

## Document Citation

Title	<b>'Vertigo' keeps up suspense</b>
Author(s)	Steve Vineberg
Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Vertigo, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1958

# 'Vertigo' keeps up suspense

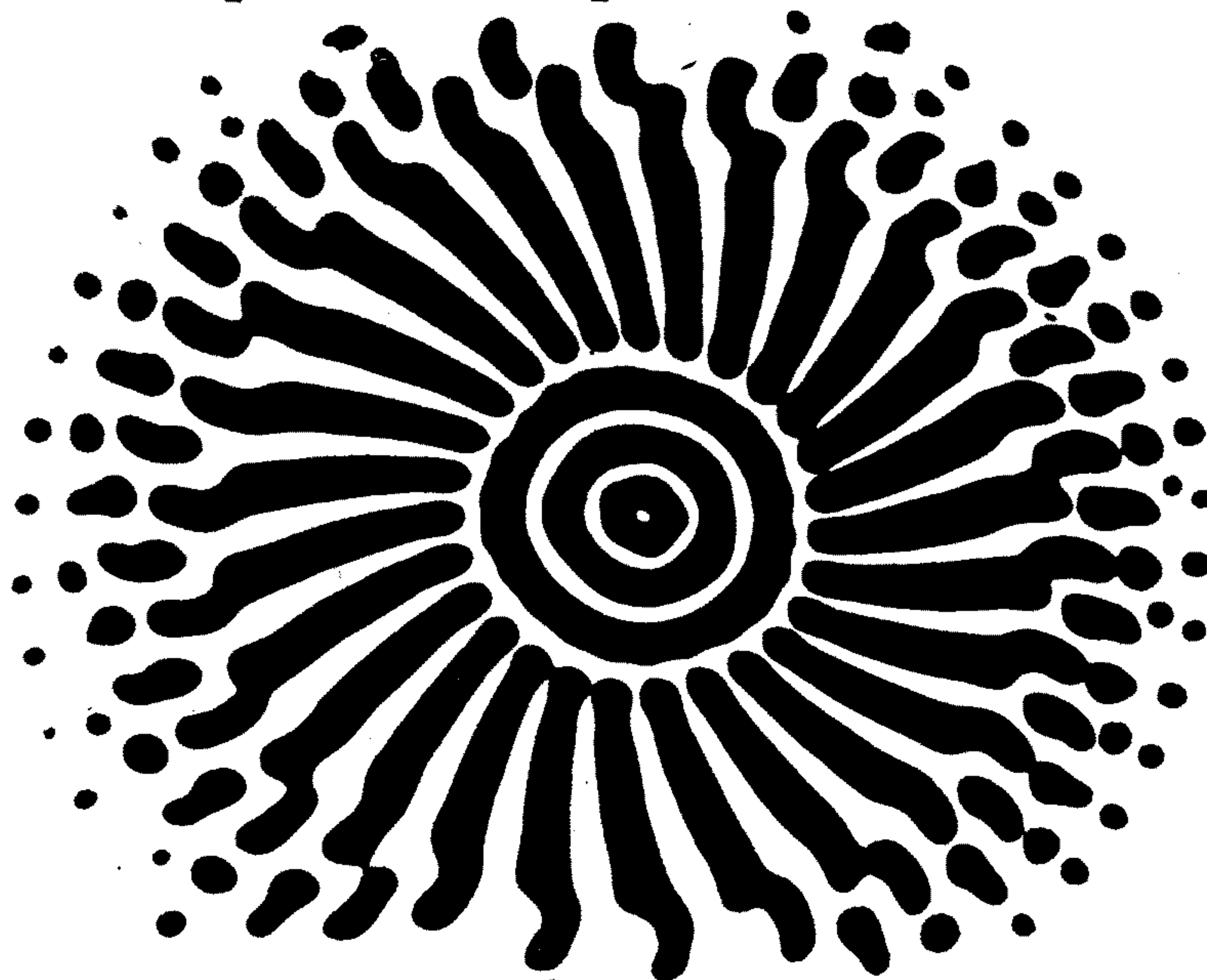
By STEVE VINEBERG

Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, originally released in 1958 and reissued at Christmas after a decade out of circulation, has an eerie, seductive romanticism.

A college pal hires "Scottie" Ferguson (James Stewart), a former police detective, to trail his wife Madeleine (Kim Novak), who seems to be possessed by the spirit of her great-grandmother and spends her daytime hours reliving snatches of that woman's tragic life. Alec Coppel and Samuel Taylor adapted the screenplay from a novel called "*D'entre les Morts*" by Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac; the American title alludes to Scottie's particular ailment — vertigo occasioned by acrophobia, which indirectly caused the death of another cop (who fell to his death trying to help Scottie up a roof during a chase) and has forced him into early retirement — as well as to the dazzling blond Madeleine's effect on him.

He falls so completely and insanely in love with her that when he loses her, he takes to searching for her in the streets (of San Francisco, where most of the picture was shot) and following women who resemble her. One day he picks up Judy Barton (also played by Novak), who might be Madeleine's brunette twin, and attempts to transform her into Madeleine.

The combination of this richly suggestive narrative, Kim Novak's otherworldly beauty in the first half of the film, the heady Bernard Herrmann music, and the hypnotic camerawork in the most famous sequences is extremely powerful, on a pop level. You watch the movie with the same fascination and impatience with which you



might read a sexy murder mystery that keeps you awake half the night until you've devoured the last details of the solution. Our desire for erotic and emotional satisfaction at the pulp-romantic level retains the images of Kim Novak's exquisitely distracted face and James Stewart's love-ravaged one in our heads long after we've forgotten the nondescript dialogue, the holes in the story and the erratic acting.

The problem is that many critics seem to take *Vertigo* absurdly seriously — as if it were a Manet painting, a Ravel concerto and a Borges story all rolled into one. In no other case — perhaps not even *Psycho* — has Hitchcock's teasing, intoxicatingly entertaining craftsmanship been confused so insistently with art. There is a kind of bald surrealism in the movie, in the credits sequence (designed by Saul Bass) and the dream sequence (John Ferren), but though other movies of the 1950s parade this

brand of pseudo-Freudian kitsch, too — like *Something Wild*, with Carroll Baker — only in *Vertigo* is it assumed to have any value.

Moreover, the movie's devotees, some of whom voted it one of the ten best films of all time in the 1982 Sight and Sound survey, see in its flirtation with perversion (necrophilia, death wish) a trenchancy the picture simply doesn't possess. For *Vertigo* doesn't say anything about these explosive topics, any more than *Rear Window* really addresses the subject of Peeping Tomism, or *Strangers on a Train* the relationship of the ego and the id, or — and here I know I'm treading on dangerous ground — *Psycho* the Oedipal complex. Certainly these movies would be far less compelling without this gaudy psychiatric color, but they have the same relationship to Freud that *Forbidden Planet* or *West Side Story* has to Shakespeare. *Vertigo* isn't Freudian at all, really — it's Freudly.