

# [With cookie-cutter template that very much inspired](https://assignbuster.com/with-cookie-cutter-template-that-very-much-inspired/)

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With Psycho and Peeping Tom’s appearances within the 1960’sgenerated an adapted stereotype of the homicidal maniac which its time becamepopular. This new breed of genre formation seemed to have their psychos appearreserved, indefinitely effeminate, and initially harmless young men. Hitchcockwas fixated in tearing back the containment shrouded over human affection toreveal the inner sickness within its antagonists. The physically genericAmerican male with a manifesting dark core perhaps played too close to home forthe American society of its time. Of course, these depictions of such men areheightened for the necessity of its genre, but it was in fact how such figuresinjected fear into the audiences. In defence of the case for Psycho, much ofthe initial fear comes from cultural paranoia of its era and the increasingembrace of democracy. As a result, through thriving U.

S. economy the culturalmovement shuffled society from the rural and urban lifestyle over to the quaintsuburban one, creating an easier way to building the idealistic white-washedreality that was fed to them through the consumerism of the 50’s. Suburbanculture became something that built itself around the notion that the familyhome is the center or life.

The fundamental purpose of suburbanization as GaryCross observes, was “ the desire for domestic seclusion” 2, the concept of thesuburban home and the reality of it became an increasingly isolated area thatbehaved like a private island almost; always remaining confined and incrediblyinward. The idea that weekdays were spent on child-care and weekends spent onmonotone activities involving gardening was a cookie-cutter template that verymuch inspired concepts within cinema, most importantly the perception that thesuburbia lifestyle was in fact a trap, a particularly dangerous one for women. This is where Alfred Hitchcock’s Psycho comes into play. Psycho is essentially split into two stories that areinterlaced within each other. Marion’s story is what drives the first have ofthe film, where we encounter her flight from Phoenix, her introduction to ourmain antagonist Norman Bates which ultimately yet surprisingly leads to herdemise. It is this brutal death scene with Marion in the shower that createsthe divide in the films narrative strand. The second half of the story becomesNorman’s as audience position is shifted, and it is within this narrative whenwe see Norman being pursued by Sam, Lila, Arbogast and the psychiatrist.

Through this structure it becomes apparentthat the first half of Psycho is the one that seems to depict a more dramaticdisruption with America’s vision of suburban living. Psycho represented a drastic shift in the nature of theAmerican horror film, that through the evident “ house next door” genre staplewas able to lace the film with connotations of the normal American suburbanlife. The audience, much like Marion in this scenario, have fantasied about thenotion of a wealthy family home, however on the other hand, very much dreamedof the escapism from the clutches of the suburban life, therefore we as anaudience take gratitude in watching on as Marion goes forth and indulges inthese fantasies.

In this situation however in classic Hitchcock manner he isquick to punish this desire we partake in from gazing. Hitchcock begins to abusethe advantage of voyeurism he once passed onto the audience by exploiting itspower and almost forcing the audience to witness as Marion is viciouslymurdered. Within the first half of Psycho Marion Crane our leadprotagonist within the current situation exposes herself to the corruption ofconsumption in the act of theft. Kendal Phillips notes that “ the resonance between the film’s first halfand suburbia helped to draw audiences into Marion’s story, to sympathise withher crimes and desires” 3 , which through investigation becomes apparentgiven the brutality of her shower scene death and its exploitive nature. We asthe audience are placed in a voyeuristic position that almost force us to rinseaway the sins of her actions, whilst also playing to the audiences ownvoyeuristic desires. This voyeuristic gratification is quickly diminished asit’s followed by a brutal act in the shower.

It is until Hitchcock delvesfurther into the dangerous of voyeurism when through the second act of the filmhe takes immense pleasure in showing the treacherous realities that accompanyyou when you apply yourself to the voyeuristic gaze. The real function ofthe second half of Psycho actually stems from its rhetorical meaning whichreveals almost carefully the emptiness of the suburban image which the firsthalf -One cannot ignore the physical transition Norman Bates goesthrough to embody the dead spirit of his mother as he clothes himself in femaleclothing to mimic his mother. He is undeniably impersonating a woman, andmatched up with his effeminate male persona reflects massively upon the notionof sexual identity or orientation problems within the character. Suchrepression was traditionally a valid motive for his extreme acts of violence, and given that society feared what they did not know, the sheer existence ofsuch a human would have been more shocking to them than any event that tookplace on their screen.

But how does this relate to becoming a disruption insocial construct? Kendall Phillips enlightened us with some intriguingintellect that said “ for many Americans – particularly those who were white andmiddle class – the cultural means of escaping their problems and anxietiesinvolved retreating to the suburbs” 1. In the 1950’s the popular image of anidealised suburban lifestyle was vaccinated into the Americans veins. Driven bya complex combination of rising economic mobility, a fear of immigrants andminorities, and a cultural universal fear of the city and its lifestyle.

This sort of template becomes one that is easy for thehorror genre to toy with and mould as a method of depiction on society’s owndemise. The suburban vision of a secluded and remote family home is revealed asa sterilised and suffocating environment where the human soul becomes warpedand distorted. Therefore it becomes extremely apparent when the main source ofhorror within Psycho being Norman Bates paired with the absurd belief that heembodies his dead mother distorts the “ suburban” American culture through theirown fear on minorities. The infliction on Norman being a homosexual man who inrealistic terms appears to be dabbling in the transition between gendersimplies that it is not the acts of the homicidal maniac that is Psycho’scentral method of fear, but the actual presence of its character Norman Batesand what he symbolises that is the actual selling point of terror here. Evensomething as simple as the imagery within Norman’s bedroom becomes soexpressionistic, one glance at the child’s bed with the stuffed animal, with classicalmusic blaring in his room is enough to highlight upon the idea of, not only asmothering mother, but an obsessive child.

If nothing else, looking at the slasher film can illustrate how the status of particular cyclesof horror production fluctuates over time. Their cheapness, crudeness andformulaic receptiveness, along with their apparent pandering to unsophisticatedteenage audiences, led to their being seen as disregarding in much the same wayas earlier types of horrors (hammer horror for example) has been seen asdegrading when they first appeared, degrading both in their reliance onscenarios of extreme violence in their crass and dumb exploitative nature. Inaddition, however, the slashers reliance on the stalking and terrorism of womenlead to a new change, that of misogyny, with the films themselves branded asviolent and pernicious reactions against feminism. In particular, the slasheroffered ‘ a conservative moralismregarding sexuality'” 4 which in itself was just one part of a broaderturn to the right that took place within American film and American societytowards the end of the 70’s. While not usually celebratory of the slasher. There was a willingness here to acknowledge that these films were complex andworthy of scrutiny, and that they might contain elements that had the potentialto be progressive with this especially the case so far as the representation ofthe female hero was concerned. The American horrorfilm has long been threatening its audiences with the sense that something darkand deadly was lurking at the edges of modern life. Dracula threatened defilingchaos, the thing initiated an invasion of inhumane monsters, and psychounravelled the illusions of the American dream.

In those films the threat wasalways something that was on its way. The American horrorfilm has been intimidating its audiences for a long time with the sense thatsomething dangerous was prowling at the edges of modern life. “ Draculathreatened defiling chaos, the thing initiated an invasion of inhumanemonsters, and psycho unravelled the illusions of the American dream”.

Imitation may be the highest form of flattery, but in 1978John Carpenters Halloween was able to borrow from the genre affairs of its pastto create a formula for the slasher sub-genre that became a staple that wouldlater stand as a genre blueprint, left to me imitated itself for generations. Ina metaphorical sense however, this creation is a formula that was fastened throughthe darkest fears and desires from American culture at its time, especiallysurrounding the suburban lifestyle. It’s simple stalk-and-slash narrative wouldbecome repetitive through repetition, with films such as Friday The 13th(1980) and A Nightmare on Elm Street (1984) there to rinse the formula of anysense of reality or authenticity, and although Halloween also became a slave tothe decline in slasher quality, there is no denying it was 1978’s Halloween thatestablished the slasher structure that, even through parody, remains intacttoday. Carpenter’s Halloween is debatably, the most successful horror film inAmerican history. The formula for horror established in the film was not only instantlyeffective but would dominate American horror films for the next decade. Before I delve into the details of just what it is thatmakes John Carpenter’s Halloween so successful in its crafting within thegenre, I must reflect on just how Carpenters fashioned the formula, as it isnot to be ignored that Halloween is merely a combination of various genrefeatures that came before it, stretching from the work of Craven to Hooper.

Though it is easy to make the assumption that Halloween birthed the sub-genrethat is here today, there is no denying that everything, even down to theholiday-themed event, was indeed borrowed from previous horror trends. Theinfluences spring from Canadian horror Black Christmas (1974), The Texas ChainSaw Massacre (1974), Last House on the Left (1972), and it was Vera Dika in Gameof Terror who demonstrated the plot structure across numerous slasher filmsremains in tact, such as “ 1. A traumaticpast event and 2. A commemoration of the event in the present 3. The holiday –aka Halloween” 5.

Although these rules do not specifically apply to each oneof the examples given above, it is evident that each one of the influencesmentioned could fit within these genre boundaries. In fact, this theory stoodmore inclined after Halloween. Films such as My Bloody Valentine (1981), AprilFools Day (1986), Silent Night, Deadly Night (1984), Mother’s Day(1980), Valentine (2001) are allbut a few who adapted Vera Dika’s theory, and whether through intention or was accidentalall withheld the formula from ever deteriorating, regardless of the poor tastein gore and originality some of these films failed to inspire. But what exactly was the appeal at its time, and what was itabout this particular combination of genre tropes that instantly created a stateof tension and mayhem for its audiences? Taken for face value Halloween is a hugelyunsettling and still quite terrifying horror film, and although for audiences nowthe films made sense of terror can only be read from the stalk-and-slashing ofMichael Myers paired with an unnerving piano-beat and synth score, for its timeit was perhaps the subtle connotations and reflective commentaries on U. S. economyand lifestyle that was the most unnerving aspect of the film and its formula.

Somethingto be questioned however is that is Carpenter’s Halloween is arguably aculmination of various anxieties and tensions within the cultural movement ofAmerica that had developed before its creation, dating back to 1931. Come 1978, it became apparent that Halloween was in fact a pinnacle moment in Americanhorror films, and could arguable be seen as the end of the American horror filmas the diverse and inconsistent elements of the modern horror film are merged fromCarpenter’s carefully constructed tale. Thus far, the story of American horror film has been one ofapproaching chaos. A brief recap seems in order. In 1931, Dracula represented thesense of social upheaval and chaos that threatened Americans during the periodbetween the two world wars. His was an invasive defilement but, at the sametime, a seductive lure over the edge of civilized boundaries. The danger ofinvasive chaos was brought closer, out of the gothic past and into the conceivableworld of the present.

In 1960 Alfred Hitchcock lured audiences into thetheatres to view another advancement in the modern horror film as the horrific chaoslurking on the boundaries of American culture was brought next door in thesympathetic form of Norman Bates. However, where Hawks has