

How does hitchcock create and maintain suspense in his 1960s film 'psycho'

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The film, 'Psycho', was produced in the 1960s, by Alfred Hitchcock. He has also produced other famous films, two of which are called, 'Birds', and 'Vertigo'. Although 'Psycho' was produced over 40 years ago it is a classic horror film and is very well known all over the world. Some people call it 'the mother of modern horror movies', as the very famous shower scene is adapted in many other horror films such as 'The Shining' and 'What Lies Beneath' where they use the bath to portray horrific images.

It is a groundbreaking film especially for the 1960s because of the taboo subjects handled. For instance, it was the first time in film industry a woman is shown in a bra on screen and the first time in a film a toilet is seen to be flushed. People went to see Psycho immediately once released because people were both fascinated and amazed by its originality and so its fame grew. Hitchcock was a very clever producer creating tension and suspense. He knew how to play with viewers' emotions and how to manipulate them into what he wanted the viewer to believe such as fear and loathing.

He introduced new and very different ways of watching films in cinema, for example, viewers had to come at the beginning and leave at the end, these customs are still used today. He did this to make the viewer feel more shocked and to enhance trepidation of the film. Additionally he used the theme of shadows to make the viewer feel nervous as shadows have the connotations of darkness and mysteriousness. Colour television was available at the time but Hitchcock reverted to black and white as it enforces evil and makes the film look more sinister, dark, and eerie.

Additionally the black and white gives more focus and makes the blood more obvious in the shower scene. Furthermore, black and white may demonstrate the loneliness and isolated mind of Norman Bates. These new ideas used by Alfred Hitchcock, such as the cinema issue made the viewer anxious before seeing the film. In addition the title itself builds up tension and anticipation, as the meaning of the word 'psycho' is that of a split personality and someone with a serious mental problem, this could be dangerous if not noticed or not dealt with properly.

Therefore, the title already suggests that the story will lead to a horrific outcome. The film opens with an everyday situation, the viewer feels some normality, thus when Hitchcock introduces violence it will seem more shocking to the viewer. As Marion is escaping with the i?? 40, 000 from work, there are some scenes that Hitchcock includes which builds up tension. For example, when she is driving away with the money and stops at a traffic light her boss catches her eye. This is shown as a point of view and medium shot, which focuses on her boss's face, as it is full of confusion.

This makes Marion feel terrified and anxious, which is also portrayed in the vigorous music accompanying the scene. This makes the viewer feel nervous and worried just like Marion. Additionally there is a close up shot of a policeman; this is used, as Hitchcock wants the viewer to focus on the policeman's features. He is wearing large sunglasses as they give the impression he has large eyes, which make him look inhumane. The sunglasses also hide the policeman's identity, expressions, and thoughts,

thus making the viewer feel nervous as they are wondering if Marion has been captured.

When Marion arrives at the 'Bates Motel' the viewer can immediately tell that it is bizarre as; it is isolated, there is no one occupying any of the cabins, the house and motel itself are also remote, hence the viewer feels frightened as hotels are generally lively and so unusual happenings would make the viewer nervous. When Marion arrives, the setting is dreadful as it is raining, deserted, dark and gloomy, which are all connotations of death and evil. This adds to all the tension and suspense as the viewer fears for Marion's life.

The appearance of the motel itself is eerie, gloomy and is positioned above a hill to make it look more menacing and secluded. The high angle shot of when the house is shown makes the house look very large and towering over the viewer, making the viewer feel small, helpless, and intimidated. Norman Bates, the owner of the chilling isolated motel is very suspicious himself, and acts unusually. The viewer starts to realise his strange behaviour as soon as Marion has registered and he is deciding which cabin to choose for her.

He hesitates in choosing a cabin to put her in but all the cabins are empty and finally chooses the first cabin making the viewer suspicious. When Marion is eating, he analyses the way she is eating. He starts a conversation about this, which is a strange topic to talk about to when having just met them. This makes the viewer curious about Norman Bates, as he is acting in a bizarre fashion. Abnormal behaviour makes the viewer feel uncomfortable leading to anticipation, nervousness and suspense. In conversation with

Marion, Norman refers to 'we', which implies that there is someone else in the house.

This creates mystery and suspense as the location looks deserted and isolated. The viewer is worried as they do not know whom Norman is referring to. Later this person is revealed as his mother and the way he talks about her shows that there is conflict in their relationship and that he hates her 'illness'. This 'illness' implies hidden secrets as Norman does not specify the illness creating further suspense. As soon as Marion mentions to put his mother in a home, his attitude changes immensely, his tone of voice becomes sinister and dangerous, this is very different from the stuttering, charming Norman Bates at the beginning.

He seems to be constantly challenging himself about hate/love with his mother as he talks with Marion. The effect this has on the viewer is that they are suspicious at this point, wondering what is going to happen with his mother, also the viewer wants all the questions that have appeared, to be soon answered. The main characteristic, which makes Norman very suspicious to the viewer, is his obsessive fascination of death. The room in which both Norman and Marion sit in is full of stuffed birds most importantly birds of prey.

As soon as Marion enters the office, Hitchcock focuses the camera on the birds and their shadows, shadows are connotations of evil and horror; being birds of prey also adds to the theme of horror and death as the idea of death is emphasised. Norman reveals to Marion that his hobby is taxidermy. The

idea of stuffing birds emphasises death and the idea of killing, particularly as they are birds of prey. The idea of killing is already being portrayed before the murder; this encourages the viewer to feel tension and suspense.

In between the office scene and the shower scene, there is a lull of tension and suspense to get the greatest impact as possible. When Marion is at her desk in her cabin doing her sums, the atmosphere is greatly different, it is more relaxed than that of the office. This is because there are no stuffed birds in the room, Norman bates has gone and she is in the safety of her cabin, hence the viewer feels quite safe and comfortable. This is exactly how Hitchcock wants the viewer to feel, as the impact of the murder will be greater by this method because the viewer is unprepared.

When Marion is in the shower, a range of camera angles is used but there are two main angles. On one hand, there is a side shot which focuses on the door but the viewer can still see Marion having shower, but the door is the main focus where the viewer is made to feel anxious as they can feel that someone is going to come in. the viewer is made to feel like they are on the same side of the shower curtain as Marion but unlike her they can see a silhouette of the killer on the curtain. On the other hand, there is the point of view shot where the showerhead is showing.

This makes the viewer nervous as this gives the idea Marion has no idea someone else is present. Together with the dramatic music, this makes the viewer very tense. As the killer gets nearer, the music develops to become more dramatic, faster, and higher. Unexpectedly the shower curtain is

pushed aside but Marion is unaware at first then soon sees the killer and screams a piercing scream as the music has built up to a faster and higher point; this makes the viewer feel terrified as they horrified and surprised of the actions of the killer.

The tension slowly rises when the killer comes closer to Marion and she is unaware of the danger, which creates tension and suspense. Then when the shower curtain is pulled back the viewer feels very anxious and is holding their breath waiting to see what is going to happen next. When Marion quickly turns around to see who has opened the shower curtain she holds her hands up as if to surrender. Then the tension gets to its highest point, as does the action when the killer stabs Marion.

In the last hope and desperation, Marion grabs on to the shower curtain and with her it falls. The peak tension has slowed down much more than the stabbing and is starting to fall. Then the final close up of Marion's face after she has fallen plays upon the audiences emotions as they realise from the close up that she is really dead. The close-up also focuses the last image of Marion in the audience's minds. The droplets from the shower on her face may symbolise tears, which suggests how innocently she died.

The music is one of the most important ingredients for suspense to this film and it would not have been a success without it. Hitchcock was again groundbreaking because using music to create suspense had never been used in films before. Using Bernard Herman's strings only soundtrack, Hitchcock used the music to reflect the characters views and to heighten

them. For example, when Marion had stolen the money and her boss sees her, violins go at a much faster stabbing pace, as she is nervous and paranoid that she will be caught.

Also when in the shower scene the music speeds as the action is increasing, as if Herman is letting out his anger by a violin, and so the tension is increasing with both the action and music, the music almost symbolises the heartbeat of the viewer as when the viewer is getting tense the heart rate rises. Additionally, to emphasise the knife wounds, high-pitched notes replace the knife sound effects. There is minimal background noise throughout the film as Hitchcock wants the viewers to concentrate on the characters and the silence has an effect of eeriness, creepiness, and isolation.

Therefore, when Marion arrives at the motel and the viewer can hear rain, this emphasises the rain as there has not been any other background noise and so the viewers will notice it. The rain distorts vision and has connotations of a miserable day. Storms and heavy rain have connotations of evil as if something is going to happen. Cinematography is vital in 'Psycho' as it is used to manipulate the viewer in unnerving them and creating tension. Hitchcock also manipulates the viewers into thinking what he wanted them to think, which leads the viewer to feel tense and suspense by using a variety of camera angles.

For example long shots are used when the house is shown to make it look much larger and over towering to make the viewer feel small and

intimidated, which makes the viewer nervous and tense. Hitchcock uses medium shots of Norman Bates, which connects him with the gothic house and makes him intimidating. Hitchcock manipulates the viewer as he does close up shots of the money regularly, which suggests to the viewer that the money is the main storyline, although there is a more sinister plot. Therefore, he shocks the viewers when the murders happen and in turn creates tension and suspense.

At the dramatic part of the first section of the film, the shower scene has many camera shots so the viewer has a good image of what is happening and it is vivid in their minds, this also provides opportunity for Hitchcock to manipulate the viewer into nervousness and anxiousness. Although, when the murder was taking place many camera angles were used very quickly, to produce confusion and franticness of the murder. Over 70 camera angles were used in this shower scene and only lasts for 45 seconds causing a crazy frenzied image of the murder.

The music also adds to this frenzied image as the violins and cello are sharp and fast, and are played vigorously and violently. Hitchcock spent a week filming this scene as he wanted to make sure all the different camera angles were shown at the right times making the viewer feel as much tension and suspense as possible. In conclusion, I think there are two main plot lines, which convey the most anticipation and suspense. Firstly, when Marion was fleeing with the money due to the music used when Marion sees her boss; the music is played violently and vigorously with sharp noises.

This plays with the audiences' minds creating impact and tension within them. Cinematography is also used in this plot line, when there is a close up shot of the policeman, this emphasises his face and sunglasses making the policeman look like he has large eyes hiding his expressions and thoughts. This encourages the idea that he is inhumane. Secondly, the other plot line that conveys the most anticipation and suspense is the shower scene as both music and cinematography are used together to create and maintain the tension and suspense of the murder.

This is very important as this is the climax of the film, which needs to grip the audience, and keep them on the 'edge of their seats'. It is all these clever techniques used by Hitchcock that made, 'Psycho', a groundbreaking film, and a breakthrough in media. The techniques employed are very effective in maintaining tension and suspense throughout the film, such as the music, the different camera shots, the precise timings, and most essentially the manipulation used to mislead the viewer. This has resulted in creating apprehension and suspense, making, 'Psycho', one of the most terrifying films of all time.