

With cookie-cutter
template that very
much inspired

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With Psycho and Peeping Tom's appearances within the 1960's generated an adapted stereotype of the homicidal maniac which its time became popular. This new breed of genre formation seemed to have their psychos appear reserved, indefinitely effeminate, and initially harmless young men. Hitchcock was fixated in tearing back the containment shrouded over human affection to reveal the inner sickness within its antagonists. The physically generic American male with a manifesting dark core perhaps played too close to home for the American society of its time. Of course, these depictions of such men are heightened for the necessity of its genre, but it was in fact how such figures injected fear into the audiences. In defence of the case for Psycho, much of the initial fear comes from cultural paranoia of its era and the increasing embrace of democracy. As a result, through thriving U.S. economy the cultural movement shuffled society from the rural and urban lifestyle over to the quaint suburban one, creating an easier way to building the idealistic white-washed reality that was fed to them through the consumerism of the 50's. Suburban culture became something that built itself around the notion that the family home is the center of life.

The fundamental purpose of suburbanization as Gary Cross observes, was "the desire for domestic seclusion" 2, the concept of the suburban home and the reality of it became an increasingly isolated area that behaved like a private island almost; always remaining confined and incredibly inward. The idea that weekdays were spent on child-care and weekends spent on monotone activities involving gardening was a cookie-cutter template that very much inspired concepts within cinema, most importantly the perception

that the suburbia 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 are interlaced within each other.

Marion's story is what drives the first half of the film, where we encounter her flight from Phoenix, her introduction to our main antagonist Norman Bates which ultimately yet surprisingly leads to her demise. It is this brutal death scene with Marion in the shower that creates the divide in the film's narrative strand. The second half of the story becomes Norman's as audience position is shifted, and it is within this narrative when we see Norman being pursued by Sam, Lila, Arbogast and the psychiatrist.

Through this structure it becomes apparent that the first half of Psycho is the one that seems to depict a more dramatic disruption with America's vision of suburban living. Psycho represented a drastic shift in the nature of the American horror film, that through the evident "house next door" genre staple was able to lace the film with connotations of the normal American suburban life. The audience, much like Marion in this scenario, have fantasied about the notion of a wealthy family home, however on the other hand, very much dreamed of the escapism from the clutches of the suburban life, therefore we as an audience take gratification in watching on as Marion goes forth and indulges in these fantasies.

In this situation however in classic Hitchcock manner he is quick to punish this desire we partake in from gazing. Hitchcock begins to abuse the advantage of voyeurism he once passed onto the audience by exploiting its power and almost forcing the audience to witness as Marion is

viciously murdered. Within the first half of Psycho Marion Crane our lead protagonist within the current situation exposes herself to the corruption of consumption in the act of theft. Kendal Phillips notes that “ the resonance between the film’s first half and suburbia helped to draw audiences into Marion’s story, to sympathise with her crimes and desires”³, which through investigation becomes apparent given the brutality of her shower scene death and its exploitive nature. We as the audience are placed in a voyeuristic position that almost force us to rinse away the sins of her actions, whilst also playing to the audience’s own voyeuristic desires. This voyeuristic gratification is quickly diminished as it’s followed by a brutal act in the shower.

It is until Hitchcock delves further into the dangerous of voyeurism when through the second act of the film he takes immense pleasure in showing the treacherous realities that accompany you when you apply yourself to the voyeuristic gaze. The real function of the second half of Psycho actually stems from its rhetorical meaning which reveals almost carefully the emptiness of the suburban image which the first half - One cannot ignore the physical transition Norman Bates goes through to embody the dead spirit of his mother as he clothes himself in female clothing to mimic his mother. He is undeniably impersonating a woman, and matched up with his effeminate male persona reflects massively upon the notion of sexual identity or orientation problems within the character. Such repression was traditionally a valid motive for his extreme acts of violence, and given that society feared

what they did not know, the sheer existence of such a human would have been more shocking to them than any event that took place on their screen.

But how does this relate to becoming a disruption in social construct? Kendall Phillips enlightened us with some intriguing intellect that said "for many Americans - particularly those who were white and middle class - the cultural means of escaping their problems and anxieties involved retreating to the suburbs" 1. In the 1950's the popular image of an idealised suburban lifestyle was vaccinated into the Americans veins. Driven by a complex combination of rising economic mobility, a fear of immigrants and minorities, and a cultural universal fear of the city and its lifestyle.

This sort of template becomes one that is easy for the horror genre to toy with and mould as a method of depiction on society's own demise. The suburban vision of a secluded and remote family home is revealed as a sterilised and suffocating environment where the human soul becomes warped and distorted. Therefore it becomes extremely apparent when the main source of horror within Psycho being Norman Bates paired with the absurd belief that he embodies his dead mother distorts the "suburban" American culture through their own fear on minorities. The infliction on Norman being a homosexual man who in realistic terms appears to be dabbling in the transition between genders implies that it is not the acts of the homicidal maniac that is Psycho's central method of fear, but the actual presence of its character Norman Bates and what he symbolises that is the actual selling point of terror here. Even something as simple as the imagery within Norman's bedroom becomes so expressionistic, one glance at the

child's bed with the stuffed animal, with classical music blaring in his room is enough to highlight upon the idea of, not only a smothering mother, but an obsessive child.

If nothing else, looking at the slasher film can illustrate how the status of particular cycles of horror production fluctuates over time. Their cheapness, crudeness and formulaic receptiveness, along with their apparent pandering to unsophisticated teenage audiences, led to their being seen as disregarding in much the same way as earlier types of horrors (hammer horror for example) has been seen as degrading when they first appeared, degrading both in their reliance on scenarios of extreme violence in their crass and dumb exploitative nature. In addition, however, the slashers' reliance on the stalking and terrorism of women led to a new change, that of misogyny, with the films themselves branded as violent and pernicious reactions against feminism. In particular, the slasher offered 'a conservative moralism regarding sexuality'⁴ which in itself was just one part of a broader turn to the right that took place within American film and American society towards 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 and worthy of scrutiny, and that they might contain elements that had the potential to be progressive with this especially the case so far as the representation of the female hero was concerned. The American horror film has long been threatening its audiences with the sense that something dark and deadly was lurking at the edges of modern life. Dracula threatened

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In those films the threat was always something that was on its way. The American horrorfilm has been intimidating its audiences for a long time with the sense that something dangerous was prowling at the edges of modern life. “ Dracula threatened 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 1978 John Carpenters Halloween was able to borrow from the genre affairs of its past to create a formula for the slasher sub-genre that became a staple that would later stand as a genre blueprint, left to me imitated itself for generations. In a metaphorical sense however, this creation is a formula that was fastened through the darkest fears and desires from American culture at its time, especially surrounding the suburban lifestyle. Its simple stalk-and-slash narrative would become repetitive through repetition, with films such as Friday The 13th (1980) and A Nightmare on Elm Street (1984) there to rinse the formula of any sense of reality or authenticity, and although Halloween also became a slave to the decline in slasher quality, there is no denying it was 1978's Halloween that established the slasher structure that, even through parody, remains intact today. Carpenter's Halloween is debatably, the most successful horror film in American history. The formula for horror established in the film was not only instantly effective but would dominate American horror films for the next decade. Before I delve into the details of

just what it is that makes John Carpenter's Halloween so successful in its crafting within the genre, I must reflect on just how Carpenters fashioned the formula, as it is not to be ignored that Halloween is merely a combination of various genre features 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-genre that is here today, there is no denying that everything, even down to the holiday-themed event, was indeed borrowed from previous horror trends. The influences spring from Canadian horror *Black Christmas* (1974), *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), *Last House on the Left* (1972), and it was Vera Dika in *Game of Terror* who demonstrated the plot structure across numerous slasher films remains in tact, such as " 1. A traumatic past 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 one of the examples given above, it is evident that each one of the influences mentioned could fit within these genre boundaries. In fact, this theory stood more inclined after Halloween. Films such as *My Bloody Valentine* (1981), *April Fools Day* (1986), *Silent Night, Deadly Night* (1984), *Mother's Day* (1980), *Valentine* (2001) are all but a few who adapted Vera Dika's theory, and whether through intention or was accidental all withheld the formula from ever deteriorating, regardless of the poor taste in gore and originality some of these films failed to inspire. But what exactly was the appeal at its time, and what was it about this particular combination of genre tropes that instantly created a state of

tension and mayhem for its audiences? Taken for face value Halloween is a hugely unsettling and still quite terrifying horror film, and although for audiences now the films made sense of terror can only be read from the stalk-and-slashing of Michael Myers paired with an unnerving piano-beat and synth score, for its time it was perhaps the subtle connotations and reflective commentaries on U. S. economy and lifestyle that was the most unnerving aspect of the film and its formula.

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

In 1960 Alfred Hitchcock lured audiences into the theatres to view another advancement in the modern horror film as the horrific chaos lurking on the

boundaries of American culture was brought next door in the sympathetic form of Norman Bates. However, where Hawks has