance segments might have so disturbed an audience's pleasure that they overwhelmed any enjoyment of the suspense scenes. Thus, some lower- and working-class viewers might just have sat through the film, if they even went. In a British cultural studies analysis, a fully oppositional reading would look very much like the ideological analysis I provided. Such a reading, while improbable in most situations, might have been possible among marxists who by the mid-1950s commonly did similar ideological studies (although without the semiological and structuralist theories added in the next decades).

A large presumption headed my analysis of audiences categorized by class: that was, that any class might find the suspense plot interesting. That assumption I am simply going to let stand. However, evidence does exist that genders differ in their interest in genres, particularly the two represented in *Rear Window*. In fact, a bit of period research can supply a basis for this part of my speculation. As of about 1950, audience analysis conducted through traditional communications research indicated that women liked love stories and romances but disliked mystery and horror pictures. Men were moderately neutral about mystery and horror pictures but disliked love stories and romances.*[22] Hollywood filmmakers at this point often tried to please mass audiences, and mixing elements of various genres to appeal to possible subgroups within the audience was a common production strategy.

From the perspective of gender, then, I would speculate that in preferred readings, men likely attended to the mystery and suspense portions of the movie, while women were attracted to the romance scenes. In this case, gender identification with individuals of the same sex as the audience member should have occurred, and pleasure would result from watching Lisa (in the case of males) or being watched (in the case of females).*[23] The resolution might have presented some difficulties, even for a preferred reading, but as before, the cultural code of conventions in Hollywood films can explain the heterosexual couple.

Negotiated and oppositional readings by each gender might have existed. In the case of women, dealing with the (probable) disparity between the body of Grace Kelly and the spectator's own physique might have produced some dissonance with identification processes. Women's liberation was yet to emerge as a discursive formation that might help produce oppositional readings (see Elizabeth Ellsworth's thesis in chapter 3) which, like those for class, would critique the textual operations.

Negotiated readings from men might also revolve around the degree to which identification with Jeff was possible or difficulties with the resolution, which seems to favor the woman's point of view. That resolution, of course, participates in the 1950s discursive formation which implied that a man chased a woman until she caught him. In this case, Lisa is particularly aggressive in the pursuit, but then she is also represented as a most desirable woman. Additionally, the romance plot was likely tolerated as conventional Hollywood fare, perhaps made more bearable for men with its spectacle accoutrements.

My speculative presentation of how a British cultural studies researcher might approach *Rear Window* has been necessarily as brief and schematic as the review of the contemporary linguistic and cognitive psychology approaches. I think, however, that an outline of what such research would do with the movie is there.

What would a historical materialist reception study of *Rear Window* look like in comparison? What it would *not* do is combine the three previous approaches. Rather, it would begin nearly at ground zero. As Douchet reminds his readers, if Jeff is a voyeur who believes he makes his own cinema, such a belief is likewise a "morose gratification." Consequently, reception studies would start by considering the contextual reading strategies available to a spectator in the mid-1950s. What were possible and pertinent ways to interpret *Rear Window*? The answer to that question is unknown because histories of reading strategies have not yet been attempted. In fact such case studies as this one are providing the beginnings of data for hypothesizing. In this instance, I want to emphasize the tentative nature of the findings. Three problems exist in this part of the case study. For one thing, I have not attempted to cover fully the range of review responses for *Rear Window*, so my sample is very limited. Additionally, I have not tried to find marginal readings in nondominant media sources. The reading public studied is film reviewers and (later) academic scholars. Finally, the review and scholarly article are genres in themselves; thus, their conventions mediate the results. However, as a starting point I will use three release reviews to initiate the analysis because even they are quite revealing.

As I have partially indicated above, the period reviewers that I surveyed appealed to four major intertextual discourses: psychoanalysis, authorship, generic conventions of Hollywood filmmaking, and current social issues.

These four discourses explain much for the reviewers. Psychoanalysis (or psychology) accounts for character motivation and narrative progression. Referencing of this discourse was likely stimulated by specific lines in the film such as Stella's remark that Jeffries was becoming a "Peeping Tom," but psychoanalysis was also a popular theory of subjectivity that had been widely available to the reading formation for at least a decade.

Authorship illuminates the origin of something of a "stunt" quality to the movie. The reviewers assume that a director makes a difference in what happens in the film, and they perceive Hitchcock as something of an innovator. Two of the three reviewers reference prior movies directed by Hitchcock, such as *Rope*, to prove their point. Apparently, Hitchcock helped them do this. In a study of Hitchcock's reputation, Robert E. Kapsis points out that from the beginning of Hitchcock's career he used "biographical legend and publicity to promote his films."[24] Thus, the reviewers' activities have significant contextual sources motivating their remarks. But they also think the story source is another factor to consider. Bosley Crowther mentions the script writer John Michael Hayes, and Zunser and McCarten reference Cornell Woolrich's original short story. Thus, authorship is dispersed among several individuals, and the hegemonic theory of individuals as sources of texts is not violated.

While the film is considered somewhat different from Hollywood fare (particularly because of the single set location), reviewers also place it in standard Hollywood generic categories. That *Rear Window* is working in a traditional genre is remarked upon as part of the explanation of the film's pleasure. However, which genre it is in depends on the reviewer. Crowther writes that it is melodrama—probably a surprise by today's notions of that genre; Zunser calls it a suspense melodrama as well as a thriller, a pleasant romance, and a bright comedy; McCarten describes it as belonging to the detective genre.

For the fourth discursive intertext, the reviewers consider the film as a possible transporter of social messages. For instance, Crowther remarks, "Mr. Hitchcock's film is not 'significant.' What it has to say about people and human nature is superficial and glib. But it does expose many facets of the loneliness of city life and it tacitly demonstrates the impulse of morbid curiosity."[25] Zunser says it makes an "amusing comment on our neighbors in New York's great backyard."[26] Thus, the early reviewers saw the film's significance as relating to human nature in urban centers, a dominant social issue in the 1950s.

The four intertextual discursive strands are joined by the reviewer's conventional responsibility: evaluation. Two of the reviewers (Crowther and Zunser) praise the film for succeeding in building up suspense and excitement. They seem to have become involved in the plot and had affective responses of which they approved. Furthermore, they evaluate the film on the basis of what they thought the film wanted to achieve. Only McCarten dissents. While he assumes the same intent for the film (producing concurrence among the three on what a preferred reading would be), he negotiates his judgment in a symptomatic way. Recall that McCarten is publishing in the *New Yorker*. He thinks Woolrich is a "popular drugstore author, and Hollywood's affinity for him is easily understandable." Thus, Hitchcock's association with such lowbrow tastes is disappointing to him since he seems to think Hitchcock has some pretensions to creating "art." Contradictorily, however, McCarten also thinks Hitchcock is not Hollywood enough. The director has a "footless ambition to make a movie that stands absolutely still. . . . One of these days he's going to bust out the way he used to, and then we'll have some satisfactory films." What makes the film tolerable for McCarten is Lisa/Kelly. He concludes his review: "If it came to eating fish heads and rice, I can't imagine anyone more likely to make them palatable than Miss Kelly. Indeed, her very presence in this film brings on an uncriticial tolerance of the thing."[27] (If psychoanalytical theories about affectivity and voyeurism are correct, then McCarten's reaction demonstrates them clearly.)

So far, what is different between my historical materialist approach and the other three? For one thing, instead of looking to the film *Rear Window* for hypothetical evidence of what spectators are doing, I have looked at responses—albeit mediated ones. The distinction is a broadening and historicizing of the description of interpretive activities. While the period reviewers definitely looked and felt and looked and learned, what was projected as felt and learned seems somewhat at odds with the hypotheses forwarded by contemporary linguistic and cognitive psychology approaches, both of which assume ideal spectators in their text-activated models. For one thing, none of the reviewers seems to have identified enough with Jeff to have experienced any catharsis eliminating undesirable voyeurism or learned any lessons about inferring. All the reviewers treat the film largely as fiction and messages about other people, not themselves. None of them—at least in their reviews—ask the question, am I, too, a Peeping Tom? (Even McCarten, who obviously is one.) None of them—at least in the reviews—ask, was Jeffries a poor thinker? (In fact, McCarten thinks Jeffries's "intuition" wins out over Doyle's professionalism.*[28] McCarten seems to learn that emotional guessing is better than rational predicting.) While all the reviewers indicate some affective experiences, those emotions are all couched within standard generic terms; that is, the affects are explained through references to cultural codes and schemata such as genres (thrillers and melodrama) and modes (fiction and Hollywood films), and not to an essential meaning of the film as being about cinematic epistemology.

Consequently, and additionally, I have not considered universal linguistic frameworks, schemata, or ideological interpretations to hypothesize about the production of meaning. Rather I have suggested the existence of

contextual discourses that might explain the evidence of actual comprehension. For instance, the four specific discourses used by the reviewers were within normative frames of reference for the mid-1950s, and feminism (as an oppositional discursive reading strategy) was not. The history of the deployment of these four discourses—psychoanalysis, authorship, Hollywood generic conventions, and social significances embedded as textual messages—is uneven and for the most part unknown. As I mentioned, psychoanalysis was common parlance in the United States from the mid-1940s, but the historical function of "authorship" discourses goes back at least several centuries. This disjunction among the temporal sources of these discourses in relation to the current 1950s social formation is explainable in the model of historical change marxism provides, for features of textuality in the superstructure have an uneven relation with the base. What is important, then, is to research these discourses and their relation to specific historical formations and the range of reading strategies these formations employ.

Furthermore, in my historical materialist analysis, no assumptions about preference on the basis of class or gender were made. In the case of gender, predictable results did develop: the male reviewers apparently liked watching the movie, in one case only because of Lisa/Grace Kelly. However, hypotheses about class consciousness or ideological sensitivities are not borne out. McCarten writes for the social sphere represented by Lisa. Thus, as a representative for the dominant class, he should have praised the film since ideologically it reconfirms that class. However, McCarten's response was the most negative. His distaste for the movie cannot be attributed to gender (i.e., masculine anxiety) since he finds Lisa the movie's compensating value (unless, of course, this is some type of displacement).

Instead, a possible explanation for his response comes from another aspect of his class configuration. In the mid-1950s, a pervasive discourse was the marking out of tastes in relation to class categories: high-, middle-, and lowbrow. In a particularly influential essay, *Life* magazine outlined this "new U.S. social structure [in which] the high-brows have the whip hand."[29] For entertainment, for instance, a highbrow enjoyed ballet, an upper middlebrow liked the theater, the lower middlebrow took in musical and extravaganza films, while the lowbrow went to western movies. Thus, McCarten's alliance with at least the upper middlebrow (displayed in his snide references to Woolrich and Hollywood) likely derives from contemporary discursive notions of *levels* of aesthetic preferences. His judgment against this "claptrap," however, is then contradicted by his desire for Hitchcock's earlier fast pacing (a narrational technique certainly associated with conventional Hollywood film practices).*[30]

Thus, the failure of McCarten to fit into a British cultural studies prediction highlights the importance of determining address, not as a theoretical feature to be derived from ideological analysis of the text and precharacterization of the subject, but as a contextually and historically variable factor. From the point of view of McCarten, his "imaginary self" as representative of highbrow tastes and his gender conflicted with any textual ideological address to a dominant class for which he may have worked.

Other observations about these three reviews could be made, but I hope the general differences are starting to stand out. As I suggested at the opening of the chapter, a historical materialist approach to reception studies tries to trace possible dominant and marginal interpretive strategies available historically. Both what is and what is not used are important. Additionally, the procedure investigates which subject positions readers consider the text to be offering them and then asks who does and does not take up those positions and at what points in the reading experience.

In the ideal situation, a historical materialist reception studies does not stop, however, at the time of the initial reception of the movie. The reason for this is that such a synchronic vision of the experience is only part of what might be learned. In the best of cases, the picture is widened in every direction—to other films of the same year, across cultures, races, nations. But also into a diachronic analysis. Consequently, the continued rereadings of *Rear Window* by academics (described above) are also part of a possible study. In this case, they continue as encrustations. Furthermore, their interpretations suggest some quite interesting historical shifts in at least the academic community's procedure for interpreting films. Here deconstruction enters, for with the intervention of modernist discourses about art as reflexive, the movie *Rear Window* becomes a prototypical playground for debating theories about the epistemology of cinema. In fact, the reading strategies for interpreting *Rear Window* duplicate the history of approaches to spectators. Thus, what a historical materialist approach could do is to go back and reread each of the interpretations from Douchet on as informed by their contemporary discursive formations, as well as linking those interpretive activities to specific historical situations (e.g., modernism's association with reflexivity, and the value that representation may have had for early 1960s French and American social and economic formations). I am not going to pursue this line of research, but I do want to make four summarizing points about the subsequent interpretations and their reading strategies.

The original reviewers of *Rear Window* assumed that the film's significance might relate to pertinent social issues, specifically human behavior in an alienating urban environment. Although not obliged to provide such an interpretation, the reviewers assumed that an obvious reading strategy was to figure out what the film said about current society. Once Douchet introduces the reflexivity discourse, the reading strategy of finding a film's significance continues, but the arena of that significance shifts to aesthetic and personal epistemological themes. For instance, Douchet's thesis of re-

flexivity allocates to Jeff not only the function of narrative protagonist but also that of spectatorial "surrogate." Whether the formalism of reflexivity tends toward focusing on the individual rather than the social requires research before the case of *Rear Window* is considered normal.

This weighting of location of significance alters once more. By the mid-1970s, Mulvey's and Wood's essays reassert social implications and effectivities in the epistemological issues: feminism and gender stereotyping studies help transform the film analyses. This reintroduction of the social can be easily explained, since post-1969 ideological analysis linked to linguistic and psychoanalytical theories reemphasized social and historical causes for those (temporarily) personal themes.

Second, as I noted above, deconstruction would argue that the debates over interpretation reenact the conflict in the film. Since historical materialism assumes a text does exist, something must be activating the debates over epistemology and effectivity. However, that the first reviewers do not raise such queries makes me leery of assuming textual materials as the primary source of the dialogues. Additionally, the contradictions within and among the individual interpretations point to the heterogeneity of the interpreting subject. Deconstruction is useful in drawing out ideological assumptions, but in the case of *Rear Window* textual features alone cannot explain the responses. They might be necessary determinants, but this time they are not sufficient.

Third, I have said little here about the affective consequences of the viewing experience. Although cognitive psychology brackets off those questions, contemporary linguistic theory and British cultural studies address them in various ways. It seems to me that historical materialism ought not to ignore the interpenetration of cognition and affect. My readings suggest to me the power of psychoanalytical theories of individuals as constituted socially and historically to explain many features of affectivity. Such a combination is viable for my model, but I do wish to leave this issue more up in the air than others. In the case of *Rear Window*, several factors seemed to influence McCarten's affective response. To explain that mixed review requires some psychoanalytical tenets (features of spectacle, objectification and exhibition of the female, trajectories of anxiety, perhaps sadomasochism). But also involved were current discursive evaluations of taste. Affect derives from unconscious dynamics, I think, but also from intertextual discursive structures.

Fourth, subject address changes depending upon the individual's need to respond (reviewer, academic scholar) and the theory of film. Movies are entertainment, auteur expression, psychological producer of catharsis, patriarchial repression, ideological representation, cognitive playground, social manifestation, or site of the production of meaning. It is the last category that I have taken up as the research imbricated in the interweaving of

epistemological theories. Terry Eagleton writes that reception theory is "a social and historical theory of meaning."[31] My interpretation and reading strategy of the other interpretations are as informed contextually and historically as they were. In my case it has been by the theories available to me in the 1980s.

LOOKING BEYOND

Rewriting the history and philosophy of moving images from the point of view of reception studies will take many years, but the transformation produced by asking the question "What is the spectator's relation to the cinematic text?" and trying to answer it through a context-activated, historical materialist approach will result in important reactivations of other questions. For I believe that every aspect of the domain of cinematic and televisual studies could be affected. To give just a brief indication of what might happen, I want to look at three general problems: critical issues as reading strategies, difference as historically constructed and varied, and evaluation as political.

When considered from the perspective of reception studies, a number of traditional approaches to film and television studies take on new life. Specifically, notions such as auteurism, national cinemas, genres, modes, styles, and fiction versus nonfiction become significant historical *reading strategies*. That is, all of those notions, as methods by which to understand a film, have been significant interpretative strategies. Thus, instead of debating whether or not auteurism is a theory of the production of textuality, reception studies considers how auteurism as a theory has informed the reading of movies. Hypothesizing personalities as the origin of the text is a common procedure for giving a source of narration to a text, and—as others, such as Michel Foucault, have suggested—that practice seems to have ideological import for humanist social formations.

Allocating films to other categories besides origin is similarly historical and ideological. Constructing an imaginary community called the nation and then defining a film by its national production circumstances offers viewers as much of a strategy for comprehending the movie as the reading strategy of genre. A reception studies researcher might, for example, investigate how the attribution of nationality or genre determines what salient items are featured in an interpretation. A researcher might consider what happens to schemata or structurations of codes if the readers consider the texts as failing to conform to constructed categorizations. Genres themselves might be redefined, not on the basis of textual features, but by reader activities, with contextual factors producing a historical dimension to generic definition. (If *Rear Window* was a melodrama in the mid-1950s,

what was *Written on the Wind*? What were readers observing and not observing in each to categorize them together?)*[32]

Modes such as Hollywood cinema or art cinema or avant-garde, or styles such as "realism" or "reflexive" might be explained historically on the basis of interpretative strategies and the production of meaning rather than ideally by supposed inherent textual features. What is fictional or nonfictional may reside in whether or not spectators use referential codes to presume correspondence between the moving images and the real world. Or a reception studies researcher might produce a historical materialist history of the reception of documentaries. None of these critical issues is fully resolved by reception studies, for, as I have stressed, this is only one type of question useful to ask about moving images. But reception studies does transform those critical issues from essentializing questions about categories to historical reading strategies.

If reception studies changes the way critical issues might be tackled, it emphasizes that difference is historically constructed. The subject is constituted within a social formation, and the range of possible subject positions changes. The taking up of those historical subject positions is an area of research as well, for interpreting a film requires perceiving from some perspective, even if that perspective changes through the film. Thus, what positions are possible and how individuals function in those perspectives matter. Currently, the types of subject positions available to a reader include at least occupation, class, sex, gender, sexual preference, nationality, ethnicity, race, life-style, and political allegiances (radical, feminist, and so forth). Some of these positions are more pertinent than others, however. Thus, reception studies research might ponder a series of questions: Which positions count more than others? When? Why? What difference does subject category make? What happens to an interpretation if dissonance among subject positions occurs? For example, as a student of Hollywood cinema, I find *Raiders of the Lost Ark* a masterpiece of filmmaking, but as a feminist I am appalled.

This last question, like all the others, concerns politics. Deriving from ideological state apparatuses, discourses and meanings are not neutral but the sites of class struggles. Interpretations, reading strategies, and evaluations, thus, are too. One use-value of reception studies is as a tool for understanding meaning as produced historically and socially by individuals. Connected to that are procedures for evaluation. Considering how canons are formed or reformed, how evaluative criteria come and go, how tastes appear and disappear—all these constitute seminal questions for reception studies. Notions of value are not universal. But they can be political weapons.

At the start of Part One, I quoted Marx. He writes in 1857, "Consumption is not only the concluding act through which the product becomes a product, but also the one through which the producer becomes a producer." I might disagree with him only as to whether consumption is the concluding act or part of a process, for what is most important is that consumption is also how a producer becomes a producer. Interpreting films is not an isolated, merely aesthetic act. It is a practice transforming the material world for our use. Researching how this happens can make a difference for the future.