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Psycho and the orchestration of anxiety

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ABSTRACT

Since its release in 1960, Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho has entered the consciousness of our culture as have few other films. Its striking imagery, combined with its universally recognized score, has prompted a wealth of scholarly output. New understanding in the areas of emotion and cognition now affords us the opportunity to re-examine this film from a less familiar vantage point. This article places Psycho within the context of American television drama of the 1950s and explores the effect of Bernard Herrmann's music on the emotional responses of the viewer, as well as the possible consequences of this effect on the literal reading of the film.

KEYWORDS

television drama
Hitchcock
emotional signifiers
Psycho
Herrmann
mood and cognition

INTRODUCTION

In the 50 years since its first release, *Psycho* (1960) has been much discussed and written about, and continues to fascinate. Much of the writing on the subject has focused on filmic issues, especially those concerning the notion of authorship, psychology, genre and gender. Books and articles that address the aural aspects of the film tend to centre on the more musicologically focused issues; few discuss the sound world of the entire film (Elisabeth Weis, in her

1. There are of course conspicuous and effective instances where non-musical sound carries information, especially in the use of disembodied voices. See below, and Weis (1982: 134).
2. This is hardly surprising, given the economic devastation suffered in most European countries by 1945. It should also be noted, *en passant*, that in 1939 very few homes were able to receive television broadcasts (or could afford televisions). Television broadcasting in the United States didn't really get going until after the war; the real growth occurred in the decade starting in 1948. In Nazi Germany, television broadcasting was designed for communal rather than private viewing. Television didn't really establish itself in either the BRD or GDR until the mid-1950s.
3. It is fascinating to note that if a drama received rave notices, it was repeated live a few days later.
4. *Playhouse 90* in particular was a major contributor to the careers of those who would later become important in film, including Rod Serling, Abbey Mann and John Frankenheimer, among many others. Several of the plays premiered on air were later remade as films, such as *Days of Wine and Roses* (Edwards, 1962), *Requiem for a Heavyweight* (Nelson, 1962) and *Judgement at Nuremberg* (Kramer, 1961).
5. The programme was aired at peak time on Sundays (9.30pm, 8.30 Central Time Zone). In the ten years of its initial run, and over 253

Silent Scream (1982), being a laudable exception to this generalization). The focus on music in this film (and in this article) is hardly surprising, however, as *Psycho*'s production process closely resembled the practice of late 1950s television drama, rather than that of cinema, and as a result very few non-musical sonic statements were part of the film's acoustic landscape, despite Hitchcock's normal proclivity to use sound as a structural device.¹

What is undeniable is that for a number of reasons extremely well rehearsed elsewhere, audiences found the film shocking and disturbing. Hitchcock had played the audience 'like an organ' (Truffaut 1978: 417). There were many factors that contributed to our shock, not least of which were expectations we brought to the cinema before the first frame was screened. Some of these expectations were informed by television, especially for American audiences.

AMERICAN CINEMA AND TELEVISION DRAMA IN THE 1950S

Although Britain and Germany produced limited scheduled television broadcasts before the Second World War, it was in the United States that television took first post-war root.² Early television was studio based, and drama was a staple in the output of the networks. Regular one-off dramas appeared on television as early as 1947, and by the mid-1950s many prime-time hours were devoted to single dramas, usually performed live to camera (with a few filmed inserts to help scene changes).³ The list of these programmes includes long-running series such as *Armstrong Circle Theatre*, (1950–1963), *The United States Steel Hour* (1949–1953), *Kraft Television Theatre* (1947–1958) and *Playhouse 90* (1956–1960).⁴

Television drama, given its stage roots, was vococentric, and in many ways its sound world mimicked that which might be heard in theatre. Sound effects were used to depict events impossible to stage, or to heighten gestures (gunshots, weather, etc). Music was used as emotional signification, but rarely under dialogue. In addition, the technology of the television receiver was such that (at least until the later 1950s) only a narrow range of frequencies and amplitudes could be accommodated. With dialogue in the foreground, there was room for little else.

HITCHCOCK

'Psycho was an experiment in this sense: could I make a feature film under the same conditions as a television show?' (Alfred Hitchcock, in Truffaut 1978: 436)

Hitchcock was probably the first director whose own persona transcended the movies he made, at least in popular consciousness in the United States between 1955 and 1965 (which was also the period during which he made some of his most accomplished and successful films). From 1955 to 1965, Hitchcock regularly appeared on television, hosting his own show, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (later *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*).⁵

A good example of the sonic world of television drama can be seen in an episode of that series entitled 'Lamb to the Slaughter', broadcast on 13 April 1958. The script was by Roald Dahl, and Hitchcock himself directed. The director of photography was John L Russell, who would have the same role in *Psycho*. The music is uncredited. In many ways, this 25-minute film bears resemblance to *Psycho*; the studio set-up is unpretentious, the sound is cleanly recorded and audible, and the acting is subtle (Barbara Bel Geddes is the main character). There are very few sounds that were not provided by the actors' movements (a police car approaches off camera, its lights making a path on the window).⁶

Alfred Hitchcock Presents began and ended with a short piece to camera in which Hitchcock made (often facetious) comments about the show in question.⁷ He directed very few of these programmes himself, yet his 'brand' was attached to them.⁸ His eccentric, intrinsically English, droll delivery was much enjoyed, and his penchant for comedy-suspense as a sub-genre⁹ inclined audiences to expect thrills tinged with humour. The trailer for *Psycho*, shot on the motel set on the day principal shooting ended, capitalized on the affection audiences felt for this persona. He takes the viewer on a tour of the set, almost (but not quite) giving away the plot, seducing the viewer into the expectation that they will see a film very similar to other Hitchcock films. This expectation was to be shattered.

As were others. The biggest (indeed the only) star in the film was Janet Leigh. By 1960 she was almost an 'A list' actor, and a screen icon. In 1960, such icons were not killed, especially not within the first half of the film. Her character's death therefore came as a double shock, from both sides of the screen.

As we have come to learn from many sources, *Psycho* was a difficult and problematic project. Hitchcock therefore decided to invest his own money in the film, and as a result endeavoured to produce it as inexpensively as possible (Rebello 1990). He used crews from his television series, minimized exterior locations (as compared to *Vertigo* and *North by Northwest*) and cast the film similarly, with A-minus or B list actors, some of whom had been used on the television series.¹⁰ Bernard Herrmann was equally well versed in the television aesthetic (and more importantly the production/post-production restrictions of broadcasting).¹¹ The decision to shoot the film in black and white may have arisen from a televisual mindset. However, Hitchcock asserted that the choice of monochrome was prompted by the influence of Clouzot's *Diabolique* (1955), a film that Hitchcock admired so much that he had his scriptwriter on *Psycho*, Joe Stefano, and other members of the crew, watch it (Skerry 2009: 227).

Hitchcock's use of sound had almost always focused on effect rather than producing a faux reality. Even in his more expensive productions, no real attempt was made to provide us with a 'realistic' sound world, full of lavish atmospheres, extraneous foley and other effects. It can be argued that the process of film-making, technically and historically, in the first three decades of sound was not biased toward naturalism as we understand the term (or hyper-reality, as some modern big-budget films might suggest). In any event, our modern notion of 'naturalism' would not have been at the forefront of the priorities of mid-twentieth century film-makers. At this time, the process of recording sound on set (or, after 1950, also on location) was completely centered on intelligibility of dialogue.¹² Music was used primarily as emotional signalling (sometimes in a primitive way, with 'stings' – sudden harsh chords – marking key moments).¹³ Generally, in dialogue scenes, music was either missing or highly attenuated.

Hitchcock always used sound meticulously, not to approximate a notion of naturalism, but to heighten the emotional impact of his films on his audience. As Marion Crane begins her journey to California we can hear other characters' voices.

[...] in *Psycho* an interior monologue presents conscious thoughts while unconscious motivations are suggested through other means. As Marion drives away with the stolen money, she imagines the reactions of her employer and sister when they discover the crime [...] The voices are a reasonable representation of what might occur; Marion's thoughts are

episodes, Hitchcock helped the careers of several directors, including Arthur Hiller (who directed seventeen episodes), Robert Altman (two episodes) and Stuart Rosenberg (four episodes), and various writers, including Roald Dahl, Ray Bradbury and Robert Bloch.

6. This episode is available for viewing on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmpY9cpe6g8>. I have been reminded that in the previous year, Hitchcock directed an episode of the show entitled 'One More Mile to Go' that seems like a rehearsal for the *Psycho* scene in which the policeman interrogates Marion through the window of her car.
7. Sometimes he was required to film two versions of the opening sequence, especially when he poked fun at the sponsors, about which the British affiliates were not as amused as the Americans.
8. Hitchcock directed seventeen of the episodes that were broadcast between 1955 and 1962.
9. He believed *Psycho* to be in such a mould (Truffaut 1978).
10. Martin Balsam and John McIntire had been featured in that series; all of the principal cast, save John Gavin and Janet Leigh, had extensive experience in television drama.
11. However, the choice of using a string orchestra was an aesthetic choice rather than a budgetary constraint.
12. As it is today, many would argue.

13. Deftly parodied by Mel Brooks in *High Anxiety* (1977).
14. It must also be stressed that a regular rhythm can provoke tension, but usually the tension is created by other factors, such as increased volume, dissonance or timbral friction. Regular rhythms as tension-producing devices can be found in Shostakovich's *7th Symphony* (1941) and in Holst's 'Mars' from *The Planets* (1916), as well as in many other works. The issue of habituation, however, implies that such patterns remain fixed, with little discernable change.
15. This is addressed below in the discussion of the *ostinato* patterns in the 'money' music.

quite rational. But her behavior [...] is irrational. Her paranoia is conveyed less by her thoughts than by the shots of rain on the windshield through which we can see successively closer and more intense shots of her eyes.
(Weis 1982: 41–2)

Marion's emotional and irrational state is also signalled through the music.

ON EMOTION AND MOODS

Recent research suggests that being in an emotional state changes not only the way we feel, but also the way we think (Thayer 1996). The chemical and the associative electrical responses in our brain create thought pathways (for lack of a better term) from which it is very difficult to deviate. In the emotional state of worry, which is fear and anxiety in various combinations, any conscious imposition of logical processes seems always short lived. And the worry blinds us to other things, things we might need to understand in order to find a solution to the problem that is at the centre of the anxiety.

Mood is related to emotion in that it shares some of the same suppressive cognitive elements, but is more of a background state, colouring more subtly how we think. Mood can often be the longer-lasting residue left by an emotional state.

Three types of evidence suggest that the substrates of cognition are shared with, or open to extensive influence by, the substrates of mood. The first comes from functional neuroimaging. The other two come from behavioral studies of cognition. These include studies of the effects of depression on cognition, already mentioned, and of the effects of laboratory-induced moods on the cognitive processes of normal healthy participants.

(Farah et al. 2007)

Studies have also shown that mood can be affected by music and by film (Thayer 1989: 23–4). If one accepts the notion that music's role in film is primarily of emotional significance (Deutsch 2008), and combine that understanding with how (musically signified) emotion affects cognition, a case can be made for the hypothesis that in *Psycho*, music guides the audience's thought patterns in parallel with their feelings.

Music that was expected to induce sadness produced large changes in heart rate, blood pressure, skin conductance and temperature; 'fearful' music produced large changes in pulse rate and amplitude [...] (Mithen 2005: 95)

It is not only the cognitive areas of the brain that are affected by music, but the precognitive areas as well. As we chart the brain's historical development, we can see that music, specifically rhythm, has an effect on the cerebellum. It '[...] taps into primitive brain structures involved with motivation, reward and emotion'. Rhythm in particular excites this part of the brain, where '[...]computational systems in the brain synchronise neural oscillators with the pulse of the music, and begin to predict when the next strong beat will occur [...]' (Levitin 2006: 191). A regular rhythm tends to produce the comfort of habituation.¹⁴ As Levitin (2006: 186) notes, 'Habituation is an important and necessary process to separate the threatening from the non-threatening'. A regular rhythm is generally non-threatening;¹⁵ an irregular rhythm might alert us to danger, but might also prevent flight (Levitin 2006: 174).

It is likely a common occurrence, especially as we get older, that sleep is interrupted through worry. For me, the prime-time slot for worry seems to be about 4 am. It's an interesting and frustrating process. A thought enters the mind, one that troubles us; it loops around and connects to subsidiary concerns. These in turn orbit our disturbed sleep. In this semi-conscious state we attempt either to 'put it out of our mind' or to 'think it through'. Neither strategy proves effective. The thoughts return, oblivious to our desire to impose logic. They continue to circuit our minds, until we either wake or fall back into restless sleep.

Worry¹⁶

Main Entry: **¹wor-ry**

Function: *verb*

Inflected Form(s): **wor-ried; wor-ry-ing**

Etymology: Middle English *worien*, from Old English *wyrgan*; akin to Old High German *wurgen* to strangle, Lithuanian *veržti* to constrict

Date: before 12th century

transitive verb **1** *dialect British* : choke, strangle **2 a** : to harass by tearing, biting, or snapping especially at the throat **b** : to shake or pull at with the teeth <a terrier worrying a rat> **c** : to touch or disturb something repeatedly **d** : to change the position of or adjust by repeated pushing or hauling **3 a** : to assail with rough or aggressive attack or treatment : torment **b** : to subject to persistent or nagging attention or effort **4** : to afflict with mental distress or agitation : make anxious *intransitive verb* **1** *dialect British* : strangle, choke **2** : to move, proceed, or progress by unceasing or difficult effort : struggle **3** : to feel or experience concern or anxiety : fret 'worrying about his health'

In *Psycho*, our emotional state and our identification with the worries of Marion blind us to the potent signs of the danger she is in once she arrives at the motel, if not before (waking in her car).

For example, birds are a constant and mostly threatening theme in the film, not often noticed by the audience.¹⁷ After the titles, the first word we read is 'Phoenix', which refers to a city and avian entity simultaneously. Marion's surname is 'Crane'. The patrolman perches over Marion as she wakes, his eyes (formed by opaque sunglass lenses) large and black, and the camera tilt produces a beak-like nose and chin. There are, of course, stuffed birds in Norman Bates' parlour, and pictures of birds on the walls of Marion's motel bedroom. Camera tilts in the parlour accentuate Norman's avian appearance, especially when he leans forward menacingly, after Marion mentions the possibility of placing his mother in a 'home'. Most of the birds we see, or to which allusion is made, are raptors.¹⁸

MUSIC AND ITS ROLE IN THE FILM

'When I first heard it, I realized what he's done. He's taken everybody's guts and used them for music' (Joseph Stefano, scriptwriter of *Psycho*, original and remake, Sullivan 2007: 243).

Bernard Herrmann, Hitchcock's collaborator from 1955 (*The Trouble With Harry*) to 1964 (*Marnie*)¹⁹ belonged to the first generation of a new type of film composer, a type that abandoned the 'operatic' model of film scoring,

16. Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, Accessed 16 January 2010.
17. As many readers will know, so interested was Hitchcock in the power of avian iconography that he made them the centre of his next film, appropriately entitled *The Birds* (1963).
18. There are also potent aqueous motifs: the rain, which propels Marion to her destiny; the shower, which is the scene of her end; and the swamp, which disposes of her.
19. One might also mention the 13 scores Herrmann composed for *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*, from 1963 to 1965, none of which were directed by Hitchcock. Also noteworthy is the discarded score to *Torn Curtain* (1966), about which much has been written elsewhere. He also composed the music for the first series of *The Twilight Zone* (1959), but his music was replaced by the now iconic score of Marius Constant, which was more dissonant and contained a powerful 'hook'.

20. Prendergast (1977) offers notational examples of some of the elements of this score.
21. Polytonality is the process of the simultaneous combination of different key centres, much as if one hand is playing a tune in C and the other the accompaniment in A (bitonality), and a trumpet adds to the sound in the key of Db (polytonality). Its capacity for variation and proclivity towards dissonance was attractive to many of the composers Herrmann admired.
22. Musical Examples can be found in Appendix 1.
23. Hitchcock popularized the use of this term. Essentially, it can serve as an object, or event or plot detail, that catches the viewer's attention and drive the story. It is sometimes abandoned once the audience's attention is rooted on the narrative.

replacing it with a more integrated style, which later developed into a style that can be called 'convergent' (Deutsch 2009).

Herrmann's music, particularly in this film, is composed using cellular elements (small phrases, often memorable, that are susceptible to being placed in different musical contexts), similar to a technique often employed by Stravinsky, especially evident in *Petrushka* (1911). Herrmann's cells often present themselves as *ostinati* (from 'obstinate'; repetitive phrases that 'loop' over time). Such small motivic phrases are the main material for the score,²⁰ presented in a harmonic texture that owes much to the polytonal world of Charles Ives (1874–1954), whom Herrmann admired and befriended.²¹ The benefit of composing with cellular material is that phrases can be placed in different combinations in the score, and can be stretched to accommodate editing without losing musical integrity. The use of polytonal gestures allows cells of differing tonalities to co-exist in the same acoustic space. It also helps a composer to create subtle shifts from consonance to dissonance.

Much has been written about the choice of string orchestra for the film, and this need not detain us here, save the issue of timbral variation. The nature of the close mic recording (multi-source mono recording) allows for very subtle timbral textures to emerge, especially in the viola lines. Such changes often occur when a change in mood is to be signalled, as in the scene when Marion decides to steal the money (discussed in more depth below).

The audience's experience of the film is immediately led by the music. The famous opening cell is followed by others, juxtaposed in unpredictable patterns.²² Each cell is rather short, and may be combined with others, creating both familiarity and discontinuity. The style of the music, and the timbres asked of the string orchestra, is harsh and abrasive, in keeping with the disjointed graphics of the titles, each card being cut into pieces as we watch. This opening music appears later on several occasions, especially when Marion is driving, in flight from her life, which she has ripped apart from the relative comfort of Phoenix.

For the film to work, the audience needs to identify strongly with the MacGuffin,²³ Marion Crane. After the fractured credits and their similarly fractious music, we enter Marion's world as voyeurs. The music that accompanies this first sequence is in great contrast to the opening. It is now played *legato*, using more conventional harmonies. During the discussions between the two lovers, the music takes a more gently melodic turn (fairly uncommon in Herrmann's technique) with harmonies redolent of romance, and echoes of (even) Puccini. They are in love, we feel, and our feelings about them prompt us to the thought that he is a fool to abandon her.

The next scene with a music cue, entitled 'money' in Herrmann's score, is crucial in order for us to engage in Marion's world and to become involved in her anxiety. Marion is faced with a dilemma about whether to take the money to the bank or to steal it. We see her (as voyeurs again) clad in black bra and slip, the colour of the material contrasting with the more innocent white undergarments she wore in the earlier hotel scene. The room is drab (we are allowed a glimpse of her shower through the open bathroom door), and there are a few homely pictures on the wall. She paces and packs, the suitcase open, the \$ 40,000 bulging in an envelope that has been placed on the bed. The camera returns to the money regularly. There are no diegetic sounds beyond studio atmosphere and the naturalistic subtle noises of her movements. The music begins when the camera first comes to rest on the cash.

The music here is quite straightforward: two cells, one static (sustained high and low notes) the other in constant movement.²⁴ This middle voice, played by the violas, seems at first to be an *ostinato*, which should provoke comfortable habituation. Part of the process of habituation is that the brain filters sounds that do not change,²⁵ but this is an eccentric *ostinato*, with notes unexpectedly absent, breaking the flow, and creating unease. Like worry, this music can't be put away. After shutting the suitcase, Marion again looks at the money, and the timbre of the *ostinato* changes. The middle voice becomes louder, more of the viola's naturally attenuated higher partials can be heard, and Marion has decided. The close mic recording of the music allowed for these subtle details to emerge.²⁶ Herrmann's decision to forgo a complete orchestra in favour of a large string ensemble (26 violins, 10 violas, 8 cellos, 5 bass²⁷) enabled the mixing process to concentrate on the individual qualities of the instruments more closely.²⁸ This intimacy, combined with sometimes slightly imperfect intonation, places what we hear into a more human scale, and what we hear brings us nearer to Marion. The music embodies what she is feeling, and we feel it with her. Her worry is now ours. Her journey is also ours, and her death will be an unbelievable shock.

Our anxiety is heightened when Marion sees her boss while driving, and the music here reverts to the opening music and its relentless rhythmic series of cells. Will he notice that she is not ill? Will he try to stop her? When she awakes at the roadside we are concerned about whether the policeman has been informed about her. At the used car lot, she looks at the newspaper to see whether she's been reported. We wonder whether news has reached the owner. The first line he utters, 'I'm in no mood for trouble', unsettles her (and us). The policeman watches her from across the road. All are suspicious of her. She begins to drive away but is stopped. Is the game up? No, she forgot to remove her suitcase from the older car. The opening music now returns us to her journey into the night and the rain.

And then things relax for a while. At the motel, when Norman brings Marion her supper, the music reverts to opening tableaux – the Phoenix hotel room's romanticism. We meet Norman and are seduced initially by his seeming innocence. Perhaps he could provide a more stable relationship for Marion. The music helps us infer this possibility. And then in the parlour, new music, as the subject of madness is discussed. This new music helps the audience begin to change their point of view from Marion to Norman. It consists of very high soft violin fragments accompanied by low string-bass gestures.²⁹ There is a pulse as well, which becomes more prominent after Marion leaves the room and Norman reverts to voyeur.

A change from bowed to plucked strings (*arco* to *pizzicato*) occurs at the point where a decision seems to have come to Norman, and the insistent rhythmic pattern becomes quite prominent as well. It then subsides somewhat and accompanies us into his house with him.

By now we have understood that Marion has decided to return the money. As she sits at the desk, the music again refers to the romanticism of Phoenix, and we are pleased that she is doing the right thing. She does some reckoning on a bit of paper. Perhaps they will be lenient with her, as she only has stolen \$700, not the \$40,000. She then flushes the reckoning down the toilet. Then the shower, and we all know that scene.³⁰

From the point that Marion's car disappears into the swamp, the job of the music as signifier of our emotional attachment with the MacGuffin comes to an end. From this point, music has little left to do. At first, it aids us in attaching

24. The notation of this material can be found in Appendix 1.
25. I spent my childhood in Brooklyn with a bedroom over which the BMT subway line rumbled 24 hours per day, but only noticed it when there was snow and the sound was different. By the way, in *Saturday Night Fever*, (Badham, 1977), John Travolta buys a piece of pizza from the pizzeria below my bedroom window. Thought you should know.
26. Whether there was a conscious decision on Herrmann's part to signal the mood change through timbre is, in many respects, irrelevant. Suffice it to say that the change occurs congruently with a shift in her posture, and seems to trigger her movement on the screen. My own view as a practitioner is that Herrmann would have been sensitive of the need for the music somehow to change at this point.
27. According to The Musicians Guild of America's *Studio Daily Report* of 16–18 March 1960. Normal practice would have been to divide the violins as 14 firsts and 12 seconds.
28. For an account of how the music is likely to have been recorded, see Appendix 3.
29. Herrmann refers to this cue as 'madness' in his score. There may be some justification for hearing the music as comprising two distinct voices, kept well apart, then coming together, analogous to Norman/mother. (On the other hand, providing an underscore with very high and very low notes – and little between – would have been a seasoned film composer's way of

keeping out of the frequency range of the dialogue.)

30. There is an entire book on the subject of the shower scene, Skerry's recent (2009) offering, *Psycho in the Shower*.
31. For a list of cues after the murder, see Appendix 2.
32. And, of course, reflects mid-1950s American television drama practice.
33. See Hildegard Westerkamp's article in *The Soundtrack*, 2.2 (2009) for a discussion of the gestation of this music.
34. This is an overhead shot of Marion as she lies dead in the bath, the wounds conspicuous on her back. Hitchcock excised the shot as being too explicit.
35. It is an anecdotally supported truism that a sure-fire way to promote a film's box office failure is to forgo colour.

to Norman, but in the main, from this point the music functions primarily as reprises (as in Arbogast's murder) or 'business' cues, music to fill in spaces, provide trajectory, or any of the multitude roles it can assume in narrative films.³¹

Brown (1994), Sullivan (2007) and others have remarked on the absence of any diegetic music in the film. This, and the lack of any enhanced atmospheres, creates the information vacuum helpful for the audience to be immersed in the diegesis.³² It can be noticed that much of the film's visual language borders on the mundane: the candlewick bedspread in Marion's modest flat; the barren landscape of the highway; the ten-a-penny used car lot. In fact, the vernacular ordinariness of the visual world allows the viewer to enter into the extraordinary internal world of the main characters without distraction. In such a world, we are invited to involve ourselves in the emotions felt by the characters, and such involvement is made more vivid through the use of the music, long before the shower scene. This involvement is allowed to happen more easily through the spaces in the fabric of the film: openings, slowings down, pauses in action (e.g. when Marion is dressing, or when she is driving), which allow the audience space to enter her world, and the music the opportunity to create the anxiety with which to fill that space.

ON THE REMAKE

In 1998, Gus Van Sant directed a recreation of this film. Van Sant is one of his generation's most interesting and challenging film-makers. His *Elephant* (2003) and *Last Days* (2005) are remarkable films, not least for the use of music within a complex soundtrack.³³ With *Psycho* his intention was to reassemble (rather than re-make) the film, using the same shots as in the original (he even uses one shot planned for the original but cut from the final print).³⁴ On the Extra Features segment of the DVD, Van Sant explains that he made the film partly because hardly anyone under 50 years of age in the United States had seen the original, mostly put off because the Hitchcock version was in monochrome.³⁵ He employed the original screenwriter, Joseph Stefano, to update the dialogue. He also decided to re-record the original score (the task of minor rearrangements was given to Danny Elfman; the strings-only scoring was maintained). The music is presented in stereo (as is the soundtrack for the rest of the film). There are many interesting aspects of the new film, and for those who have seen the original it allows for instructive comparisons.

For example, let's again focus on the 'money' scene. Where the monochrome version was bland, here the colour is extravagant. We see a cacophony of hues: turquoise sheets, cherry red hat, green slip and bra. We hear Marion (Anne Heche) clearly, moving, tutting and thinking. We hear her vocalise her indecision about the money. There is also a constant exterior atmosphere that makes its presence felt through the open window; we hear birdsong (and even see a pigeon land in a bush outside). The music begins before we see the money, and it is much faster: where the original tempo was 108 beats per minute, the newer version is at 128. This is no doubt due to the fact that the scene is now much shorter. The newer version has Marion leave her room after 1'23'; the original lasts almost 30' longer (ending at 1'50'). As a result, the music carries on into the scene where Marion is driving. The editor of the Van Sant film, Amy Duddleston, attests (in the Extra Features segment of the DVD) that she had to cut the film to play faster, as the original was *so slow*.

The effect of the faster cutting, the brisk tempo and the smoother performance of the music (the players were after all familiar with the score; the

original session musicians were charting new territory, and their unfamiliarity with the music added to the tension in the performance) nullify to a great extent the effect that the music has in creating an anxious mood in the audience. And, with the faster tempo, the unsettling gaps between the notes are shorter, and filled with other sonic events. In the original film, the music carried the sound of the scene; here it is now one of the elements that create a 'filmic reality'. Anxiety and ambivalence are strongly attenuated as a result. More importantly, the audience is no longer afforded the opportunity to 'fill in' the gaps with meaning, nor the time so to do. One might consider whether the scene, as now constructed, really needed music at all.

The rest of the Van Sant film is in the same style. The decision to use Hermann's music, which was composed for a film with few other competitive sonic elements, creates a dysfunctional melange within the acoustic elements of the film.

Of course, it is impossible for any of us familiar with the original objectively to gauge the effect of the newer version on an uninitiated viewer. Nevertheless, the trend towards supplying too much information, and thereby placing the viewer at a distance from the emotional life on screen, is quite common (although the exceptions are encouraging, for example *No Country for Old Men* (2007) by Joel and Ethan Coen, and *The White Ribbon* (2009) by Michael Haneke).

Little has been written about *Psycho* from a cognitive³⁶ and emotional viewpoint, especially pertaining to its sound/music. By examining a film's soundtrack for effect rather than solely through intention or as text, we may come closer to understanding how audiences make sense of film. Such an approach also gives us the opportunity to re-examine the role of the soundtrack in light of this understanding. A subsequent benefit would be the encouragement of the trend for music and sound to be considered as a single entity and to be involved in the production process from the script stage.

36. It is necessary here to discriminate between several uses of the term 'cognitive'. In terms of psychological studies, the term refers to internal mental processes of thought. However, recent developments of Cognitive Theory in Film Studies, typified by works by Noël Carroll, Greg Smith and David Bordwell, have continued a debate about film theory's perceived orthodoxy in the areas of psychoanalysis, Marxism and Barthesian semiotics. For the purposes of this article, however, the use of the word is intended as offering a polarity. As developed in my earlier taxonomy of the soundtrack (Deutsch 2008), *Cognitive* stands at the opposite (but non exclusive) pole to *Emotive*. It implies a conscious reading of a film, what we think about what we see, as opposed to what we feel about what we are seeing.

37. These have been culled from hand-written transcriptions made by Prendergast in his 1977 book (pp. 138-42).

APPENDIX 1: MUSICAL EXAMPLES

All extracts Copyright © 1960 Ensign Music Corporation³⁷

Opening Music:

cell 1



cell 2



cell 2a



cell 3



cell 4 (+2a)





The pulse in the parlour

The 'money' (worry) music

♩ = 102 Bernard Herrmann



The viola line extended

Bernard Herrmann



APPENDIX 2: MUSIC CUES AFTER MURDER:

Timings approximate

| | | |
|----------|---|---|
| 47' | Norman 'finds' body | reprise 'madness' music |
| 50' | cleaning | new music: trills and tremolos |
| 52' | body into car | new music: octaves |
| 53 | clearing away Marion's things | 'madness' music variation |
| 1 hr 01' | Arbogast looking for Marion | light reprise of title music |
| 1 hr 07' | Arbogast looks around | 'madness' music variation |
| 1 hr 08' | Arbogast leaves | business: music, variation on previous cues |
| 1 hr 10' | Arbogast returns | madness' music variation when Arbogast moves to house |
| 1 hr 13' | Arbogast enters house | variation, higher notes, some harmonics |
| 1 hr 14' | murder | shower music |
| 1 hr 15' | Lila alone in shop; Sam looks for Arbogast at Motel | reprise of Norman's voyeur music |
| 47' | Norman 'finds' body | reprise 'madness' music |
| 1 hr 21' | Bates goes into mother's room has a conversation with her – to take her to fruit cellar | 'madness' music variation |
| 1 hr 24' | Sam and Lila arrive at motel | 'business' music, <i>legato</i> strings, |
| 1 hr 28' | Sam and Lila explore | 'business' music, <i>legato</i> strings, |
| 1 hr 30' | Lila goes to house | contrary motion stepwise music, suspense |
| 1 hr 32' | Lila in Mrs Bates' room | <i>legato</i> strings with pulse |
| 1 hr 34' | Lila in Norman's room | <i>legato</i> strings with pulse reprise |
| 1 hr 35' | Norman rushes to house | new music, agitated strings, fast |
| 1 hr 36' | in cellar, Norman attacks Lila | shower music + different ending |
| 1 hr 42' | Mrs Bates speaks in N's mind | 'madness' music variation |

APPENDIX 3: ON THE RECORDING OF PSYCHO'S MUSIC

Shawn Murphy:³⁸

What I can say would be regarding Universal Stage 10 and the method for scoring at Universal during that period.

More so than any other Hollywood Scoring Stage, Universal retained the 'Standard Setup' in its method. Even into the mid-late 1980s the Universal Stage had in place a standard set of chairs, risers, stands and microphones into which ALL sessions were configured. This came about of course due to the extremely busy recording schedules required by the Television industry, with three session days being more the norm than the exception. The standard set-up would allow quick change over between ensembles, composers and productions. The recording mixer could just bring up the required faders and set his mix very quickly, with great efficiency in the recording process (quality notwithstanding).

At that time, and in fact throughout the thirties through the seventies and the demise of studio orchestras, all Scoring Stages retained some sort of standard setup.

In 1960, all music recordings would have been mastered on Magnetic Film, full coat, normally three track. There would have been a master copy and a 'cutting copy'. The master machine/copy would have been used for transfer reprints and archive. This method was used at virtually all studios during that period. The Magnetic Film recorders would normally have been RCA or Westrex and individually leveled to a flux level 6dB below 3 percent harmonic distortion (considered to be effectively the same as optical clash). This level normally was around 320nW/m. There was no Dolby or other noise reduction, but the high reference level coupled with the quality of the magnetic film made for generally quiet and high-quality recordings. I do not yet know the track layout for PSYCHO, but given the state of Universal Sound/Scoring at that time, I would guess that a three track, multi mono format was used. It may have been something like High Strings/Low Strings/String Effects, or more likely, a single track mono mix. There would have been no multitrack on magnetic tape or film. (Mixing desks at that time had no multitrack capabilities, there were no electronic synchronizers, and the widest non-sprocketed recorders were 3-track, the widest sprocketed was 6-track).

As to the balancing and monitoring, I would suppose it was done entirely by ear in the studio. If there were headphones used, it would have been only for synchronization/click tracks. Given Bernard Herrmann's musicianship, I would think there may have been no cans³⁹ at all and all cueing was by marked picture and/or clock timings.

E-mail: 3 March 2010.

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38. Shawn Murphy is one of the leading music mixers in Hollywood, whose credits include *2012* (2009); *Ice Age* (2009); *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008); and *Charlie Wilson's War* (2007), as well as over 300 others, starting with a remix of the music for *Fantasia* (1940/1982). His full credits can be found at: <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0004156/>.

39. i.e., headphones.

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