

**Katalin Makkai**, ed.

*Vertigo: Philosophers on Film.*

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What continues to fascinate viewers about Alfred Hitchcock's masterpiece, *Vertigo*? While each of the nine essays in *Vertigo: Philosophers on Film* focuses on a different topic, each author offers a unique answer to this question amidst his or her central arguments. Is it Hitchcock's combination of suspense and romance that keeps viewers coming back? Or perhaps, the way fantasy, dreams, and reality are intertwined in *Vertigo*? How knowledge, power, and gender are related? Or how Hitchcock's film deals with voyeurism and the gaze? How memory, loss, and desire are entangled? Or the relationship between creativity, memorialization, and art making? Or perhaps how *Vertigo* engenders a variety of spectators and interpretations? *Vertigo: Philosophers on Film* addresses these questions and many more in its essays.

Although there is already a prodigious amount of Hitchcock scholarship available, *Vertigo: Philosophers on Film* is a welcome contribution to the field due to the quality of writing, the variety of issues explored, and the diversity of interpretations offered by the authors. I remark, in particular, upon the broad appeal of this volume because of its value at many levels of scholarship. *Vertigo: Philosophers on Film* will serve as a fine model of what successful philosophical writing about film might entail for those who are just beginning to engage with the medium; it will equally interest seasoned film scholars and philosophers due to the complexity of its analyses and the variety of interpretations the volume provides. (William Rothman's article "Scottie's Dream, Judy's Plan, Madeleine's Revenge" is exemplary on both counts.) The authors supply interpretive surprises even for devotees of the film, inviting further viewing of *Vertigo*.

After a brief introduction by Katalin Makkai that contextualizes *Vertigo* in terms of Hitchcock's oeuvre, the second chapter addresses the topic of magic and representation. Nickolas Pappas' "Magic and Art in *Vertigo*" opens with a discussion of the kinds of art present in *Vertigo*, from those that are central to the film's plot (the painting of Carlotta Valdes and Midge's response painting) to those that might go overlooked (the architecture of the Golden Gate Bridge and Coit Tower; Midge's commercial art sketches; etc.). Pappas aims to investigate what unites these disparate forms aside from the broad designation "art". In service of this inquiry, Pappas explores representational art, in particular the concept of *mimêsis* derived from Plato. This discussion is thought provoking, but it is abandoned too quickly, as multiple Greek analogues are deployed to make sense of the relationships in *Vertigo*. For instance, are Scottie and Madeleine versions of Orpheus and Eurydice? Admetus and Alcestis? A mourner and his kolossos? While these interpretive analogues are interesting enough to consider, they are not sufficiently connected in Pappas' analysis. Because *Vertigo* is already rife with so many images, it is sometimes difficult to grasp the argumentative thread amidst the superfluity of examples. Pappas' essay would have benefitted from sharper focus on one or two of these analogues in order to ensure the clarity and coherence of his argument.

Chapter Three, William Rothman's "Scottie's Dream, Judy's Plan, Madeleine's Revenge", is a tightly focused argument regarding two key scenes in *Vertigo*. Rothman interprets Scottie's dream sequence in a shot-by-shot analysis, drawing parallels between the composition of shots in the opening sequence and Scottie's dream. He focuses in particular on the repetition of symbols such as spirals, jewels, and eyes in these scenes. Rothman proceeds to discuss Judy's agency in the latter half of the film, arguing that we may be led astray by what we think we know about her motives. Here, Rothman revisits and revises his arguments from *The Murderous Gaze* (1984). It is refreshing to see a philosopher so candidly question his prior assumptions in order to take a brave new perspective on Judy in this essay. Notably, Rothman's essay also features the first mention of Chris Marker's article, "A Free Replay (Notes on *Vertigo*)", in which the filmmaker presents an intriguing and controversial reading of reality and fantasy in *Vertigo*. Marker will be a touchstone for authors in this volume, both in terms of his writing and his work as a director (*La Jetée* and *Sans Soleil* figure into the arguments of later essays). Because of Marker's centrality to the analyses here, I wish that Makkai had reproduced "A Free Replay (Notes on *Vertigo*)" in this volume. Thankfully, Marker's article is easily accessible online; it is essential reading for *Vertigo: Philosophers on Film*.

Chapter Four, Noël Carroll's "*Vertigo*: The Impossible Love", addresses the question of what fascinates us about *Vertigo* when its plot and suspense appear absurd upon a second viewing. This crucial question unites the volume's essays. Carroll explores reasons why we ought to find *Vertigo* compelling—why, even, we ought to return to the film for multiple viewings. For Carroll, the answer lies in *Vertigo*'s exploration of the nature of love. He investigates Scottie's misguided idea of love that is based upon the aggregation of particular properties in the beloved. Carroll argues that it is not merely a set of properties we love; we have deep feelings for a person with whom we share a historical bond. He further argues that we should not be satisfied if our loved one was replaced by a facsimile, cyborg, or clone who shares his or her properties. This is why Scottie's attempt to recreate Madeleine's properties in Judy strikes us as monstrous.

Chapter Five, Charles Warren's "Offensive", deals with the thematic connections between *Vertigo* and Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil*, which reflects upon Hitchcock's film. The two works are a natural pairing because both explore the nature of art. Warren begins with a detailed description of several aspects of *Sans Soleil*, making it relatively easy to follow his argument even for those unfamiliar with Marker's film. In the course of the essay, Warren investigates whether a work of art, in this case a film, can develop a mind and life of its own, complete with intentions and desires. The extreme version of intentionality Warren presents here is difficult to digest. Especially because of Hitchcock's reputation for being a controlling and painstaking director, Warren's bold argument about how *Vertigo* roams out of control needs further support.

In Chapter Six, "A Made-to-Order Witness: Women's Knowledge in *Vertigo*", Gregg M. Horowitz presents an interesting analysis of Elster and Midge's intimate and asymmetric knowledge of Scottie. Horowitz begins with a suspicion of our ease in reading Hitchcock psychoanalytically, in spite of all the indications that Hitchcock is operating within this register in films like *Rear Window* and *Vertigo*. Allowing such readings to be unquestionably authoritative can, according to Horowitz, easily obscure alternative sources of meaning and

knowledge. Rather than giving in to such temptation, we must look more closely at *Vertigo* and in particular at what Elster and Midge know. Close reading plays a crucial role here, as it does in Rothman's article. One notable example of the insights Horowitz reveals through this method regards Scottie and Madeleine's first "meeting":

In a delicately choreographed dance of faces and eyes, Madeleine first shows herself to Scottie in full profile, the form of presentation that (for humans, if not for fish and horses) prohibits eye contact. Madeleine slowly begins to turn her face toward Scottie, foretelling an exchange of glances, but before she can face the camera and Scottie head on, Hitchcock cuts to Scottie turning his gaze away—or we should say, to capture the force of the strange magnetic repulsion at work here, having his gaze driven away by the threat of meeting Madeleine's eyes. By the time Hitchcock cuts back from the shying Scottie to Madeleine, her face has passed beyond the point of eye contact (123).

Madeleine could not possibly recognize Scottie; they have never met one another. Therefore, Scottie's motivation to avert his eyes must stem from another source. This is not a traditional "love at first sight" scenario. After all, Scottie and Madeleine do not actually make eye contact; something other than Madeleine's beauty attracts (and repels) Scottie. Horowitz argues that this scene reveals Scottie's obsession with images as well as his desire to look without being seen. He proceeds to argue that asymmetrical knowledge allows Elster to manipulate Scottie, using Scottie's acrophobia, drinking habits, and tendency to stalk to ensure the success of his murder plot; a similar asymmetry moves Scottie to flee from Midge, who knows Scottie's trouble with intimacy all too well due to their college relationship and broken engagement. Ultimately, it is Judy's knowledge and deception that Scottie fears most and cannot bear.

In Chapter Seven, "Vertigo and Being Seen", Katalin Makkai presents a nuanced analysis of the gaze by first complicating Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking argument from "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" and then offering a view in which one may gaze, but not necessarily objectify that which is seen. This involves an exploration of Jean-Paul Sartre's notions of "being-for-others" and "the look". The most interesting aspect of Makkai's argument regards Scottie's fascination with those who lack a gaze: "I take it that Scottie is attracted to the idea of a woman who, at least intermittently, is dispossessed of a gaze, and is lured by the hope of encountering her in the flesh—the experience, that is, of seeing her, and not being seen by her. And this is precisely the experience Madeleine provides for him, and for the viewer" (150). This echoes Horowitz's claim that Scottie is attracted to Madeleine's ghostly nature, which allows him to gaze without being seen, as well as Pappas' argument that Scottie loves Madeleine precisely *because* she is haunted. Makkai argues that what intrigues Scottie is Madeleine's absent but nonetheless powerful gaze. Her gaze is absent when she goes into ghostly trances and her eyes cloud over, but her connection to magic and the occult affords Madeleine a powerful and potentially generative gaze.

Chapter Eight, Eli Friedlander's "Being-in-(Techni)color" addresses an issue that is touched upon by several authors in the volume: how color functions in *Vertigo*. Friedlander doesn't want to collapse his inquiry into a simplistic point-by-point color system or indulge in a painterly or symbolic analysis. Instead, Friedlander examines how color shapes our viewing experience by investigating the alternation and repetition of colors in *Vertigo*. From a

phenomenological perspective informed by Stanley Cavell and Martin Heidegger, Friedlander explores how color can create a texture for our visual experience. Towards the end of his article, Friedlander raises questions of art, design, and power, and draws parallels between Gavin Elster, *Vertigo*'s master manipulator, and Alfred Hitchcock, controlling director. Several authors in the volume explore this relationship, questioning whether and to what extent Elster and Hitchcock are similar.

The final chapter, Andrew Klevan's "*Vertigo* and the Spectator of Film Analysis", argues that there are different kinds of spectators for *Vertigo*, complete with attendant modes of interpretation. Klevan enumerates several types of spectator including: the fixated spectator; medium-conscious spectator; philosophical spectator; camera-conscious spectator; experiential spectator; context-conscious spectator; evaluating spectator; and analysis-conscious spectator. Because Klevan deals with so many overlapping types of spectatorship, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish them, making his argument difficult to follow. This is especially complicated because he puts theorists into multiple categories of spectatorship. In spite of this criticism, Klevan's article is an appropriate conclusion for the volume because it reinforces the different perspectives from which the essays are written. Each author focuses on a different aspect of *Vertigo* and offers a unique interpretation and way of viewing the film. In fact, upon Klevan's reading, the ambiguity of *Vertigo* makes this multiplicity of interpretations possible! At times, these interpretations coincide and at times they conflict, but this is a strength of the volume rather than a weakness. The volume coheres due to the thematic cross-pollination among its essays. What is so compelling about *Vertigo: Philosophers on Film* is that even if you disagree with a particular reading, every author invites the reader to see from his or her point of view by offering thought-provoking arguments that are carefully supported with evidence from *Vertigo*. This is a must read volume for any Hitchcock lover.

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