A tale of two psychos

Hitchcock and Van Sant's " Psycho" s, in theory, should have accomplished the same, or at least very similar, enunciative effects. Van Sant said himself that he wanted to experiment by creating a near " shot for shot" remake, but the cinematic result of the original did not come to fruition in his version. The colorization and modernization of the setting featured in the remake have, arguably, the most visible impact on the overall enunciation of the film. Hitchcock's Psycho maintains a more serious tone, and Van Sant employs a series of changes, some more subtle than others, in order to drastically change the the film to become significantly more flashy, harsh, and sexually explicit, eliminating a lot of the " horror" seen in the original film.

The most obvious difference between the two films is their color, and the directors utilize their mediums with contrasting techniques. The audience knows right from the introduction of the 1998 movie that this is not going to be the same film, as the opening credits feature green bars instead of white, establishing the neon color scheme. The pastel and neon palette create a flashiness and modernity that cannot be observed in the original, as well as diminishing the severity of many of the films most crucial moments. This color scheme gives intense moments a Vegas light show vibe, enhancing the flamboyance and somewhat glossing over the horror. The pink sign of the motel, for example, leads the audience to believe this place is cheap but not dangerous. Van Sant does not appear to use lighting intentionally to get his message across, solely using color to make the original story more " glamorous" and to contribute to the overall parodic tone. In the original film, Hitchcock employs a lot of shadow work with the black and white stylistic choice, lighting his characters to reflect their personas. When the characters

dine in the parlor, Hitchcock keeps Marion well lit and deliberately hides Norman in the shadows, using a motif of lighting to signify their respective levels of innocence. While the audience initially believes that Marion is the evil protagonist and Norman is a pure-of-heart antagonist, Hitchcock's artful lighting during the course of the film reveal the character's true personas in much more solemn fashion than the bright colors of Van Sant. In the final scene, we see Perkins' Norman perfectly lit in fluorescent light, symbolizing a true reveal of character and allowing the audience to see who he is really is, both literally and metaphorically, while stares menacingly into the camera. Vaughan's Norman, on the other hand, is hard to take legitimately in the same scene as he wears an oversaturated blue shirt.

The camera work is also varied between the two directors, leading to very different enunciative accomplishments. In the primary shot, for instance, Hitchcock pans across several different cityscapes with dissolves while Van Sant only uses one continuous shot. The camera work for the duration of the Hitchcock version maintains a shaky and almost alive presence when following the actors, a sharp contrast from Van Sant's smooth transitions and completely stable shots. The Hitchcock version exudes a sense of urgency throughout, unlike Van Sant's, which has an almost sleepy tone throughout most of the film. Both directors use extreme lingering shots, but Hitchcock's seem to have a more tense result when Van Sant's appear more like a sleepy pause. Hitchcock's effective use of the personified camera allows the eye of the camera becomes an active participant in the action, almost spying on the characters onscreen. In the moment when Marion decides to steal the money, the camera stays on the envelope for a less than comfortable

amount of time, allowing the audience to participate in this decision process as well and heightening the stress of the scene. After the shower scene as well, the camera lingers intrusively from her dead body to the newspaper containing the money, acknowledging what has been done and the grim effects. Moreover, Hitchcock varies between extreme close ups and long shots with short cuts, adding to the panicky tone. The remake, on the other hand, uses a similar approach but emerges with a very different result. In the hotel room scene with Sam and Marion, one of the first shots is a macro close up of a fly sitting on their food intercut with them laying in bed, making what was originally an urgent discussion into a casual chat, highlighting one of the main enunciative results of the remake: casualness.

Furthermore, both directors use mise-en-scene differently to give insight into the characters. In the 1960 scene where Marion and Norman eat in the office, Norman’s body is framed by birds of prey that cast long shadows over his dark face, whereas Marion is surrounded by innocent, small birds, that are also lit well behind her shining face, serving as a metaphor for the characters’ intentions. Both movies handle this scene relatively similarly, although the 1960 version uses a lot more shadow play and the birds are much more in focus when contrasted to the 1998 film, which utilizes the dark colors of the predator birds and the bright colors of the little birds as well as a sharper depth of field. This causes the audience to focus on the character’s faces more than they might in the earlier version. In the Hitchcock version, however, Perkins face is set at the same angle in front of the birds the entire time, and his face is only shown from a worms-eye low angle. Van Sant’s camera angle varies when he shot Vaughan, and he is much closer and more

eye level, setting him up with equal positioning to Marion rather than seemingly above her. Van Sant's style draws more attention to the Norman than his background, whereas Hitchcock shows Norman's unsettling inner workings. This separate approach allows Hitchcock to reveal the deeper intentions of Norman while Van Sant's Norman leaves little to the imagination, and exposes the motel owner as a very mentally unstable man from the audience's first encounter with him.

Another important addition to the remake is Norman masturbating while he spies on Marion dressing. The original would not have been allowed to show this graphic of a scene with the movie restrictions at the time, so Van Sant takes full advantage of a more lenient time period in order to display Norman Bates' internal lust in a more external fashion. However, this scene eliminates a lot of the suspense seen in the original because any suspicions the audience had about Norman being a pervert are validated without any doubt. This scene also adds to the more intense sexual atmosphere of the 1998 movie, depicting a more overtly erotic and perverted version of Bates and making the audience less inclined to trust his character. Vince Vaughan's complete lack of subtlety in his rendition of Norman contributes to the overall intensified aggressiveness of the film. The audience can tell from the get-go that something is very off with Vaughan's Norman, as opposed to the more subdued Norman Bates portrayed by Perkins. Vaughan giggles nervously and creepily after nearly every line and dresses in an off-putting fashion, whereas Perkins' Norman is more charming and charismatic and the audience only starts to truly notice his creepiness when he gets defensive about his mother. His " nervous habit" is also more set in subtlety — he

nibbles on pieces of candy, setting the stage for more bird comparisons. Furthermore, in the remake, Anne Heche's Marion appears to be more smug and flirty, smiling widely after she gets away and when she stares at the money on the bed and shrugging Norman's weirdness off instead of being genuinely concerned. Her interactions with Viggo Mortensen's Sam also seem more jokey then tense, like when she says " you have to put your shoes on" in the first scene — it's the exact same line as the original, but because Sam is completely naked, it turns into a parody. Heche's contributions to the role make the film seem more like a spoof than a remake at times especially when paired with her bright, ridiculous outfits and Sam's off-putting Southern accent.

In terms of camera work, Van Sant adds in intercutting into the two crucial murder scenes, creating perhaps one of the most interesting stylistic decisions in the film. In the shower scene, shots of blood and gore are intercut with stormy clouds, giving a look into what is supposed to be Marion's psyche. Moreover, when Arbogast is stabbed, the audience sees a masked naked woman and cow ominously standing in the road. This very deliberate directorial addition, one of the most outwardly obvious changes in a so-called " shot for shot" remake, adds a feeling of ominousness and an additional element of surprise to an already very jarring stabbing. These intercut shots are completely unexpected and contribute to the shock value of Van Sant's remake, as well as heightening the suspense of the killings, evoking a juxtaposition of raw human emotion in its purest form and nature's course — the storms, the naked woman, the cow, all signifying different natural human impositions that can only happen at a moment of exposure

such as a murder scene. The storms are anger; the woman is lust and sexuality, and the cow is isolation, all key aspects of the film, which Van Sant plants subconsciously in the viewers mind. Two additions in the shower scene continue these ideas, the close-up of Marion’s pupil dilating in the shower scene and the overhead shot after she dies, neither of which shots are included in the original. These supplemental shots give the viewer both an extreme inside view (the eye) and an onlooker’s perspective of Marion at her weakest, furthering the brash tone and motif of being a too close for comfort.

When Hitchcock released the film in 1960, he did so with one main purpose: to shock. However, he could not go as far as directors go today with gore and sexual content in his more restrictive time period. Hitchcock even said that he shot in black and white because he did not believe that people could handle seeing that much blood in color. Despite the supposedly less threatening black and white, Psycho left audiences screaming in terror in 1960. Van Sant wanted to create the same feeling for younger generations, but in order to shock a much more jaded modern audience, he needed to take Hitchcock’s work a step further. In order to accomplish this, Van Sant made the 1998 film notably more sexually charged and violent. In particular, the shower scene exposes a great deal more of Anne Heche when compared to Janet Leigh in the 1960 version, as well as a lot more blood. Heche is even more vulnerable than her earlier counterpart, her body being nearly completely visible and defenseless on the motel bathroom floor in an entirely vulgar fashion, surrounded by blood. Hitchcock would not have been able to show this level of nakedness, so Van Sant uses the new movie codes to his

advantage in order to further disturb his audience. Again, the viewer is brought past comfort and is disgusted by a sight that almost approaches comedy in its raw sickliness. Furthermore, in the very first scene of the film, the audience is almost ambushed with a direct shot of Viggo Mortensen’s bare backside, as well as a more obvious depiction of their lustful relationship. Van Sant obviously wanted to surprise the audience, and he did so by making his version criminally sexual and violent, to the extent where the film seems to be mocking both the mildness of movies past and the disgust in movies now.