Vertigo and Psychoanalysis
Freudian theories relevant to Vertigo

- **Repressed memory**: Freud believed that traumatic events, usually from childhood, are *repressed* by the conscious mind.

- **Repetition compulsion**: Freud identified the tendency of a person who has experienced a traumatic event to re-live the negative event over and over, in action, in memory, or in dreams.

- **The Uncanny**: Freud developed the concept of the uncanny (*Das Umheimliche*) to describe the feeling caused by something that is familiar and strange simultaneously. As a result, the uncanny experience is both attractive and frightening at the same time.
• **The Oedipus complex**: mothers are often seen as encouraging the Oedipal complex through possessive or flirtatious behaviour toward sons.

• **Dream Analysis**: Freud thought that dreams reveal repressed desires and trauma, although in symbolic form.

• **Split personality**: The doppelganger - The alternate personality can act out repressed desires or wishes without the "normal" individual being aware of these actions.
Freudian sexual symbolism in Vertigo
Jacques Lacan and “the mirror stage.”

The mirror stage is a pivotal phase of a child’s progression. It is the time when the child recognizes its self in the reflection and forms identification with its own image. This moment of identification is when a child starts to develop the notion of the ego.
This relates to film because...

The spectator experiences a very similar phenomena when watching a film. The screen now acts as the mirror and the spectator recognizes their likeness on the screen. We ‘recognise’ and identify with the subject.
J.L Baudry suggests the screen-mirror provides an “impression of reality” which constitutes the spectator’s formation of an imaginary self within the film world. This forms a specifically filmic “ego” on which the spectator relies for his or her sense of self in relation to the film.
Misrecognition

Our constructed self image.
Laura Mulvey says that there is identification with specifically the male character as bearer of the look. The spectator’s look is inherently male and inseparable from that of the male character on screen. The female does not have the possession of the look whatsoever, and is only able to be looked at.
But...

Consider how Hitchcock manipulates both Scottie and the spectator’s sense of what is real.

How much do we identify with Scottie and how much with Judy?

List examples where appearances are deceptive in the film
Examples of sequences from Vertigo where Hitchcock manipulates identification

Think:
• ‘Seeing’
• Mirrors
• Acting
• Lying
• Watching
• Performing
• The artificial image (painting, costume, etc.)
Slavoj Zizek

Philosopher and psychoanalyst Slavoj Zizek has been accused of misogyny and opportunism, and a Guardian columnist once wondered if he is “the Borat of philosophy.”
Zizek also bases his approach on Lacan...

“We all know the uncanny moments in our everyday lives when we catch sight of our own image and this image is not looking back at us. I remember once trying to inspect a strange growth on the side of my head using a double mirror, when, all of a sudden, I caught a glimpse of my face from the profile. The image replicated all my gestures, but in a weird uncoordinated way. “

Our usual self-image is one of misrecognition
Through a series of close analyses of plot points and camera angles, Zizek concludes that *Vertigo* is the realization of a male fantasy, which necessarily involves violence and nightmarish transformations. In the “male libidinal economy,” he says, women must be “mortified” before they are acceptable sexual partners.

“…to paraphrase an old saying, the only good woman is a dead woman.” Zizek
“A subject,” says Zizek, “is a partial something, a face, something we see. Behind it, there is a void, a nothingness. And of course, we spontaneously tend to fill in that nothingness with our fantasies about the wealth of human personality and so on, and so on. To see what is lacking in reality, to see it as that, there you see subjectivity. To confront subjectivity means to confront femininity. Woman is the subject. Masculinity is a fake.”
“Often things begin as a fake, inauthentic, artificial, but you get caught in your own game.” - Zizek

There is an agreement here with Tania Modleski
Zizek and Modleski in a nutshell:

Masculinity constructs its self image through oppression of the female.

But...

Zizek: this leads to violence towards Judy in order to assert Scottie’s dominant sexuality.

Modleski: the failure of the illusion is the cause of violence towards the female.
Explore how far the application of a particular critical approach has *either* reinforced *or* challenged your first impressions of your close study film.

**Level 4**

- An excellent, detailed knowledge and understanding of the chosen film
- A sound understanding and appreciation of the chosen critical approach – which is clearly defined and demonstrated in practice.
- An ability to engage directly with the question, using well chosen examples to develop a considered response.
- (The very best candidates) ... will be distinguished by the sophistication of their understanding and application of the critical approach and may wish to argue beyond the either / or terms of the question.