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| **A: Context** |
| **1. Classical Hollywood** | a) Studio system (dominated by 5 big studios) / Producer-led (rather than director-led).b) A time of very strict studio control and rigid rules / formulas with regard to filmmaking and visual storytelling. Narrow expectations in terms of stars, genre, narrative and character. d) Realist style, using continuity editing to keep audience immersed and unaware of the editing. |
| **2. Hitchcock vs. Hollywood** | a) Hitch was a British filmmaker who moved to Hollywood in 1940.b) Clashed with the studio system and the ‘mainstream’ Hollywood way of doing things – an ‘outsider’ or maverick. Lots of studio interference in his early films.c) David Selznick was the producer with whom he frequently collaborated (and clashed). |
| **3. Vertigo and the end of the Classical Era** | a) This clash of Classical Hollywood vs. Hitchcock’s individuality can be seen in Vertigo.b) Released at the very end of the Classical Hollywood era, when the demise of the studio system meant more freedom for the director (rise of director as artist / auteur theory).c) As such Vertigo was not well-received by critics or audiences on its release as Hitchcock subverted many of the rigid expectations of the time.d) More recently, the film has been reappraised and is now considered Hitch’s masterpiece – in 2012 it was ranked No. 1 in a poll of the greatest films ever made. |
| **4. Other Social / Historical Context** | a) Post-war / early Cold War era USA – reflected in the ‘Crisis in Masculinity’ seen in the ‘weak male’ protagonist of Scottie, and the male power fantasy of Elster’s plot. b) The film can be read as emblematic of men trying to re-assert their control over women in post war America. One of the first things Scottie asks of Judy is that she not go to work but spends time with him instead, “let me take care of you.”c) While the Cold War / Soviet Union is not referenced in the film on a literal level, Vertigo’s dizzying, chaotic plot and sense of paranoia does reflect the ‘reds under the bed’ paranoia of the early Cold War era. |

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| **B: Characters** |
| **5. John ‘Scottie’ Ferguson (James Stewart)** | a) The protagonist of the film, though inherently flawed and an example of a ‘weak male’.b) Symbolically emasculated through his vertigo from the film’s opening, and later propelled and manipulated by a female (Madeleine/Judy) and a more dominant male (Elster)d) He is also a romantic who appears to reject reality in favour of illusion, and his obsession with Madeleine (and controlling of Judy) in the latter third of the film alienates much of the audience’s sympathy. |
| **6. ‘Madeleine Elster’(Kim Novak)** | a) The romantic and ethereal ‘Madeleine’ becomes Scottie’s love interest early on in the film, and an example of an ‘idealised female’.c) The fact she is a fabrication and does not really exist is significant – from a feminist perspective, the male idea of an ‘idealised female’ is just that: an illusion. |
| **7. Judy Barton****(Kim Novak)** | a) The real identity of ‘Madeleine’, who we learn was Elster’s accomplice and has manipulated Scottie in his plot. She represents the real, non-idealised female who Scottie attempts to re-create in Madeleine’s image.b) Her pivotal confession scene, in which she takes the audience into her confidence, shifts our relationship with the narrative and characters.c) Judy is malleable and lonely, and experiences identity issues from her first ‘real’ appearance - note how she begins to shift back into Madeleine’s identity by speaking in Madeleine’s voice in the final scene in the tower. |
| **8. Midge Wood (Barbara Bel Geddes)** | a) Scottie’s old friend and ex-fiancé, she is a mother figure who is still in love with Scottie and perhaps represents everyday reality.b) Hitchcock presents Midge as a highly sympathetic character, although her attempts to woo Scottie and save him from himself are fruitless. |
| **9. Gavin Elster(Tom Helmore)** | a) Revealed as the real antagonist of the film, the charming, wealthy and powerful Elster is the one who murders his wife and manipulates Judy into being his accomplice and Scottie into being his ‘fall guy’.b) His first scene with Scottie invokes a nostalgia for the past, where a man had ‘freedom’ and ‘power’.c) Unusual for a Classical Hollywood narrative, Elster escapes justice and is not heard from again after Madeleine’s inquest.d) Symbolically associated with Hitchcock himself through Hitch’s cameo at the start of his first scene – Elster is Hitchcock, in a way, as they are both doing the same thing in *Vertigo*: planting an implausible narrative into the minds of their unwitting audience, and fooling them into believing and following this narrative. |

**Knowledge Organiser Film Studies Component 1 – Varieties of Film and Filmmaking Section A – Hollywood 1930-1990 – *Vertigo***

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| **C: Key Elements of Film Form (1)** |
| **10. Cinematography** | a) Pioneering cinematography techniques to give a sense of dizziness and disorientation – the dolly zoom which gives a sense of Scottie’s literal vertigo but also evokes the spiral motif that is repeated throughout the film.b) High number of POV shots, particularly from Scottie’s perspective to establish his obsession, manipulate the audience’s perception, and represent the ‘male gaze’.c) Soft focus on Madeleine to create a ghostly, dreamlike appearance (in the cemetery and in Madeleine’s ‘resurrection’ scene). |
| **11. Mise-en-Scene** | a) Use of over-saturated and highly symbolic colours (red and green) which present important themes (life / death, reality / illusion etc.)b) The recurring spiral motif, seen in multiple aspects of the mise-en-scene (Madeleine / Carlotta’s hair, the flowers, the spiral staircase etc.) representing Scottie’s vertigo but also the dizzying chaos, obsession and loss of control associated with the plot.c) Other symbols include trees and flowers (immortality / mortality), mirrors (doubles, identity and the divided self), phallocentrism (seen throughout the San Francisco setting – towers, bridges, cranes, etc.), and yonic symbolism (flowers, tunnels, graves, etc.). |

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| **D: Key Elements of Film Form (2)** |
| **12. Editing** | a) Cinematic montage in Scottie’s nightmare sequence, which could be read as his subconscious piecing together, and giving subliminal clues about, the Elster plot.b) Prevalence of eye line matches, allowing the audience to identify with Scottie on an intellectual, emotional and point of view level. Hitchcock carefully constructs audience identification through the sequencing of silent shots.c) Use of a flashback montage in Judy’s confession scene presents Judy’s memories to the viewer, shifting the narrative of the film and changing the emotional, intellectual and POV identification from Scottie to Judy. |
| **13. Sound** | a) Bernard Hermann’s musical score creates a frantic and dizzying feel to the film, with clashes in sound and chords that are never resolved, repeatedly broken. The high-pitched strings evoke Scottie’s increasing madness and obsession.b) Lengthy silent sequences and absences of dialogue, allowing the viewer to focus on watching the characters doing, and creating a strong feeling of voyeurism.c) Voiceover narration during Judy’s confession scene as she writes her letter and reveals her story to the viewer. Here the viewer gets direct access to Judy’s thoughts and the technique itself is quite obtrusive, ‘jolting’ the viewer out of being immersed in the scene. |
| **14. Performance** | a) The blocking (movement and positioning) in the early Elster interview scene reveals much about the true nature of this conversation.b) While the dialogue tells us one thing (and misleads us and Scottie), Hitchcock is subliminally hinting at the truth through his positioning and movement of the two men. |

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| **F: Specialist Study Area – Auteur** |
| **17. Auteur Definition**  | A filmmaker with a distinct and highly personal creative signature; seen as the sole artistic voice behind a film |
| **18. Auteur Characteristics** | A director who is an auteur may: a) Have complete control over all aspects of productionb) Have a distinct and instantly recognisable visual stylec) Explore recurring psychological or moral themesd) Work frequently with the same collaborators (including actors)e) Transcend genre |
| **19. Hitchcock as Auteur** | a) Hitchcock had complete creative control over all aspects of his films, and regularly worked with frequent collaborators including graphic designer Saul Bass and composer Bernard Herrmann (visuals and music in the title sequence).b) James Stewart was a frequent Hitchcock leading man who accomplished his most intense and acclaimed performances for Hitch. Kim Novak was one of the legendary ‘Hitchcock blondes’ with whom the director frequently worked.c) Hitchcock is known for his careful manipulation of spectator response, which often hinges on his pivotal scenes which turn the narrative on its head and change the audience’s relationship with the film, its narrative and/or its characters.d) His narratives are always based around an investigation, which leads to four key themes: Confession and Guilt, Suspense, The Perfect Murder and The Wrong Mane) Hitchcock’s signature techniques include: an emphasis on ‘extremes’ of editing (long take and montage), a high number of POV shots, lengthy silent sequences.f) He is also known for his MacGuffins (plot device that instigates the investigation narrative), and his onscreen cameos which usually have symbolic significance. |

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| **E: Meaning and Response**  |
| **15. Aesthetic** | a) There is a deliberate artificial quality to Vertigo that gives the film an ethereal or dreamlike feel.b) Over-saturation of colour, use of soft filters and lengthy fluid camera movements contribute to this dreamlike effectc) Recurring symbols and motifs also create abstract, dreamlike imagery (see Mise-en-Scene and Cinematography for more on this). |
| **16. Representation** | a) Vertigo is a film in which symbolism and thematic development arguably take precedence over more traditional interpretations.b) Some of the key psychological themes in the film are binary or dualistic, including reality / illusion, control / chaos and life / death.c) Gender is another significant binary theme in the film, which demands a gender theory / feminist reading for its representation of gender roles and gender conflict.d) Consider the way masculinity is portrayed through the weak male Scottie and the alpha Elster, both of whom in their respective ‘quests’ demonstrate the male impulse for power and control, and freedom from the emotional ties that bind, weaken and feminize.e) Consider the way femininity is portrayed through Madeleine / Judy – Madeleine as the ‘idealised’ female, coded for what Laura Mulvey calls “strong visual and erotic impact” and the perfect damsel in distress in need of saving, but ultimately a fabrication constructed by the male characters. Judy, despite representing the ‘real’ female, is quick to surrender her real identity and allow Scottie to transform her into the ideal Madeleine. |

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| **G: Key Scenes** |
| **20. Opening Scene** | a) The film opens ‘In Media Res’ and arguably opens in disruption from a narrative perspective, which is unconventional for Classical Hollywood.b) First use of the ‘Dolly zoom’, a pioneering technique by Hitchcock, which is also presented through the film’s first POV shot – another notable technique in Hitchcock’s auteur signature.c) Visual symbolism / subliminal imagery can be seen in the dead policeman resembling the first of the film’s hidden ‘spiral’ motifs. Visual spiral effect is also created through the dolly zoom.d) Establishes Scottie as a ‘weak male’ protagonist through exposing his vulnerability from the very start – this crisis in masculinity is a big part of the themes of power and control which drive the rest of the film.e) Also significant in narrative terms as we never see Scottie rescued, and Hitchcock transitions to him recovering in Midge’s apartment at some point in the future. An example of Hitchcock’s playful approach to the details of plot – this detail is deliberately skipped over and adds to the audience’s perception of Scottie as not typically heroic. |

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| **G: Key Scenes (continued)** |
| **21. Elster Interview** | a) The Hitchcock cameo at the start signals that this is a very significant scene – Hitch walks past the shipyard, wearing a suit and carrying a manual foghorn: this links him symbolically to the character of Elster. Both Hitchcock and Elster are the ‘puppet masters’, planting an implausible narrative into the heads of Scottie and the audience, and presenting visual cues which fool us into believing this narrative. Even the foghorn is symbolic, being a device used in shipping to lure ships through fog, just as Elster is luring Scottie into his elaborate trap.b) When Elster yearns for the old days, when a man had ‘power’ and ‘freedom’, he is actually giving us his hidden motive, and presenting a major theme of the film: the male impulse towards power and control. The ship building cranes behind Elster during this moment can be read as symbols of ‘alpha masculinity’, being essentially huge phallic objects.d) Hitchcock’s blocking in this scene (performance and movement) is also hugely significant – consider the positioning of Elster and Scottie throughout, as Elster steps into the room above when he starts to tell his story, like a performer on a stage, and Scottie sits observing him like a member of a theatrical audience. |
| **22. Investigation Sequence** | a) One of Hitchcock’s lengthy silent sequences, in which we carefully follow Scottie following Madeleine in a dialogue-free 10-minute sequence. Hitchcock’s keen attention to visual detail is evident here.b) Hitchcock masterfully constructs point of view and audience identification through a high number of POV shots from Scottie’s perspective, interspersed with shots of Scottie (eyeline matches). The audience identifies intellectually and through POV with Scottie.c) The character of Madeleine is framed entirely from Scottie’s POV in this sequence, which presents ideas about the ‘male gaze’ and the objectification of the female character. The fact we only see Madeleine through Scottie’s POV also casts doubts on her objective reality, which is significant as we learn later. d) The recurring spiral motif appears significantly in this scene and the audience’s attention is deliberately drawn to it through the cinematography. The spirals in the hair / flowers (mirrored in the painting) represent the hypnosis or ‘mind control’ that is the real purpose the investigation has over Scottie. |
| **23. Scottie’s Nightmare** | a) An example of cinematic or Soviet montage – a technique Hitchcock is known for. A series of subliminal images with no clear literal meaning, the sequencing of which encourages the viewer to make their own meaning.b) One possible explanation is that it is Scottie’s subconscious trying to work out the ‘truth’ about the Madeleine plot, which would make the necklace a key image as its recurrence at the end of the film triggers Scottie’s realisation of this.c) Aesthetically, the scene is completely out of character for a Classical Hollywood film, having a psychedelic and ethereal quality that is self-consciously artificial or expressive (whereas Classical Hollywood was known for following the ‘realist’ approach).d) In terms of symbolism, there is some spiral imagery, the open grave evokes the tunnel image (death and the afterlife), the flowers evoke mortality or the fragile nature of life, and the flashing red symbolises a warning or danger. |
| **24. Judy’s Confession** | a) This is the pivotal scene in the film in which Hitchcock deliberately shifts the audience’s relationship with character and narrative.b) The audience is left alone with the character of Judy/Madeleine for the first time, and she emphasises this by ‘breaking the fourth wall’ and looking directly at the viewer.c) The flash of red, last seen in Scottie’s dream sequence, suggests the audience is being given access to Judy’s memories / subconscious. This shifts the audience’s identification as we see a part of the flashback that Scottie did not.d) The sequence shifts all three levels of audience identification from Scottie to Judy. By the end of the scene, the audience will identify with Judy intellectually, emotionally and through POV.e) This scene shifts the plot from a classic detective narrative, spoiling the mystery two thirds of the way into the film in favour of suspense – a major Hitchcock theme.f) The other three major Hitchcock themes – Confession and Guilt, the Perfect Murder, and the Wrong Man (/Woman!) – are all central to this scene also. g) The fact that Judy rips up her letter to Scottie at the end of the scene highlights the fact that the confession is really meant for the audience. |
| **25. Madeleine’s Resurrection** | a) One of the most ethereal, dreamlike and aesthetically artificial scenes in the film, where symbolism and thematic development clearly take precedence over more traditional elements.b) The ghostly green glow which illuminates the apartment evokes themes of death and rebirth, and the soft filter on ‘Madeleine’ as she emerges from the bathroom makes her look translucent, deliberately evoking the idea that she is a ghost.c) When Scottie takes Judy/Madeleine in his arms, the camera circles around them, stylistically reminding us of his vertigo, then the background morphs into the stable of San Juan Bautista, the place where Madeleine died.d) Hitchcock thus implies that in Scottie's mind she has been resurrected, and this moment also explores the importance of a place’s bearing on the subconscious: Scottie seems momentarily ‘transported’ back to the place where he last kissed Madeleine. |