

- and the new regimes of sensory perception emerging with mass-mediated modernity; Lash, 'Reflexive modernization: the aesthetic dimension', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 10, 1 (1993), pp. 1–23.
- 47 This is not to say that the cinema was unique or original in forging a modern type of publicness. It was part of, and borrowed from, a whole array of institutions – department stores, world fairs, tourism, amusement parks, vaudeville, etc. – that involved new regimes of sensory perception and new forms of sociability; at the same time, the cinema represented, multiplied, and deterritorialized these new experiential regimes. My understanding of the public sphere as a general, social 'horizon of experience' is indebted to Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *The public sphere and experience* (1972), translated by Peter Labanyi, Jamie Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff, introduced by M. Hansen (Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
- 48 S. Kracauer, 'Berliner Nebeneinander: Kara-Iki – Scala-Ball im Savoy – Menschen im Hotel', *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 17 February 1933; also, see 'Cult of Distraction' (1926) and other essays in Kracauer, *The mass ornament: Weimar essays*, translated, edited, and introduction by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1995).
- 49 Kracauer, *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 29 January 1926.
- 50 See, for instance, Eileen Bowser, 'Subverting the conventions: slapstick as genre', in Bowser, ed., *The slapstick symposium*, May 1985, The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Brussels, Fédération Internationale des Archives du Film, 1988), pp. 13–17; Crafton, 'Pie and Chase'; Charles Musser, 'Work, ideology and Chaplin's tramp', *Radical History*, 41 (April 1988), pp. 37–66.
- 51 Benjamin, 'One-way street' (1928), translated by Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected writings*, eds Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 476 (translation modified).
- 52 Antonin Artaud, 'The shell and the clergyman: film scenario', *Transition*, 29–30 (June 1930), p. 65, quoted in Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of film* (1960; Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 189; Louis Aragon, 'On decor' (1918) in Richard Abel, ed., *French film theory and criticism: a history/anthology, 1907–1939*, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1988), vol 1, p. 165. Also see in Abel, *French film theory and criticism*, Colette, 'Cinema: the cheat', Louis Delluc, 'Beauty in the cinema' (1917) and 'From Orestes to Rio Jim' (1921), Blaise Cendrars, 'The modern: a new art, the cinema' (1919), Jean Epstein, 'Magnification' (1921); 'Bonjour cinéma and other writings by Jean Epstein', translated by Tom Milne, *Afterimage*, no. 10 (undated), especially pp. 9–16; and Philippe Soupault, 'Cinema U.S.A.' (1924), in Paul Hammond, ed. and intr., *The shadow and its shadow: surrealist writings on the cinema* (London, British Film Institute, 1978), pp. 32–3.
- 53 Benjamin develops the notion of an 'optical unconscious' in 'A short history of photography' (1931), translated by Stanley Mitchell, *Screen*, 13 (Spring 1972), pp. 7–8, and in his famous essay, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction' (1936), *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (New York, Schocken, 1969), pp. 235–7. Also see his defense of *Battleship Potemkin*, 'A discussion of Russian filmic art and collectivist art in general' (1927), in Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, eds, *The Weimar Republic source book*, p. 627.

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19 Discipline and fun: *Psycho* and postmodern cinema

Linda Williams

If you've designed a picture correctly, in terms of its emotional impact, the Japanese audience would scream at the same time as the Indian audience.

(Alfred Hitchcock, quoted in Houston, 1980: 448)

Talk to psychoanalytic critics about *Psycho* and they will tell you how perfectly the film illustrates the perverse mechanisms of the medium. Talk to horror aficionados and they will tell you how the film represents the moment horror moved inside the family and home. Talk to anyone old enough to have seen *Psycho* on first release in a movie theater, however, and they will tell you what it felt like to be scared out of their wits. Fear of showers in the aftermath of the film's famous shower-murder ran rampant throughout the 1960s. Yet if it is popularly remembered how *Psycho* altered the bathing habits of the nation, it is oddly less well remembered how it fundamentally altered viewing habits.

The following study of the place of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) in film studies is interested in the critical and popular reception of a film that I believe has been crucial to the constitution of new ways of seeing, and new ways of feeling, films. As we shall see, these ways of seeing and feeling are simultaneously more distracted and more disciplined than previous cinema. Released in the summer of 1960 – a date which has been seen by some to mark the end of the 'classical' Hollywood style and mode of production and the beginning of a much more amorphously defined 'post-classical', postmodern cinema – *Psycho* has nevertheless not previously been viewed as a quintessentially postmodern film.¹

The term postmodern is enormously complicated in its application to cinema by the way the medium of cinema has, since its inception, automatically, but unreflectingly been equated with modernity. Fredric Jameson (1984) sees postmodernism in cinema as a relatively recent occurrence determined by the 'cultural logic of late capitalism' manifested in a schizophrenic, decentered subjectivity that can be seen in popular cinema in the pervasive mode of nostalgia and pastiche that flattens all time, or, more recently, in the prevalence of paranoid conspiracy thrillers in which communication technologies are often central metaphors. Anne Friedberg (1993) and Miriam Hansen

(this volume, Chapter 18), on the other hand, have both argued for the need first to sort out cinema's problematic relation to the modern, before leaping to embrace the 'p' word. For Friedberg the very apparatus of the cinema makes the stylistic categories of modernism and postmodernism inappropriate since it constructs a 'virtual, mobilized gaze' through a photographically represented 'elsewhere and elsewhere' that is already postmodern. Thus for Friedberg there is no precise moment of temporal rupture between the modern and the postmodern, but only a subtle transformation produced by the increasing centrality of the image-producing and reproducing apparatuses (1993: 170). For Hansen, the difficulty is the relation of the modernity of cinema and its so-called 'classical' Hollywood tendencies. Since cinema history has so often been presented as the juncture between the classical popular and the modernist avant-garde, it has been difficult to perceive the extent to which the quintessentially modern phenomenon of movies have also been popular.

I agree with Friedberg that the basic elements of the so-called postmodern condition consist in the 'instrumentalized acceleration of spatial and temporal fluidities' that have always operated in cinema (1993: 179). In this sense all cinema is, as Friedberg puts it, 'proto-postmodern'. A mere thematics of nostalgia – or in this case of schizophrenia – does not adequately define a postmodern film. I also agree with Hansen that from the contemporary perspective of postmodernity, it becomes possible to see the limitations of both a purely 'high modernist' understanding of cinematic modernism and a seemingly ahistorical popular 'classicism'. However, the temptation to identify specific films or genres which emphatically perform the kind of acceleration of fluidities Friedberg mentions and the kind of challenge to the 'classical' Hansen mentions remains. My own particular temptation is to locate within the history of cinematic reception a moment in which audience response to postmodern gender and sexual fluidity, schizophrenia, and irony began to become not only central attractions of 'going to the movies' but the very basis of new spectatorial disciplines capable of enhancing these attractions.

The place of *Psycho* in film studies

In order to argue for the postmodern nature of *Psycho*'s discipline and distraction, let me briefly survey the film's changing status within the field of film studies. David Bordwell's (1989) survey of the rhetoric of *Psycho* criticism is a good place to begin to identify what might be called the modernist appropriation of the film – approaches that Bordwell wishes to disparage. Bordwell's account of the interpretations of *Psycho* traces a remarkable process of legitimization whereby a film initially seen as a minor, low-budget, black-and-white Hitchcock 'thriller', not up to the 'master's' usual standards, was 5 years later the subject of an extremely influential chapter of a major auteur study, 10 years later a classic worthy of close analysis, and 15 years later an example of a subversive work of modernism. All subsequent interpretations, including those by Rothman (1982), Jameson (1990), and Žižek (1992), assume the centrality of the film to cinema studies as constituted and legitimized by reigning psychoanalytic paradigms of

film theory in the 1970s. Yet, as Bordwell shows, what is missing from such interpretations is a quality mentioned by Hitchcock himself and cited in an epigraph to Robin Wood's influential auteur study: this quality is 'fun'.

You have to remember that *Psycho* is a film made with quite a sense of amusement on my part. To me it's a *fun* picture. The processes through which we take the audience, you see, its rather like taking them through the haunted house at the fairground.

(Bordwell, 1989: 229; Wood, 1965: 106)

With *Psycho*'s entrance into the canon of the 20 or so most frequently taught and critically revered films, discussion of this fairground appeal to sensational fun fell by the wayside. The more exalted Hitchcock's critical reputation became, the less he, or anyone else, learned about the secrets of this fun. As he once noted, 'My films went from being failures to masterpieces without ever being successes' (Spoto, 1983: 456–7). So interested was Hitchcock in understanding the powerful effect *Psycho* had on audiences that he proposed that the Stanford Research Institute devote a study to understand its popularity. But when he found out they wanted US\$75 000 to do the research, he told them he was not that curious (Spoto, 1983: 457).

One reason so much academic film criticism has passed over the question of the film's fun has to do with psychoanalytic and feminist paradigms aligned with what David Rodowick has called the discourse of political modernism in which the notion of an endlessly deferred, unsatisfiable *desire* was central and the notion of visual pleasure (let alone 'fun') was anathema.² Within these paradigms *Psycho*'s modernism could only be understood as a rupture with 'readerly', and 'classical' forms of visual pleasure. This 'classical' pleasure might be understood judgmentally as transparent realism's support of bourgeois ideology (as in most 1970s' film theory) or, somewhat more neutrally, as a dominant style and mode of production (as in Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger's monumental work, *The classical Hollywood cinema: film style and mode of production, 1917–1960* (1985)). Of course it makes a difference which form of classicism a work like *Psycho* is seen to rupture.

For Kaja Silverman, it ruptures the classical 'system of suture' whereby coherent forms of meaning and unified subject positions are upheld. Silverman asserts the exceptional and deviant status of a film that obliges its viewing subjects 'to make abrupt shifts in identification', at one juncture inscribed as victim, 'at the next juncture as victimizer' (Silverman, 1983: 206). However, Silverman's psychoanalytic characterization of the viewer as 'castrated' comes close to presenting the experience of viewing the film as a form of punishment. For her – and for most critics who wrote about the film in this mode – the film is about painful castration and perversely thwarted desires. Spectators who are first identified with the neurotic desires of Marion are abruptly cut off from her and subsequently unwittingly caught up in the perverse and psychotic desires of Norman and are then, presumably, punished for such errant identification by a narrative that does not follow the 'classical' realist narrative trajectory of resolution and reassurance.³ For Silverman, and many others, the transparency and unity of the suture system are 'synonymous with the operations of classic narrative' and its ideological effects (1983: 214).

In contrast, in the Bordwell–Thompson paradigm of the ‘classical’ cinema, classicism stands not so much for realism and suture as for Aristotelian (and neo-Aristotelian) values of unity, harmony, and tradition that have endured in American cinema since the late ‘teens’. This classicism is seen as consisting in a strong narrative logic, coherence of cause and effect, space and time, psychological motivation, and character-driven events. To Bordwell and Thompson it is so stable and permanent a style that it is capable of absorbing whatever differences are introduced into the system. This is precisely what Bordwell argues with respect to *Psycho*. Noting that it is ‘certainly one of the most deviant films ever made in Hollywood’ because of its attack on such fundamental classical assumptions as the psychological identity of characters and the role accorded to narration, he nevertheless argues that ‘*Psycho* remains closer to *His Girl Friday* than *Diary of a Country Priest*’ (Bordwell *et al.*, 1985: 81).

For Bordwell, *Psycho*’s deviation from ‘classical’ unity is transitory and fleeting: ‘in Hollywood cinema, there are no subversive films, only subversive moments’ – moments ultimately absorbed by the relatively static hegemony of the group style (Bordwell *et al.*, 1985: 81). For Silverman, *Psycho*’s deviation from classical style is subversive, but it is a subversion that partakes of the unpleasure – even the quasi-punishment – of high modernism. Thus, although the answer to the questions of what *Psycho* ruptures, and how it does so, differs slightly depending on whether it is the 1970s’ version of ‘classical realist narrative’ – often equated with the novel – or the ‘classical Hollywood style’ – often traced back to the well-made play, and to neo-classical values – the common wisdom of both approaches is that the classical can be opposed to the innovation and rupture of the modern. Classicism thus seems to acquire something akin to a universal static appeal in tension with, but ultimately overpowering any deviation posed by, the modern.⁴

What is missing from both Bordwell’s and Silverman’s account of *Psycho*’s deviance from ‘classical’ norms is any sense of the popular, sensory pleasures of either the mainstream cinema from which it supposedly deviates or the specific nature of the different and ‘deviant’ pleasures of *Psycho* itself. The deeper problem may be, as Miriam Hansen has suggested, that the very category of the classical verges on anachronism when we are using the term to refer to ‘a cultural formation that was, after all, perceived as the incarnation of *the modern*’ in its methods of industrial production and mass consumption (page 337, emphasis in original). In other words, the category of the classical to which Bordwell wants to assimilate *Psycho*, and from which Silverman and others want to differentiate it, might better be reconceived as a form of what Hansen calls ‘popular modernism’. From this perspective, the Bordwell–Thompson–Staiger model of the tendency of the classical cinema to devour and assimilate the modern, and the 1970s’ film theory model of classical realism’s neutralization of the modern, are both inadequate to the task of understanding what was new, and fun, in popular, mainstream cinema.

My project with *Psycho* is therefore to account for some of its more sensational and ‘fun’ appeals. However, this fun does not represent a completely radical rupture with a popularly conceived, mainstream, Hollywood cinema in the business of providing sensually based thrills and pleasures. It represents, rather, a new intensification and

destabilization of the gendered components of that pleasure. Following both Anne Friedberg and Miriam Hansen, then, I would like to argue that *Psycho* offers an intensification of certain forms of visuality, and certain appeals to the senses through the image-producing and reproducing apparatuses that were already evident in what is more properly called the popular modernism of mainstream Hollywood cinema, but which changed under the incipient pressures of postmodernity.⁵

Psycho’s story of an eye

Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* opens on a famous ‘bird’s eye’ view of the Phoenix skyline; after surveying the city laterally the camera moves forward towards a half-open window blind, then through the window to allow us to become voyeurs of the aftermath of illicit sex in a sleazy hotel. Marion Crane and her lover Sam are half naked after a lunch-hour tryst. Never before in the history of mainstream American film had an erotic scene been played horizontally on a bed (Rebello, 1990: 86). Never before had a film so blatantly enlisted voyeuristic pleasures. Marion begins the scene supine, in bra and slip; Sam, with his shirt off, stands over her. Soon he joins her on the bed; they kiss and express frustration at having to meet like this.

Marion later steals \$40 000 in order not to have to meet in cheap hotels. When she gets lost *en route* to Sam, she meets Norman Bates who seems, like herself, caught in a ‘private trap’. After a cathartic conversation with Norman in the parlor of the motel, Marion decides to return the money. Norman peers through a peephole as she prepares for her shower. In extreme close-up we see a gigantic (male) eye gazing at a partly disrobed (female) body. Yet the twist of *Psycho* will turn out to be that this ‘male gaze’ unleashes not a conventional, masculine heterosexual desire (or assault) but a new being: the schizo-psychotic Norman–Mother who will act to foil Norman’s heterosexual desire.

The sudden, unexplained violence of the attack in the shower came as a great shock to audiences who had been set up by the first third of the film to expect the slightly tawdry love story of Marion and Sam. The shower-murder’s destabilizing effect on audiences was perfectly enacted by the shots that followed this attack. The same roving, voyeuristic camera eye that began the film appears to want to pick up the pieces of a narrative trajectory. But where should it go? What should it now see? The inquisitive, forward-propelled movement that inaugurated the story is now impossible; the camera can only look at the bloody water washing down the drain. Tracking ‘down the drain’ graphically enacts what has just happened to all narrative expectation with the murder of the film’s main character and star. From the darkness of the drain, and echoing the counter-clockwise spiral of the swirling water, vision re-emerges in a reverse pull-back out of the dead, staring, eye of Marion.

This baroque camera movement ‘down the drain’ and back out of a dead, unseeing eye enacts a spectatorial disorientation that was one of the most striking features of watching *Psycho*. In a moment this abyss will be filled by a new focus on Norman who will enter to clean up the mess and protect ‘Mother’. But from this point on, the audience cannot comfortably settle into a conventional narrative trajectory. What it will

do instead is begin to anticipate 'Mother's' next attack and to register the rhythms of its anticipation, shock, and release.

The above are familiar observations about *Psycho's* abrupt rupture with supposedly 'classical' narrative expectation. Yet anyone who has gone to the movies in the past 20 years – a period in which the influence of Hitchcock in general and *Psycho* in particular has become increasingly apparent – cannot help but notice how elements of this 'roller-coaster' sensibility – a sensibility that is grounded in the pleasurable anticipation of the next gut-spilling, gut-wrenching moment – has gained ascendancy in popular moving-image culture.⁶ Although *Psycho* is certainly not the direct antecedent of all these films, it does mark the important beginning of an era in which viewers began going to the movies to be thrilled and moved in quite visceral ways, and without much concern for coherent characters or motives.

The new 'cinema of attractions'

Scholars of early cinema have recently shown the importance of visual sensation in this period (see Gunning, this volume, Chapter 17). As these scholars have learned to appreciate the sensational pleasures of this pre-narrative, pre-'classical' cinema, they have often noted affinities between this cinema and the contemporary return to sensation in special effects, extreme violence, and sexual display. While narrative is not abandoned in ever more sensationalized cinema, it often takes second seat to a succession of visual and auditory 'attractions'. Tom Gunning's work on the early 'cinema of attractions' is based on this cinema's dual ability visually to 'show' something new or sensational and to 'attract' viewers to this show. Gunning shows how most early cinema before Griffith placed a premium on calling attention to the ability of the apparatus to offer attractions over its ability to absorb spectators into a diegetic world (Gunning, 1986). The term attraction is borrowed from Sergei Eisenstein whose theory of the 'montage of attractions' laid stress on the 'sensual or psychological impact' of images on spectators in their ability to disrupt spectatorial absorption into 'illusory depictions' (Eisenstein, 1988: 35). It was, in fact, the destabilizing, shock effect of the fairground roller coaster that Eisenstein had most in mind when he coined the term.⁷ And it is very much a quality like a roller-coaster ride that is the primary attraction of the new cinema described above.

The point of invoking the term 'attractions' (and the further association of the actual roller-coaster ride) is not to argue that contemporary postmodern American cinema has reverted to the *same* attractions of early cinema. While there is certainly an affinity between the two, this new regime entails entirely different spectatorial disciplines and engages viewers in entirely different social experiences.⁸ We might distinguish between these experiences by considering the attractions of the fair which beckon to viewers, surrounding them with sights and shows from which they might choose, to the experience of being caught up in the literal sensations of falling, flying, careening in the roller coaster. Film historian Thomas Schatz has attempted to specify the institutional, economic, technological, and generic changes that have constituted the new attractions

of what he prefers to call 'the New Hollywood' (Schatz, 1993). Schatz isolates a common feature of 'high-cost, high-tech, high-speed thrillers' which, in his predominantly negative account, were most dramatically ushered in by the 1973 blockbuster *Jaws* and followed by the *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *E.T.*, *Exorcist*, and *Godfather* mega hits.⁹ He characterizes these 'calculated blockbusters' as genre pastiches which are 'visceral, kinetic, and fast-paced, increasingly reliant on special effects, increasingly "fantastic" ... and increasingly targeted at younger audiences' (Schatz, 1993: 23).

What is especially interesting in Schatz's description is the attention to the new packaging of thrills and the connection of these thrills not simply to the fairground of Eisenstein's attractions but to the postmodern theme park of Baudrillardian simulacra. For the crucial point about all the films Schatz mentions is not simply that some of them actually *are* theme-park rides (for example, Universal's 'E.T.' and Disneyland's 'Star Tours'), but that many films now set out, as a first order of business, to simulate the bodily thrills and visceral pleasures of attractions that not only beckon to us but take us on a continuous ride punctuated by shocks and moments of speed-up and slow-down. Since Schatz wrote his essay, one of the highest grossing movies ever is a film about a dinosaur theme-park ride run amok (*Jurassic Park*, 1993). The fact that this film has now itself become a theme-park ride only confirms the observation that the destabilized ride, the ride that seems to careen most wildly out of control, is the one we increasingly want to take.

We might consider as well a telling moment in *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997), the film that has now passed *Jurassic Park* to become the biggest box-office hit of all time. Just before the stern end of the *Titanic* – the only part of the ship still afloat – sinks, it rides high up into the air and poises perpendicular to the water. With desperate passengers clinging to the railings, the towering upended stern pauses a breathless moment before plunging straight down into the deep. During this moment, behaving for all the world like a kid on a roller coaster preparing to ride the downhill plunge after the dramatic pause at the top, the film's hero Jack Dawson (Leonardo DiCaprio) cries out with more excitement than fear: 'This is it!' Dawson's exclamation, pinpointing the exact moment of the ride's greatest anticipation and fear speaks for the roller-coaster thrill of yet another film ride that has careened wildly out of control. Can the theme-park simulation be far behind?

Perhaps the best way to understand this specific appeal to the roller-coaster sensibilities of contemporary life is to compare a traditional roller-coaster ride – say the rickety wood and steel affair on Santa Cruz CA's boardwalk, part of the fun of which is riding high above the boardwalk, beach, and ocean – with the roller-coaster-style rides at Disneyland. These latter rides borrow from cinema in one of two ways. Either they simulate a diegetic world through cinematic *mise en scène* – but still literally move the body through actual space – such as the 'Matterhorn', or they are elaborate updates of early cinema's Hales Tours, 'moving' the audience through virtual, electronically generated, space, such as Tomorrowland's motion-simulation 'Star Tours'. This ride, which literally goes nowhere, feels just as harrowing as an actual roller coaster, even more so when the added narrative informs us that the robot pilot has malfunctioned

causing us nearly to collide with a number of objects. The narrative information that we are out of control enhances the virtual sensation of wild careening.

In both forms of ride, traditional roller coasters have become more like the movies; and movies, in turn, have become more like roller coasters. In this convergence of pleasures the contemporary, postmodern cinema has reconnected in important ways with the 'attractions' of amusement parks. But these attractions have themselves been thematized and narrativized through their connection with the entire history of movies. (Even the Matterhorn is based on a now forgotten 1959 movie, *Third Man on the Mountain*.) It would be a mistake, therefore, to think of these new forms of attractions as simply reverting (or regressing) to the spectatorial sensations of early cinema. Rather, we need to see them as scopic regimes demanding specific kinds of spectatorial discipline.

One aspect of that discipline was already being cultivated in the long lines beginning to form in the late 1950s at the newly built Disneyland. Just as the newly thematized roller coasters such as the Matterhorn and the later motion-simulation roller coasters such as Star Tours base their thrills on destabilizing movement through real, or simulated, narrativized space, so a film such as *Psycho* introduced, long before the blockbusters Schatz describes as defining the New Hollywood, what might be called a roller-coaster concept to the phenomenon of film viewing. For *Psycho* the ride began, like the rides at Disneyland, with the line and its anticipation of terror. It continued in the film proper with an unprecedented experience of disorientation, destabilization, and terror. When the forward-moving, purposeful voyeuristic camera eye 'washes' down the drain after the murder of Marion and emerges in reverse twisting out of her dead eye, audiences could, for the first time in mainstream motion picture history, take pleasure in losing the kind of control, mastery, and forward momentum familiar to what I will now resist calling the 'classical' narrative and will instead call popular modern cinema.

Billy Crystal's joke at the 1993 Academy Awards ceremony that *The Crying Game* proved that 'white men can jump' offers a good example of the kind of pleasurable destabilization that I am trying to identify. The shocking attraction of this film is the appearance of a masculine mark of gender where none was expected. This gender shock would not have been possible without the remarkable ability of audiences and critics to keep the secret of a key protagonist's gender. Gender shock is, of course, what *Psycho* also gave to its audience. The 'shock' of the surprise depends on the discipline of the kept secret. *Psycho* is the film that first linked an erotic display of sexual attractions to a shocking display of sexualized violence. But its attractions were no longer deployed within a stable heterosexual framework or within the hegemony of an exclusive masculine subjectivity. This new twist on some very 'basic instincts' is at the heart of postmodern gender and sexuality in popular cinema.

***Psycho* and genre study**

If today it is becoming possible to recognize *Psycho* as fun, it is partly because the popular contemporary slasher film has taught us this lesson through generic repetitions

of what was once so strikingly original in *Psycho*. But it is also because genre study has sometimes been the one place in film studies where repeatable audience pleasures, as opposed to thwarted or punitive desires, have been scrutinized. Genre study is also the place where some of the major truisms of contemporary film theory have been most thoroughly re-examined in the face of the social experiences of spectators. It is thus not surprising that it is in the study of the horror genre that we have received, however indirectly, an implicit appreciation of *Psycho*'s pivotal place in the transition to a postmodern visual culture.

Approached as a horror film, *Psycho* is often regarded as a turning point in the history of the genre: the moment when horror moved, in Andrew Tudor's words, 'from collective fears about threatening forces somewhere "out there"' to a 'sexuality, repression and psychosis' that is frighteningly close to home and potential in us all (1989: 46-7). Carol J. Clover's study of contemporary horror film, *Men, women, and chain saws*, has also commented on the enormous influence of a tale 'of sex and parents' (1992: 49) inaugurated by *Psycho*. In her chapter on the contemporary 'slasher film' that forms the nucleus of her book, Clover notices how powerfully a masculine viewer casts his emotional lot with a 'female-victim-hero'.¹⁰ This 'final girl', survivor of gruesome slice and dice mayhem, is, in her knife-wielding or chain-saw-wielding triumph at the end, anything but passive and not very feminine. Where traditional views of the horror genre have too simply polarized gender to active male monster and passive female victim, Clover's analysis of the low exploitative subgenre of the slasher film discovers that a vicarious 'abject terror, gendered feminine' is crucial to the genre, and that this terror is merely the starting point of a roller-coaster ride that careens wildly, between the gendered poles of feminine abjection and masculine mastery.

Clover develops Kaja Silverman's insight that identification in *Psycho* shifts between victim and victimizer, though she develops this mostly in relation to the contemporary horror tradition spawned by this film and she develops it as masochistic *pleasure*, not punishment. In order to understand sadomasochistic pleasures that are perhaps more basic to contemporary film viewing than any modernist rupture, Clover argues that all forms of contemporary horror involve the thrill of being assaulted – of 'opening up' to penetrating images. Using horror's own meta-commentary on itself to fill in what she calls the 'blind spots' of theories of spectatorship by Metz and Mulvey, Clover asserts the importance of 'gazes' that do not master their objects of vision but are reactive and introjective (Clover, 1992: 225-6).

Today, *Psycho*'s relation to the slasher genre and its peculiar gendered pleasure seems obvious. Yet, it is only in retrospect that we can place it 'in' the slasher subgenre, or perhaps only if we wish to include its sequels of the 1980s – *Psycho* II, III, and IV – as part of its text.¹¹ What, then, is *Psycho*? Or, more precisely, what was *Psycho* on first viewing and what has it become since? Through subsequent viewings it has become the familiar antecedent for familial 'slice and dice' horror. But audiences who first went to see it did not go to see a slasher horror film; they went to see a *Hitchcock* thriller with a twist – about which there was a great deal of excitement and quite a bit of mystery. The crucial significance of *Psycho*, measurable today in terms of its influence on the slasher film, but measurable then in its new 'attractions' challenging certain production code taboos

against depictions of both sex and violence, is not that it actually showed more sex or more violence than other films – which it, literally speaking, did not – but rather, as Clover notes, that it sexualized the motive, and the action, of violence (Clover, 1992: 24).

Just how we understand this sexualization of violence seems to be the key issue in assessing the impact, the influence, and the postmodernity of *Psycho*'s particular roller-coaster ride of attractions. The shower sequence is one of the most analysed sequences in all American film. Certainly, part of its fame derives from the technical brilliance of the way it is cut. Many a film teacher, myself included, has taught the importance of editing by punning on its powerful effects of cutting – of both flesh and film.

It was almost a reflex of post-structuralist psychoanalytic criticism to 'read' the shower sequence as an act of symbolic castration carried out on the presumably already 'castrated' body of a woman with whom spectators have identified. Marion's body – insisted on by some form of undress in two scenes prior to the shower murder – unleashes Norman's desire for her which in turn unleashes 'Mrs Bates', the mother who kills to protect her son from the sexual aggressions of 'loose' women. As I once put it: 'the woman is both victim and monster . . . Norman, the matricide and killer of several other women, is judged the victim of the very mother he has killed' (Williams, 1984: 93–4). The female monster unleashed by the female victim seemed to permit the simultaneous vilification and victimization of women. Yet as Carol Clover has correctly pointed out, such a feminist critique does not do justice to the obvious bisexuality of the slasher killers spawned by Norman, nor to the new-found strength and resourcefulness of the female victims spawned by Marion and her sister (Clover, 1992: 21–64).

Barbara Creed has tried to argue that what has been missing from psychoanalytically based studies of horror film has been an appreciation of the disturbing power of the 'monstrous feminine'.¹² Creed has a point about the Kristevan powers of (abject, female) horror. However, because she points to the monstrous feminine as an archetype, she fails to account for the remarkable emergence of this monstrosity in the wake of the influence of *Psycho*, or for the historical importance of *Psycho* itself. For the really striking fact about this film is not its illustration of a previously unacknowledged archetype, but its archetype's influential emergence in 1960. This is not to say that there had not been female monsters before *Psycho* or that conventional male monsters of classic horror were not often sexually indeterminate.¹³ It is to say, however, that *Psycho*'s array of dislocations – between normal and psychotic; between masculine and feminine; between Eros and fear; even between the familiar Hitchcockian suspense and a new, frankly gender-based horror – are what make it an important precursor of the thrill-producing visual attractions Schatz discusses as crucial to the New Hollywood and which I would like to identify as postmodern. Thus Hitchcock's decision to make the traditional monster of horror cinema a son who dresses up as his own mummified mother was a decision not so much to give violent power to 'the monstrous feminine', but, much more dramatically, to destabilize masculine and feminine altogether.

'He's a transvestite!' says the district attorney in a famously inadequate attempt to explain the root cause of Norman's disturbance. The line has been criticized, along with the psychiatrist's lengthy speech about how Norman became his mother, as Hitchcock's jab at the inadequacies of clinical explanation. Certainly Norman is not a mere

transvestite – that is, a person whose sexual pleasure involves dressing up as the opposite sex – but rather a much more deeply disturbed individual whose whole personality had at times, as the psychiatrist puts it, 'become the mother'. Yet in the scene that supposedly shows us that Norman has finally 'become the mother', what we really see is Norman, now without wig and dress, sitting alone in a holding area reflecting, in the most feminine of the many voices given Mrs Bates, on the evil of 'her' son.

In other words, while ostensibly illustrating that Norman now 'is' the mother, the film provides a visual and auditory variation on Norman's earlier sexual indeterminacy. The shock of this scene is the combination of young male body and older female voice: visual evidence of male, aural evidence of female. It is thus not the recognition of one identity overcome by another that fascinates so much as the slippage between masculine and feminine poles of an identity. The film's penultimate image drives this home. Briefly emerging as if from under Norman's face is the grinning mouth of Mrs Bates's corpse. Again, the shock is that of indeterminacy: both Norman *and* mother. Thus the psychiatrist's point that Norman is entirely mother is not visually or aurally proven. Instead, these variations of drag become overtly thematized as ironic, and almost camp, forms of play with audience expectations regarding the fixity of gender.¹⁴ Norman is not a transvestite but transvestitism is a major 'attraction' of these scenes for audiences.

A similar point can be made for the earlier climax of *Psycho* during Norman–Mrs Bates's thwarted attack on Lila in the fruit cellar. Here again the 'attraction' is neither the appearance of Mrs Bates as woman, nor the revelation, when 'her' wig falls off in the struggle, that 'she' is her son. At the precise moment that Norman's wig begins to slip off in his struggle with Sam – when we see a masculine head emerging from under the old-lady wig – we witnessed what was at the time a truly shocking absence of gender stability. Gender of the monster is revealed in this film in very much the terms Judith Butler offers: as an imitation without an origin, a corporeal style of performance, a construction (1990: 138–9).

There can be no doubt, however, that one primary 'attraction' of the film's horror is its spectacular mutilation of a woman's naked body. Abject terror, as Clover puts it, is 'gendered feminine' (1992: 51). There is also no doubt that the introduction of certain psychoanalytic conventions on screen conspire to vilify the mother and her sexuality as cause of Norman's derangement. These are certain misogynist features of a film that, for a variety of reasons, struck a responsive chord with American audiences in a way that Michael Powell's similar, but more truly modernist, 'laying bare' of the device of voyeurism in *Peeping Tom* (also 1960) did not.¹⁵ Over the next 20 years the horror genre would begin to establish a formula for reproducing, and refining, the various sexual and gendered elements of this experience in ways that would not lessen the attraction of the violence against women but which would empower the 'final girl' to fight back and invite spectators to identify alternately with her powerless victimization and the subsequently empowered struggle against it.

Psycho thus needs to be seen not as an exceptional and transgressive experience working against the classical norms of visual pleasure but rather as an important turning point in the pleasurable destabilizing of sexual identity within what would become the genre of slasher horror: it is the moment when the experience of going to the movies

began to be constituted as providing a certain generally transgressive sexualized thrill of promiscuous abandonment to indeterminate, 'other' identities. To undergo this abandonment, however, audiences had to be *disciplined*, not in Silverman's sense of being punished, but in Foucault's sense of voluntarily submitting to a regime.

Disciplining fear: 'the care and handling of *Psycho*'

From the very first screenings of the film, audience reaction, in the form of gasps, screams, yells, and even running up and down the aisles, was unprecedented. Although Hitchcock later claimed to have calculated all this, saying he could hear the screams when planning the shower montage, screenwriter Joseph Stefano claims, 'He was lying . . . We had no idea. We thought people would gasp or be silent, but screaming? Never' (Rebello, 1990: 117).

No contemporary review of the film ignored the fact that audiences were screaming as never before. Here are some typical reviews:

Scream! Its a good way to let off steam in this Alfred Hitchcock shockeroo, . . . so scream, shiver and shake and have yourself a ball.

(*LA Examiner*, 8 November 1960)

So well is the picture made . . . that it can lead audiences to do something they hardly ever do any more – cry out to the characters, in hopes of dissuading them from going to the doom that has been cleverly established as awaiting them.

(Callenbach, 1960: 48)

And on the negative side:

Director Hitchcock bears down too heavily in this one, and the delicate illusion of reality necessary for a creak-and-shriek movie becomes, instead, a spectacle of stomach-churning horror.

(*Time*, 27 June 1960: 51)

Psycho is being advertised as more a shocker than a thriller, and that is right – I am shocked, in the sense that I am offended and disgusted . . . The clinical details of psychopathology are not material for trivial entertainment; when they are used so they are an offense against taste and an assault upon the sensibilities of the audience . . . it makes you feel unclean.

(Robert Hatch, *The Nation*, 2 July 1960)

Having unleashed such powerful reactions, the problem now was how to handle them. According to Anthony Perkins the entire scene in the hardware store following the shower-murder, the mopping up and disposal of Marion's body in the swamp were inaudible due to leftover howls from the previous scene. Hitchcock even asked Paramount Studio head Lew Wasserman to allow him to remix the sound to allow for the audience's vocal reaction. Permission was denied (Rebello, 1990: 163).

Hitchcock's unprecedented 'special policy' of admitting no one to the theater after the film had begun was certainly a successful publicity stunt, but it had lasting repercussions

in its transformation of the previously casual act of going to the movies into a much more *disciplined* activity of arriving on time and waiting in an orderly line. As Peter Bogdanovich (1963) has noted, it is because of *Psycho* that audiences now go to movies at the beginning. One popular critic wrote in a Sunday arts-and-leisure section about the new policy:

At any other entertainment from ice show to baseball games, the bulk of the patrons arrive before the performance begins. Not so at the movies which have followed the policy of grabbing customers in any time they arrive, no matter how it may impair the story for those who come in midway.

(*View*: 1)

This reviewer then takes it upon himself to advocate the exhibition policy so important to *Psycho*'s success and impact on audiences: that no one be admitted late to the film. Hitchcock defended this policy in an article published in the *Motion Picture Herald* saying that the idea came to him one afternoon in the cutting room.

I suddenly startled my fellow-workers with a noisy vow that my frontwards-backwards-sideways-and-inside-out labors on 'Psycho' would not be in vain – that everyone else in the world would have to enjoy the fruits of my labor to the full by seeing the picture from beginning to end. This was the way the picture was conceived – and this was how it had to be seen.

(6 August, 1960: 17–18)

This 'policy', unheard of in the USA at the time, necessitated important changes in the public's movie-going habits: audiences had to be trained to learn the times of each show; if they were late they had to wait for the next screening; and, once they bought their tickets, they had to be induced to stand patiently in ticketholder lines. The theater managers new buzzwords were to 'fill and spill' theaters efficiently at precise intervals, thus affording more screenings. The unprecedented discipline required to 'fill and spill' the theater was in paradoxical contrast to the equally unprecedented thrills of the show itself.¹⁶

Here is how another columnist described the discipline and thrill of seeing the film over a month after its release:

There was a long line of people at the show – they will only seat you at the beginning and I don't think they let you out while it's going on . . . A loudspeaker was carrying a sound track made by Mr. Hitchcock. He said it was absolutely necessary – he gave it the British pronunciation like 'nessary'. He said you absolutely could not go in at the beginning. The loudspeaker then let out a couple of female shrieks that would turn your blood to ice. And the ticket taker began letting us all in. A few months ago, I was reading the London review of this picture. The British critics rapped it. 'Contrived', they said. 'Not up to the Hitchcock standards'. I do not know what standards they were talking about. But I must say that Hitchcock . . . did not seem to be that kind of person at all. Hitchcock turned us all on. Of all the shrieking and screaming! We were all limp. And, after drying my palms on the mink coat next to me, we went out to have hamburgers. And let the next line of

people go in and die. Well, if you are reading the trade papers, you must know that 'Psycho' is making a mint of money. This means we are in for a whole series of such pictures.

(Delaplane, 1960)

How shall we construe this new disciplining of audiences to wait in line? Michel Foucault writes that 'discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, "docile" bodies' (1978: 138). He means that what we experience as autonomy is actually a subtle form of power. Obviously the bodies of the *Psycho* audience were docile. Indeed, the fun of the film was dependent upon the ability of these bodies to wait patiently in line in order to catch the thrills described above. No one coerced them to arrive on time and wait in line. This discipline is for fun. And the fun derives partly from the exhilaration of a group submitting itself, as a group, to a thrilling sensation of fear and release from fear. In this highly ritualized masochistic submission to a familiar 'master', blood turns to ice, shrieking and screaming are understood frankly as a 'turn on', followed by climax, detumescence, and the final the recovery and renewal of (literal and metaphorical) appetite.

The passage also offers a rich mix of allusions to gender, class, and nationality: the mink coat next to the columnist is clear indication that these pleasures were not for men only, as well as evidence that a wide variety of the public participated. Hamburger counters mink; snooty English 'standards' are foils to America's favorite fantasy of the leveling democratic entertainment of 'the movies'. What we see here is a conception of the audience as a group with a common solidarity – that of submitting to an experience of mixed arousal and fear and of recognizing those reactions in one another and perhaps even performing them for one another.¹⁷

This audience, surveilled and policed with unprecedented rigor outside the theater, responding with unprecedented vocalized terror inside the theater, is certainly disciplined in the sense of Foucault's term. But it is also an audience with a new-found sense of itself as bonded around the revelation of certain terrifying visual secrets. The shock of learning these secrets produces a camaraderie, a pleasure of the group, that was, I think, quite new to motion pictures. A certain community was created around *Psycho*'s secret that gender is often not what it seems. The shock of learning this secret helped produce an ironic sadomasochistic discipline of master and slave with Hitchcock hamming up his role as sadistic master and with audiences enjoying their role as submissive victims.

An important tool in disciplining the *Psycho* audience were three promotional trailers, two quite short and one six-minute affair that has become a classic. All hinted at but, unlike most 'coming attractions', refrained from showing too much of the film's secret. In the most famous of these Hitchcock acts as a kind of house-of-horrors tour guide at the Universal International Studio set of the Bates Motel and adjacent house (now the Universal Studios Theme Park featuring the *Psycho* house and motel). Each trailer stressed the importance of special discipline: either 'please don't tell the ending, it's the only one we have' – or the importance of arriving on time. But there was also another trailer, not seen by the general public but even more crucial in inculcating audience discipline. Called 'The care and handling of *Psycho*' this was not a preview of the film but a filmed 'press book' teaching theater exhibitors how properly to exhibit the film and police the audience.¹⁸

The black-and-white trailer begins with a scene outside the DeMille Theater in New York where *Psycho* began a limited engagement before being released nationwide. To the accompaniment of Bernard Herrmann's driving violin score we see crowds in line for the film. A man in a tuxedo is a theater manager, the narrator urgently informs us, in charge of implementing the new policy, which the trailer then explains. The sly voice of Alfred Hitchcock is heard over a loudspeaker explaining to the waiting audience that 'This queuing up is good for you, it will make you appreciate the seats inside. It will also make you appreciate *Psycho*.' The mixture of polite inducement backed up by the presence of Pinkerton guards, and a life-size lobby card cut-out of Hitchcock pointing to his watch, add up to a rather theatrical, sadomasochistic display of coercion. We hear Hitchcock induce the audience to keep the 'tiny, little horrifying secrets' of the story while insisting on the democracy of a policy that will not even make exceptions for the Queen of England or the manager's brother.

Perhaps the most striking thing about this trailer is that it worked; not only did audiences learn to arrive on time but they eagerly joined the visible crowds on the sidewalks waiting to see the film. When shaken spectators left the theater they were grilled by those waiting in line but never gave away the secret (Rebello, 1990: 161). By exploiting his popular television persona as the man who loves to scare you, and the man audiences love to be scared by, Hitchcock achieved the kind of rapt audience attention, prompt arrival, and departure, that would have been the envy of a symphony orchestra. Yet, he achieved this attention with the casual, general audience more used to the distractions of amusement parks than the discipline of high culture.

On 17 July 1955 Disneyland had already opened its doors to large numbers of visitors taking in the total visual attraction of a variety of film-orientated 'fantasy lands'. In August 1964 Universal Studios began offering tramride tours of its movie sets and would eventually expand to a more movie-related and thrill-inducing competitor to Disneyland, including the *Psycho* set and a presentation of how certain scenes from the film were shot.¹⁹ Clearly, the sort of discipline that Hitchcock was teaching was more like that of the crowds at these theme parks than any kind of simple audience taming. Lawrence Levine has written compellingly about the taming of American audiences during the latter part of the nineteenth century. He argues that while American theater audiences had in the first half of the nineteenth century been a highly participatory and unruly lot, spitting tobacco, talking back to actors, arriving late, leaving early, stamping feet, applauding promiscuously, they were gradually tamed by the arbiters of culture to 'submit to creators and become mere instruments of their will, mere auditors of the productions of the artist' (1988: 183).

Levine tells, for example, of an orchestra conductor in Cincinnati in 1873 who ordered the doors to be closed when he began to play, admitting no one until the first part was finished. When he was resisted his argument was 'When you play Offenbach or Yankee Doodle, you can keep your doors open. When I play Handel . . . they must be shut. Those who appreciate music will be here on time' (1988: 188). Levine argues that this late-nineteenth-century American audience lost a sense of itself as an active force, a 'public', and became instead a passive 'mute receptor' of the will of the artist through this discipline. New divisions between high and low meant that it was more and more

difficult to find audiences who could serve as microcosms of society, who felt like participants in a general culture, and who could articulate their opinions and feelings vocally (Levine, 1988: 195).

With Hitchcock's policy trailer we certainly see some elements of Levine's tamed audience: Pinkerton guards, loudspeakers, 'docile bodies' waiting patiently in line, not to mention Hitchcock's disembodied voice insisting that seeing the film from the beginning is 'required'. Certainly, Hitchcock asserts 'the will of the artist' over the audience. However, this will is in the service of producing visceral thrills and ear-splitting screams that are a far cry from the politely suppressed coughs of the concert hall. It seems that the efficiency and discipline demonstrated outside the theater need to be viewed in tandem with the unprecedented patterns of fear and release unleashed inside.

Hitchcock's discipline, like that of the emerging theme parks, was not based on the stratification of audiences into high and low, nor, as would later occur in the ratings system, was it based on the stratification of different age-groups. Nor was it based on the acquisition of the same kind of passivity and silence that Levine traces in late-nineteenth-century America. In Hitchcock's assumption of the persona of the sadist who expects his submissive audience to trust him to provide a devious form of pleasure, we see a new bargain struck between film-maker and audience: if you want me to make you scream in a new way and about these new sexually destabilized secrets, the impresario seems to say, then you must line up patiently to receive this thrill.

Hitchcock is, of course, only doing what he often did in his trailers: teasing the audience with their paradoxical love of fear, shock, surprise, and suspense – all emotions which he can rely upon audiences to know that he will manipulate for maximum pleasure. His famous cameos in the early parts of most of his films are another way of teasing the audience, though also of disciplining them to pay close attention. Like the patient crowds standing in line at Disneyland, or the crowds that would eventually stand in line to see the *Psycho* house and motel at Universal Studios,²⁰ these disciplined audiences were a far cry either from 1970s' film theory's notion of distanced, voyeuristic mastery or Levine's passive, mute receptors.

Psycho is popularly remembered as the film that violated spectatorial identification with a main character by an unprecedented killing off of that character in the first third of the film. But in order for audiences to experience the full force of that violation, Hitchcock required the kind of rapt entrance into the spell of a unified space and time that the so-called 'classical' theories of spectatorship assume but which the popular Hollywood cinema, with its distracted viewers wandering into theaters at any old time, had perhaps only rarely delivered. *Psycho* thus needs to be viewed as a film in which disciplined audiences arrived on time in order to be attentively absorbed into the filmic world and narrative, and in which distracted 'attractions' of the amusement-park variety are equally important. The more rapt viewers' initial attention, the more acute the shock when the rug was pulled out from under them.

Lawrence Levine's analysis of the nineteenth-century taming of the audience argues a singular process of repressing unruly body functions. Theaters, opera houses, large movie houses were, for him, agents in teaching audiences to adjust to new social

imperatives, training them to keep strict control of emotional and physical processes. Levine may be right that bodily repression was necessary to concert and theater goers. But the (mostly unwritten) history of cinema reception²¹ will require more than a concept of bodily repression to understand the various disciplines of film-going that have taken place in this century. It will certainly require a more Foucauldian concept of discipline as productive of certain precise bodily regimes of pleasure rather than the mere repression of the physical. For, as we have seen, *Psycho* simultaneously elicits more bodily reaction along with greater bodily discipline.²²

The lesson of the 'care and handling' of *Psycho* is thus how first Hitchcock, and then Hollywood, learned how greater spectatorial discipline could pay off in the distracted attractions of a postmodern cinema. *Psycho* needs to be seen as an historical marker of a moment when popular American movies, facing the threat of television, in competition and cooperation with new kinds of amusement parks, began to invent new scopical regimes of visual and visceral 'attraction'. In this moment visual culture can be seen getting a tighter grip on the visual pleasures of film spectators through the reinstitution of a postmodern cinema of attractions.

One way of picturing the variety of these regimes and this perhaps unique moment of discipline and distraction that was *Psycho* is to consider an entire series of publicity photos of audiences watching *Psycho* published in the same trade publication. These photos were taken at the Plaza Theatre, London, during the film's first run in Britain. Figure 19.1 shows fragments of a very intense-looking audience, jaws set, looking hard except for a few people with averted eyes. We can note here the somewhat defensive postures indicating moments of anticipation – arms crossed; one person holding ears, suggesting the importance sound has in cueing the anticipation of terror.

Figure 19.2 shows closer detail of what may be the same audience. Here we begin to note significant gender differences. Whereas the men look intently, most women cringe, refusing to look at the screen as I had once suggested women do at horror films (Williams, 1984), or they cover their ears [Figure 19.2(a)]. On the other hand, Figure 19.2(b) shows just how dramatically male viewers seem to assert their masculinity by looking (note the 'cool' man with clenched jaw who both looks and clutches his tie).

Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that these scared women in the audience are looking at one of the following: the 'scary woman' (Mrs Bates) or a terrified woman being attacked (Marion, Figure 19.3). What is the best way to describe the specifically gendered reactions of these women spectators? Consider the experience of watching the first attack on Marion in the shower. At this point in the film all viewers can be assumed to be somewhat identified with Marion and to be relatively, though not completely, unprepared for the attack – after all the film is called *Psycho*. They are taken by surprise by this first irrational irruption of violence, mystified by the lack of a distinct view of the attacker, shocked by the eerie sound and rhythms of screaming violins blending with screaming victim, and energized by the rapid cutting of the scene. This much is true for all spectators. Why then do women appear so much more moved, often to the point of grabbing ears, averting and covering eyes? The question, it seems, is whether female viewers can be said to be more closely identified with Marion, especially at the height of her fear and pain, than the males? Do we identify more, and thus find ourselves more



Figure 19.1 Fragment of the audience at the Plaza Theatre, London: bracing itself to view *Psycho*.
Reproduced courtesy of The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.



Figure 19.2 Fragment of the audience at the Plaza Theatre, London: gendered responses to *Psycho*.
Reproduced courtesy of The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.



Figure 19.3 Marion in the shower, *Psycho* (1960).

Reproduced courtesy of The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

terrorized, because we are insufficiently distanced from the image in general and from this tortured image of our like in particular?

Men, in contrast, may identify with Marion but they forcefully limit their correspondence to her. Since terror is itself, as Carol Clover aptly notes, 'gendered feminine', the more controlled masculine reaction immediately distances itself from the scared woman on the screen. It more quickly gets a grip on itself (as does the man with his tie) and checks its expression. Yet at the same time that it exercises this control, this masculine reaction fully *opens up* to the image to, as Clover puts it, 'take it in the eye' (1992: 202). If, as Clover argues, all forms of contemporary horror involve the masochistic and feminine thrill of 'opening up' to, of being 'assaulted' by, penetrating images, we might say that the men can be seen to open up more because they feel they 'correspond' less to the gender of the primary victims (and to the femininity of fear itself).

For the woman viewer, however, this 'taking it in the eye' pleasures her less, initially, than it does the man. Because women already perceive themselves as more vulnerable to penetration, as corresponding more to the assaulted, wide-eyed, and opened-up female victim all too readily penetrated by knife or penis, women's response is more likely to

close down, at least initially, to such images. This is to say that the mix of pleasure and pain common to all horror viewing, and aligned with a feminine subject position, is negotiated differently by men than by women. Thus all viewers experience a second degree of vicarious pain that is felt as feminizing. But in their greater vulnerability, some women viewers react by acting to filter out some of the painful images. I once took the woman's refusal to look at the screen as a sensible resistance to pain (Williams, 1984). Now I am more inclined to think that, like the general audiences who were disciplined to arrive on time, a much more complex and disciplined negotiation of pleasure and pain is taking place, and that this negotiation takes place over time, as we watch first this film and then its host of imitators – something these instantaneous photos cannot register.

In involuntarily averting their eyes, for example, women viewers partially rupture their connection with the female victim. In the process, we may also establish a new connection with the other women in the audience whose screams we hear. This new connection then itself becomes a source of highly ritualized feminine pleasure. We enjoy being scared *with one another* – a camaraderie that also allows us to measure our difference from Marion. Notice, for example, the smile on the half-hidden mouth of the woman in Figure 19.4.

Thus, while our first reactive, introjective experience of fear may elicit almost involuntary screams and the 'closing down' response of not looking, we do not stop feeling

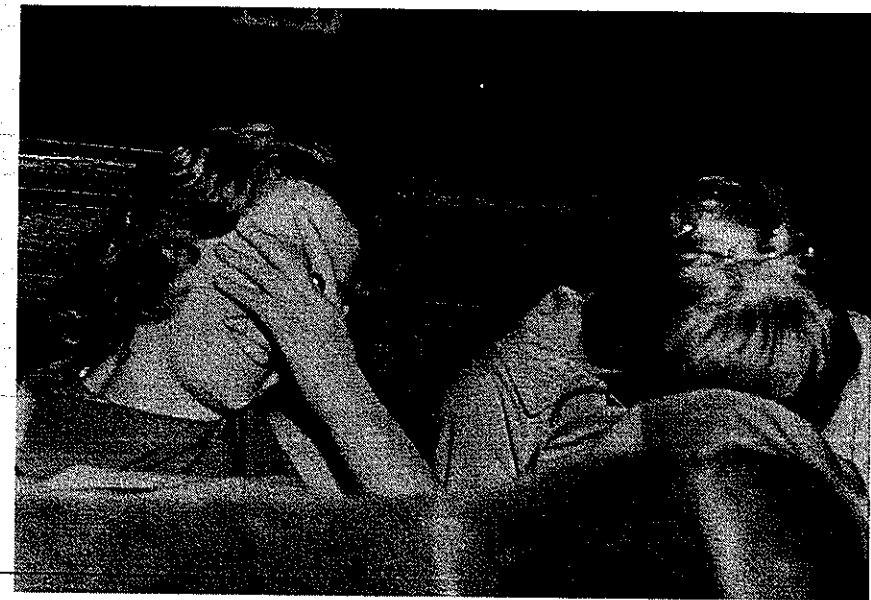


Figure 19.4 Fragment of the audience at the Plaza Theatre, London: the gendered pleasure of fear.

Reproduced courtesy of The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

the film because we stop looking. In fact, our reliance on musical cues may even induce us to feel more at this juncture. What are the violins saying about the danger of looking again? What is my girlfriend's posture as she leans into me telling me about how I might respond? Eventually, however, through the familiarity afforded by the film's repeated attacks, we begin to discipline ourselves to the experience of this reactive, introjective gaze. At this point some women may discipline themselves to keep their eyes more open.

Of course, these pictures do not really tell what audiences felt, and like all still images these are frozen moments, a few hundredths of seconds out of a 109-minute film. They could also have been faked. Nevertheless they dramatize, in acute body language, some general points about the changing distractions and disciplines of film spectatorship inaugurated by *Psycho*.

The first point is that however much we speak about the disembodied and virtual nature of cinematic, and all postmodern, forms of spectatorship, these are still real bodies in the theater, bodies which acutely feel what they see and which, even when visually 'assaulted', experience various mixes of vulnerability and pleasure. These people are on a kind of roller coaster which they have been disciplined to ride, and discipline is an enormously important part of the social experience of going to the movies.

A second point is that this discipline may involve the audience in a new level of performativity. While learning to enjoy the roller-coaster ride of a new kind of thrill, the audience may begin to perceive its own performances of fear as part of the show. As we also saw in the extended description of seeing *Psycho* by the columnist, these performances – screaming, hiding eyes, clutching the self as well as neighbors – may be important to the pleasures audiences take, as a group, in the film. Such spectatorial performances are certainly not new with *Psycho*. However, the self-consciously ironic manipulations of 'the master' eliciting these performances from audiences in a film that is itself about the performance of masculinity and femininity represents a new level of gender play and destabilization that I take to be a founding moment of the greater awareness of the performativity of gender roles increasingly ushered in by a postmodern, 'post-classical' reception of cinema.

A final point is that the discipline involved here – both inside and outside the theater – takes place over time. Spectators who clutched themselves, covered eyes, ears, and recoiled in fear at the shower-murder may have been responding involuntarily, the first time, to an unexpected assault. But by the film's second assault this audience was already beginning to play the game of anticipation and to repeat its response in increasingly performed and gender-based gestures and cries. By the time the game of slasher-assault became an actual genre in the mid-1970s, this disciplined and distracted, this attentive, performing audience will give way to the equivalent of the kids who raise their hands in roller-coaster rides and call out 'look 'ma, no hands!'

To find the experience of the popular, fun *Psycho* beneath the layers of high modernist critique or an all-embracing classicism is neither to denigrate the film's intelligence, nor the intelligence of the audiences who have enjoyed it. It is to recognize, rather, how important the visual and visceral experience of narrativized roller coasters have become and how assiduously audiences have applied themselves to the discipline of this fun.

Endnotes

- 1 Slavoj Žižek, for example, claims that it is 'still a "modernist" film because it has maintained a dialectical tension between history and the present' which he sees embodied in the contrast between the old family house and the modern hotel (Žižek, 1992: 232). Psychoanalytic critics seem to agree with this assessment. David Bordwell, as we shall see below, goes to some trouble to argue for the film's 'classical' status despite the fact that the release date of the film corresponds with the endpoint of his and his colleagues study of the classical Hollywood era of cinema. This date would be quite convenient for the argument I propose about the postmodernity of *Psycho* if Bordwell, Thompson and Staiger actually argued that 1960 represented a real change in the Hollywood style of film-making. In fact, however, they argue that while the mode of production has changed, moving from studio system to a package-unit system relying on the enormous profits of occasional blockbusters to drive economic expansion into related acquisitions in the leisure field, the Hollywood style has not changed that much (1985: 360–77). I think it has and that *Psycho* is a good example of the nature of this change.
- 2 One measure of the high seriousness of this tradition could be seen in Robin Wood's straight-faced interpretation of Mrs Bates's famous line about the fruit cellar – 'Do you think I'm fruity?' – as offering the 'hidden sexual springs of his behavior' yet then simply explicating the line as 'the source of fruition and fertility become rotten' – with not a word about the gay implications of Norman's fruitiness.
- 3 In this passage, Silverman introduces the seeds of a sadomasochistic dynamic that she and others have fruitfully developed in later work. But she cannot develop it here, in relation to *Psycho*'s viewing pleasure because her analysis is still wedded to a Mulveyan formula that sees all viewers seeking to escape an unpleasurable threat of castration. Since such escape is presumably thwarted by *Psycho*, the film seems to Silverman to disrupt classical narrative. However, this disruption was, in effect, saved from popular and suspect pleasures by its supposed enactment of castration: 'When the stabbing begins, there is a cinematic cut with almost every thrust of the knife. The implied equation is too striking to ignore: the cinematic machine is lethal; it too murders and dissects' (1983: 211).
- 4 For an excellent critique of limitations of this way of formulating cinema history see Miriam Hansen, this volume (Chapter 18). For a critique of the glaring omission of the mode or genre of melodrama from this history, see Altman (1992), Gledhill (1987), and Williams (1998).
- 5 This unfortunately leaves open the vexed problem of what to call this cinema, given the general acceptance of the term classical by so many scholars. I have become convinced that very often the old-fashioned, industry term melodrama – along with additional descriptive terms (western melodrama, gangster melodrama, racial melodrama) – offers a more precise description of both the narrative form and the spectatorial pleasures of a certain mainstream Hollywood product than does the term classical. But that is a matter for another essay (see Williams, 1998).
- 6 Consider, for example, the collections of films that have often (rather loosely) been called thrillers: erotic thrillers as different as *Blue Velvet* (1986), *Fatal Attraction* (1987), and *Basic Instinct* (1992); older-style paranoid political thrillers such as *The Parallax View* (1974) or *All the President's Men* (1976); or the more-recent political thrillers *JFK* (1991) and *The Pelican Brief* (1993); action thrillers, whether of the slightly more realistic Harrison Ford variety or the more stylized Hong Kong-influenced variety; older-style gross-out horror such as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) or *Halloween* (1978) and the hundreds of sequels of these

- and many other titles, or the newer-style mainstream horror thrillers (with similar 'psycho-killer' monsters) such as *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991); or, finally, the paranoid political thriller turned gender-destabilized romance of *The Crying Game* (1992).
- 7 Gunning writes, for example, 'the relations between films and the emergence of the great amusement parks, such as Coney Island, at the turn of the century provides rich ground for rethinking the roots of early cinema' (1990 reprint: 58). A similarly rich ground for rethinking postmodern cinema might be to consider the relation between cinema and the theme parks of the second half of the twentieth century.
 - 8 Miriam Hansen, for example, has (sibilantly) argued that American films have in some ways returned to attractions which 'assault the viewer with sensational, supernatural, scientific, sentimental or otherwise stimulating sights' (Hansen, 1995). Yet, as Hansen certainly is aware, it is also important to see how these sensational and stimulating sights have changed.
 - 9 Though Schatz himself would have no truck with such theoretical grand narratives as the rupture of the modern by the postmodern, his description of the appeal of these films nevertheless exemplifies both Jameson's 'cultural logic of late capitalism' as well as Friedberg's more modest description of the gradually increasing centrality of the image-producing and reproducing apparatuses.
 - 10 Clover does not consider the female viewer as a significant component of the audience of slasher films.
 - 11 Although the basic conventions of gender-confused psycho 'killer', 'terrible place', 'phallic weapon', and 'multiple victims' are already in place with *Psycho*, the convention of the powerful and triumphant 'final girl' is only incipient with the survival (though not yet the self-rescue) of Marion's sister Lillah. Since this 'girl's' reversal from abject victim to triumphant victor is crucial to the energy of the genre it is possible to say that *Psycho* does not fully 'fit' the psycho-killer genre.
 - 12 This power challenges the prevalent view – especially in discussions of horror cinema – that femininity constitutes passivity. Creed goes on to argue in a chapter on *Psycho* that the really important story of this film is precisely the story of the castrating mother. While it has become conventional to interpret the phallic mother as endowed with a fantasy phallus whose function is to disavow the male fear of castration – and thus the 'actual' 'lack' in the mother's body – Creed insists that *Psycho* does not offer an image of a phallic mother disavowing lack, but of a castrating mother whose power is located, presumably, in her difference from the male. Creed does not make this point about difference specifically in relation to *Psycho*, but she does make it generally with respect to the monstrous feminine.
 - 13 Rhona Berenstein's study of classic horror film (1995), for example, extends Clover's insights into an earlier realm of horror often considered the province of the sadistic 'male gaze' to argue that viewing pleasures were a more complicated form of role play than even Clover's masochistic pleasure of being assaulted can account for. In a genre in which monsters are masked and unmasked, heroes are feminized and doubled with monsters, heroines are both victimized and aligned with the monster's potency, viewer pleasure cannot be accounted for by simple binaries of masculine/feminine, Oedipal/preOedipal, homo/hetero. Berenstein thus argues not for a subversion of a monolithic male gaze through a challenge to pleasure but for an account of viewing pleasures that entails a play of shifting gender and sexual identifications. Audiences themselves, Berenstein argues, become performers of gender roles in the game of attraction-repulsion played out in the genre.
 - 14 See, for example, Butler (1990), Garber (1992) and Berenstein (1995).
- 15 Both films are about knife-wielding psycho killers. Both begin with illicit sex – sex in a hotel room in *Psycho*; the initial filmed assignation-murder of a prostitute in *Peeping Tom* – both then travel down a circuitous garden path to sexually motivated murder. Both films were more 'graphic' in their displays of sex and violence than previous narratives. In both we are led to identify with the impulses of murdering peeping Toms who are presented as sympathetic and with young men beleaguered by oppressive parents – Norman by his dead mother, Mark by his dead film-maker father. The films differ, however, in one very important respect: Hitchcock initially fools us, in effect, about the perversions in which we are enlisted. Powell 'plays fair' and lets us know immediately that the nice boy who is so damaged by his private family romance is in fact a psycho killer who murders women while filming them and then projects what amounts to a snuff film for his private pleasure. Hitchcock, on the other hand, plays devious and does not let on that the nice young man who seems to be protecting his mother is really a sexually confused psychotic condemned to murder anyone who interferes with his totally psychotic relation to his mother-himself. Thus Powell's construction of the audience's relation to Mark, who is actually a moral being who destroys himself rather than destroy the 'good' woman who breaks into his psychotic repetition compulsions, is ironically more threatening to moral and psychological certainty than Hitchcock's construction of the audience's relation to Norman. For Norman has no moral awareness of his deeds at all since they are done 'by' Norman-as-mother. Thus *Peeping Tom* is the film that took the critical heat for being truly perverse while *Psycho* acquired the reputation of the self-reflexive critique of perversion. Powell claims that the strong negative reaction to this film, coupled with its poor box office, virtually ended his career. In contrast, the initially negative critical reaction to *Psycho* did Hitchcock no harm at all.
 - 16 This is not to say that absolute mayhem inside the theater contrasted to absolute discipline in the lines formed outside. Hitchcock's project was, after all, to control the audience reaction inside the theater as well: 'If you've designed a picture correctly, in terms of its emotional impact, the Japanese audience would scream at the same time as the Indian audience' (Penelope Houston, 1980: 448). To the extent that he could not remix his film, Hitchcock did not, finally, obtain optimum control over audience reaction.
 - 17 In 1971 film critic William Pechter pinpoints this camaraderie of the audience in his own description of how it felt to watch *Psycho*:

The atmosphere ... was deeply charged with apprehension. Something awful is always about to happen. One could sense that the audience was constantly aware of this; indeed, it had the solidarity of a convention assembled on the common understanding of some unspoken *entente terrible*; it was, in the fullest sense, an audience; not merely the random gathering of discrete individuals attendant at most plays and movies.

(1971: 181)
 - 18 The recent Universal Studios 'rides' – with the possible exception of the fanciful flight on E.T.'s bicycle, or the more jolting experiences of catastrophic earthquake (*Earthquake*) and fire (*Backdraft*) seem to operate in the more sensationalizing, blockbuster, Hitchcock tradition of catastrophe and terror, to move audiences quite seriously. In April 1992 the guide on the tram ride portion of the tour showed how thoroughly the Hitchcockian model of assault on the body had been absorbed: 'At Universal Studios we not only like to show you the movies, we like you to feel them too'. For an excellent discussion of the 'hypercinematic' nature of the Disney experience see Scott Bukatman (1991).

- 19 It is worth noting that Hitchcock's next project was to have been a film set against the background of Disneyland with Jimmy Stewart as a blind pianist whose sight is restored in an operation and who goes to Disneyland in celebration. While there he discovers that the eyes he has been given are those of a murdered man. He thus begins to hunt down 'his' killer. After the manifest perversions of *Psycho*, the then child-centered and family-centered Disney claimed that not only would he not permit Hitchcock to shoot in his park, he would not permit his own children to see *Psycho* (Spoto, 1983: 471).
- 20 Hitchcock was greatly disappointed. Yet he may have had at least partial revenge. In a filmed address made sometime later to a British film society, we can see Hitchcock inventing the rudiments of what would one day become the Universal Studio's Tour. Called the Westcliffe Address – basically a filmed speech overlaid with documentary shots of the Universal Studio backlots featuring, of course, as the movie-centered amusement park now does, the *Psycho* house as one of its main attractions – the speech is fascinating for its anticipation of the Hollywood rival to Disneyland which would include a more catastrophic, Hitchcockian, assaultive, approach to its attractions. As we have already seen, what Hitchcock anticipated, not only in this address but in *Psycho* itself, was the process whereby amusement parks would become more like movies and movies would become more like the new amusement parks. The Westcliffe Address is in the archives of the Margaret Herrick Library.
- 21 One important exploration in the theory and practice of cinematic reception study is Janet Staiger's *Interpreting films* (1992).
- 22 Berenstein (1997) argues that such performances were a common feature of 'classic' horror cinema. She cites the publicity stunt of a woman planted in the audience of each screening of *Mark of the Vampire* as an extreme example. Her task was to scream and faint at predetermined moments so that ushers would whisk her away in a waiting ambulance.

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PART 5

Cinema in the age of global multimedia

Editors' introduction

Contributors to this section take up the question of what cinema has become in an era of postmodern, post-colonial, and global multimedia in which Hollywood still rules although no longer in the same ways. Robert Stam and Ella Shohat frame the concerns of this section with an understanding of the inherently globalized, multicultural, and transnational nature of film arguing, like Tom Gunning in the previous section, that moving-image media today are very much situated as they were a hundred years ago. In their essay 'Film theory and spectatorship in the age of the "posts"' they show that then, as now, everything is possible; visual media of all sorts proliferate, and theatrical, feature exhibition is only one possibility. Although Stam and Shohat acknowledge the often one-way cultural imperialism of Hollywood, they also point to the many ways in which the global media are now more interactive, and to the way post-colonial theory and post-colonial cinema present new kinds of cultural contradictions and syncretisms in a mass-mediated world. They also suggest the ways in which the long-heralded celluloid specificity of film has been 'dissolving into the larger bitstream of the audio-visual media' (page 394) as media blur and become transnational and as the notion of passive spectators gives way to more active participants.

Rey Chow, addressing the international post-colonial, transnational appeal of contemporary Chinese cinema, asks the hard question of how to read these films beyond the simple fact of their difference from Hollywood films. In 'Digging an old well: the labor of social fantasy in a contemporary Chinese