*Vertigo* (1958)

*Vertigo* is a psychological thriller directed and produced by Alfred Hitchcock, based on *D’entre les morts* (*The Living and the Dead*), a 1954 crime novel by Boileau-Narcejac. The film uses innovative cinematography to explore Freud’s theory of scopophila. Set in San Francisco, acrophobic ex-detective John “Scottie” Ferguson (James Stewart) is asked by former colleague Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore) to investigate his mentally unstable wife, Madeleine (Kim Novak). The two become romantically involved, as Scottie attempts to decipher Madeleine’s psychosis and amnesia. After what appears to be Madeleine’s suicide, Scottie obsessively follows another woman Judy Barton (also played by Novak) who bears an uncanny resemblance to Madeleine. The film concludes with the revelation that Madeleine’s suicide was a ruse for Elster to kill his real wife, whom Judy was impersonating. In keeping with the modernist fascination of the emotional impact of colour and light, contrasts in brightness are used to communicate the characters’ varying degrees of confusion. To emphasize the tenuous distinction between reality and fantasy, Hitchcock uses the “Dolly zoom,” or “Vertigo Effect,” which creates a Surrealistic perspective change through alterations in camera movement and focus. In 2012 *Sight and Sound’s* poll *Vertigo* replaced *Citizen Kane* as the best film of all time.

References and Further Reading:

Auiler, D. (1998) Vertigo: The Making of a Hitchcock Classic, New York: St. Martin’s Press.

Orr, J. (2005). Hitchcock and Twentieth-Century Cinema, London; New York: Wallflower Press.

Wood, R. (2002) Hitchcock’s Films Revisited, New York: Columbia University Press.

Paratextual Material:

- The BFI contains several important documents on the film, including video interviews with Kim Novak, <http://explore.bfi.org.uk/5139dd672ab4d>, Martin Scorsese, <http://explore.bfi.org.uk/5139d971598d5>, Numerous stills from the film <http://explore.bfi.org.uk/4ce2b6b9caca4> and its poster <http://explore.bfi.org.uk/4ce2b6b9caca4>

- The poster for the film (designed by Saul Bass) as well as an interpretation of its design, can be found here: [http://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/sep/26/poster.vertigo#](http://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/sep/26/poster.vertigo)

- Stills from the film can be found at the Internet Movie Database entry for the film: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0052357/>

Contributor: Valerie Uher