

Vertigo

Cinematography



The Vertigo Shot

- ▶ simultaneously zooming in and tracking backward
- ▶ the foreground remains stable while the background expands backwards
- ▶ gives us a sense of distortion and ‘vertigo’
- ▶ it is a visual aid of Scottie’s mind and feeling
- ▶ Importantly, given the film’s theme, it is a *subjective* shot



The 'Vertigo' Shot

- ▶ This occurs seven times throughout the film and is also a **structuring motif**. It is the visual approximation of the mind and body of Scotty and shows a perception problem.
- ▶ It represents ambiguous feelings of attraction and repulsion, which are our feelings towards the characters.
- ▶ It is the most striking of the many repeated shots in the film. Repetition is an essential component of the film's structure.

The Vertigo Shot is also a Bird's eye view

- ▶ Creates a sense of depth/height
- ▶ Gives the **audience** a sense of the vertigo that Scottie is suffering from, forcing us into his perspective



The 360 degree camera movement

- ▶ Following the motif of spirals and the circular plot
- ▶ It suggests the accomplishment of full circle when Scottie has succeeded in reconstructing Judy as Madeleine - though it is illusory
- ▶ Scottie is no longer an observer, but is now part of this a spiralling illusion that he can turn Judy into Madeline



The Profile Shot



- ▶ The repetition of the shot suggests the link between Madeleine and Judy, as well as indicating how Scottie is haunted by the first image he had of her.



The Profile Shot



- ▶ Scottie's 1st reaction to Madeleine is noticeably a guilty turning of his head, suggesting how transgressive the act of looking is.

Direct Repetition of Composition

The circularity of the narrative and sense of the past haunting the present is emphasised through deliberate repetitions of key shots



Subtle compositional repetition and links



Note the femininity of the mise-en-scene in Midge's apartment is juxtaposed with the masculinity of Elster's office.

The positioning of both characters is at work in front of a large window.





The repetition and contrasts are particularly used to create links between Madeleine and Judy.

This makes us subtly share the obsession Scottie feels





Composition both links and differentiates the character's two personalities

Note the polka dots that both link and separate the two





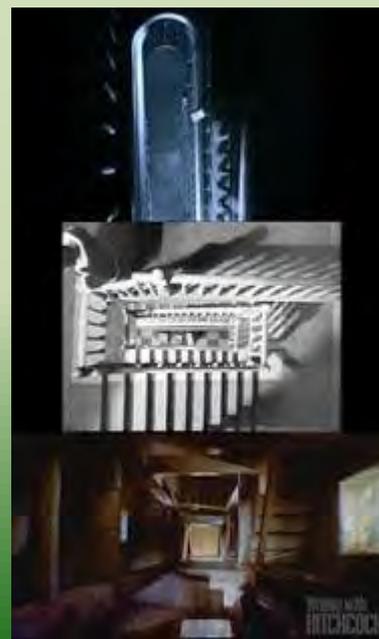
Vertigo and The Wrong Man

Repeated composition across different Hitchcock films



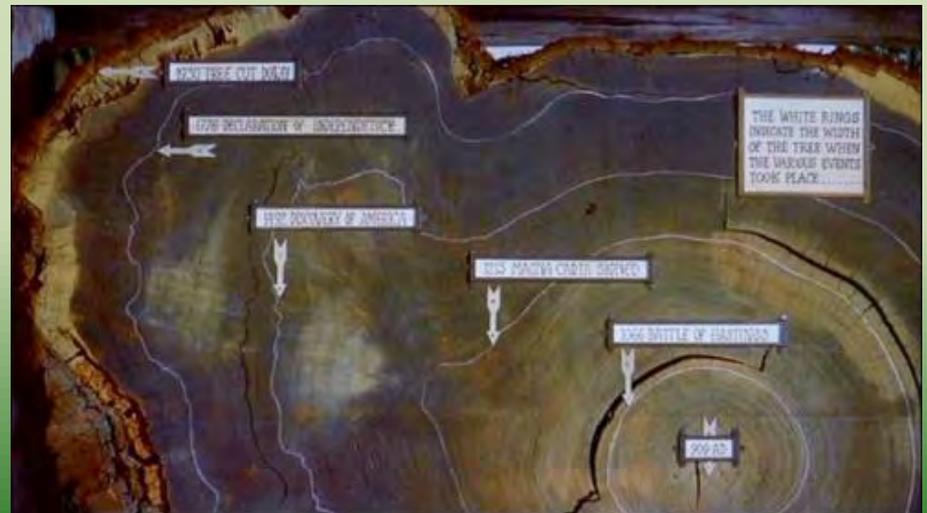
Vertigo and Psycho

Vertigo and many other Hitchcock kiss scenes



Vertigo, The Lodger and Blackmail

Emphasis on the Spiral Motif



Point of View shots

- ▶ The camera is often either subjective (a character's point of view) or active (acts like a character through its movement, though its perspective is not assigned to a character) across Hitchcock's work



The camera should take on human qualities and roam around playfully looking for something suspicious in a room.



- ▶ The POVs add another layer of reverse shot so that the audience knows specifically to what Scotty is reacting. We are led by Hitchcock to see absolutely through Scotty's eyes.
- ▶ The audience often sees him look, sees what he's looking at, sees him squint, and then sees a close up on what he's focusing.
- ▶ Thus, putting the audience in Scotty's position and furthermore allowing us to understand his feelings for Madeline and his sense of confusion in the latter half of the film.



Point of view

Look out for the film's emphasis on shot-reverse shot.



We are given mostly Scottie's perspective but in the final sequence of the film, the POV is shared with Judy.

This perspective, although subjective, is 'the truth'



Midge also has brief scenes taken from her perspective – like Judy, this is also more of a ‘true perspective’.



Shifting the perspective, first to Midge then later Judy alters the masculine/feminine dynamic of the film.

What both women perceive is opposed to Scottie's delusion



Non subjective but active camera

Who are we? Do we have a role other than the audience?



How does Hitchcock manipulate not only what we see, but *how we see it*?

A characteristic of Hitchcock films is the camera that searches, as if itself an active voyeur

When Scottie first sees Madeleine, we are not given a straightforward POV shot



The Looming Danger

Psycho

- ▶ We can see the danger, however, the same cannot be said for some of those in the scene.



- ▶ This is a technique that builds suspense



Vertigo

- ▶ Not only does Hitchcock make us question the morality of the onscreen characters through the way he uses the camera...
- ▶ ...,he also makes us question the morality of our 'role' as observers.



Key scene: Scottie first sees Madeleine

- ▶ Not a straight forward shot reverse shot
- ▶ First we have a forward-tracking movement to imply Madeleine's allure for Scottie
- ▶ Then a backward-tracking movement to register the manner in which Scottie is bonded to his object of desire
- ▶ together, they create a sense of the character being drawn towards the woman as object



Several times, Madeline disappears from view out of the shot

- ▶ Into the flower-shop
- ▶ As she enters the church
- ▶ As she leaves the church for the graveyard
- ▶ She vanishes altogether at the McKittrick Hotel
- ▶ Scottie's flat
- ▶ Briefly in the forest
- ▶ At the tower (both times)



She is forever out of reach, emphasising the idea of Scottie's underlying but endless chase for Madeline and the illusion of a 'ghostly' presence

In contrast, Scottie has three near-departures:

Scottie starts to leave a room, only to return. Each return gets him deeper into his involvement.



In Midge's apartment:
"What did you mean,
there's no losing it . . . the
acrophobia? . . . I think I
can lick it."



In Gavin Elster's office: "I didn't
mean to be that rough. . . ." [*Elster.*]
Do you think I made it up? [*Scottie:*]
"No. . . ."



In Judy's hotel room: Will you have
dinner with me? . . . Will you, for me?

Soft focus and use of filters

The graveyard scene and Madeleine's return both use these to suggest a ghostly presence – the past haunting the present



“Framing The Emotion”

Hitchcock controlled the intensity of the emotion by placing the camera a certain distance from the eyes. a close up will fill the screen with emotion, and pulling back will dissipate the emotion on screen.

A sudden cut from wide to close-up will give the audience a sudden surprise.





Sometimes a strange angle above an actor will heighten the dramatic meaning – suggesting the vertigo of the title or things being out of balance



Shift in Medium

The animated dream sequence takes us completely out of perceived 'reality' to glimpses of a subconscious 'truth'



“There is an artificial cinematic quality about *Vertigo* which makes us question constantly what kind of film we are watching.” How far can it be argued that this is a strength of *Vertigo*?