University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange

University of Tennessee Honors Thesis Projects | University of Tennessee Honors Program

5-2007

Psychosomatic: Gus Van Sant and Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Auterism at its Most Querrelous

Lisa Elizabeth Schutt
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

Follow this and additional works at: http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonoproj

Recommended Citation
Schutt, Lisa Elizabeth, "Psychosomatic: Gus Van Sant and Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Auterism at its Most Querrelous" (2007). *University of Tennessee Honors Thesis Projects.*
http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonoproj/1112

This is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Tennessee Honors Program at Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Tennessee Honors Thesis Projects by an authorized administrator of Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact trace@utk.edu.

Lisa Elizabeth Schutt
Bachelor of Arts

Lisa Schutt

"Psychosomatic: Gus Van Sant and Alfred Hitchcock's

Psycho, Auterism at its Most Querrelous"

Senior Honors Project, Dr. Bill Larsen, Supervisor

05-01-07

INTRODUCTION:

"OF: Haven't you ever been involved in a dramatic situation?

AH: No. Never. Only in movies. I never get involved in dramatic situations. You're the one who's in a dramatic situation.

OF: Why, Mr. Hitchcock?

AH: Because you have to write an article about me. And you don't know anything about me."

-- "Alfred Hitchcock, Mr. Chastity", Oriana Fallaci 1963

Gus Van Sant's *Psycho* (1998) isn't exactly a remake, nor is it an original film, nor is it a replica of the earlier film, but rests uniquely in some limbo land in between all three. In the last fifteen years, film adaptations and remakes have flooded the American film market, filmmakers and studio heads alike taking a crack at recreating or recapturing the success of an earlier property through imitation or reexamination, and often times presently falling far short of the mark while retroactively marring the reputation of the original version by the failure of the "new" version. Van Sant, however, seemed to take a totally different angle in his revival of *Psycho*, playing both copycat and auteur in the

approach to the 1998 project. The idea of an updating without the drastic changes to narrative and cinema space necessary to accommodate a gulf of nearly thirty years was maverick, to say the least—Van Sant proposed to remake one of Hitchcock's greatest achievements in the most literal sense, the finished product being practically line for line, shot for shot a recreation of the original film. Riding high on the critical and popular success of his previous film, *Good Will Hunting*, the director more than likely had *carte blanche* as to his choice of a follow-up project, and the audacity with which he undertook challenging a culturally iconic as well as critically revered film is admirable. Yet, under close scrutiny, his finished product was a failure—lukewarm reviews and a disappointing $21.38 million dollar box office gross, on a $25 million dollar budget, showed that audiences in 1998 were not ready to accept the slasher/thriller nearly as readily as in 1960 (Parish, 273). While this could easily be blamed on cinephiles and cinefanatics, as well as the cult of Hitchcock devotees/analysts spanning back critically in time to French New Wave director Francois Truffaut, the group that would ostensibly be critically wary of the new work only represent a minute portion of the film going populace—not all ticket buyers, hence, would be steeped enough in film history and appreciation to be dissuaded from seeing the "new" *Psycho*.

With these factors set squarely on the table, the failure of *Psycho* 98 seems somewhat counterintuitive. Given the bloodier, more violent nature of a late twentieth century film context, why were people more interested in the story of a transvestite schizophrenic, in which the key scene features a beautiful woman being butchered to death in a shower, in conservative 1960 than in 1998? What key element was missing from Van Sant's meticulous recreation?

In the average remake, the failure of the film could be blamed on a number of factors—the script was horrible, the camera work was jarringly different, the audience was unable to accept a drastic departure from a comfortable conception of the original property. However, in *Psycho* '98, all the supposedly important elements remained—Joseph Stefano's 1960 script remained more or less intact, sets were closely designed to echo if not completely replicate the 1960 set space, Bernard Herrmann's original score was slightly tweaked by contemporary scorist Danny Elfman but reverently, and on and on, yet something was missing from this film to make both audiences new to *Psycho* and those familiar with its hypnotic draw derive something out of Hitchcock's film that Van Sant's couldn't offer.

Two factors affect the latter day *Psycho*, critically wounding its plausibility as well as enjoyability, and more or less dooming its success as either a remake *or* a stand alone narrative—the removal of the story space from 1960 to 1998 without any significant changes to plot structure or values, and the reinterpretations of the key characters of Marion Crane and Norman Bates in the first forty minutes of the film. These two problems work in tandem, one relying heavily on the other, to creates holes in the overall structure that can't be mended with any number of good intentions on the director's part.

I: MISSION STATEMENT: THE 98 PRODUCTION

"We want to watch movies that are made by people that are living with us, in our day, rather than a piece of history"—Gus Van Sant, Universal Website for Psycho 98

Gus Van Sant asserted early into the production process of *Psycho* 98[1] his confidence in the feasibility of the success of his project. One point that seemed to be continually hammered into the media was his stance on adaptation in general: "*Psycho* is like *Waiting for Godot*. You can put anybody in the place of the characters, stage it indoors, outdoors, it's going to do it's own thing...It's very much like the opera, something you should restage and celebrate" (Parish 254). Van Sant echoes in a way the oft quoted quip of Hitchcock describing actors as cattle or, at best, temperamental children (Fallaci, 256), but sorely overlooks the very real contribution the principal players, even in a masterfully outlined film, make to the success of the picture. His conception of the process of restaging *Psycho* as one would restage Shakespeare is deceptive in its reliance on the idea of the text as a blank slate, malleably unattached and unhindered by the cultural context and values intrinsic to the original version. The benefits of textual fidelity in the 98 production are undermined by cultural/temporal disruption in a way that Van Sant seems to completely ignore. Hitchcock scholar Thomas Leitch offers: "[Van Sant] is attempting to be true to both the original (in textual terms) and the 1990s (in cultural terms)...the resulting contradictions place Van Sant's film in a historical limbo, a product of both the 60's and the 90's, and therefore, really, of neither." This compromise of text versus story space causes a rift in believability that harms both the actors' already limited plausibility within their roles and the honesty/success of the narrative as a whole.

Mostly, in the characters of Norman and Marion, the viewer is confronted again and again by contradictions of a sixties' mindset pitted against a nineties' sensibility—the heart of their actions and reactions, of their motivations and movements within their

[1] To clarify, the GvS version will be henceforth referred to as "Psycho 98" and the AH version as "Psycho 60". Likewise for character interpretations in the respective films. -LS

scenarios, are rooted in a 1959 context. Marion's position in her relationship with Sam Loomis, in her employment in the secretarial pool of a real estate office, as well Norman's quarrelsome sexuality and relationship with his mother, carry within them in a early 60's era moral climate a different gravity than in a 90's context—as the viewing audience approaches the millennium, the forty year gap in sensibilities are more insurmountable than negligible, as Van Sant seems to imply. Joseph Stefano, author of the screenplay used in both versions, "My feeling about *Psycho* was I had two jobs. One was to make you love and mourn a wonderful young woman. The other was to make you feel sympathy and sorrow and friendship for the person who was the killer. I don't think audiences ever had any trouble doing that" (Wallace F1)—yet denied the empathy engendered by a heartfelt portrayal, or even a plausible portrayal, that remains almost impossible in 1998 with 1960 characters, the audience is unable to achieve the emotions on which the success of the narrative balance.

The emotional discord, coupled with the extreme unsuitability the casting of Anne Heche and Vince Vaughan present, blemishes the production before scene was ever set to film on the 98 set. These two aspects contribute massively to its lack of success, not, as necessarily posited by the pre-release press, any amount of loyalty to the original *Psycho* on the part of the American (and international) film going audience.

II: JANET LEIGH (*PSYCHO 60*)

Janet Leigh's performance in *Psycho* 60 is one of the most layered in a career full of stand-out and starring roles. Leigh's Marion engenders the empathy that fuels the first

and second acts of the picture and it is Leigh's fragility and likeability that add monumentally to the shock of the shower scene, the pin on which the entire film hinges. Despite the earlier quotation of Hitchcock's disdain for acting and actors, he is quoted as saying to Leigh upon her being brought on as Marion Crane: "I hired you because you are an actress! I will only direct you if A, you attempt to take more than your share of the pie, B, if you don't take enough, or C, if you are having trouble motivating the necessary timed emotion" (Leigh, 256). The statement is in keeping with his general attitude towards the talent of his films, interfering only when the acting gets in the way of the staging, a crucial pre-production part of Hitchcock's creative process (Knight, 121). At the same time this attitude dismisses, in a way, the importance of the screen actor's contribution to the film (seeing the actors more as colors to fill in on the grand scale of a paint-by-numbers outline), at the same time it shows the very great contribution of the actor, without slavish direction from their *auteur*, to personally work out the motivations of the role in a meaningful and believable way. With this in mind, Janet Leigh's acting in *Psycho* 60 is not merely filling in a narrative space, but creating a great deal of depth on her own, without much positive or negative influence from her director. Her work in creating harmony with the narrative and film space through her performance is in that way entirely her own, something which, in terms of evaluating the plausibility of the first forty minutes, owes a great deal to her work as well as her director's. Screenplay writer Joseph Stefano wrote Leigh a letter upon hearing of her nomination for best supporting actress 1960:

> You've created a person, a live and touching and extremely moving person, and I believe it is your interpretation of Marion Crane that gives the picture a dimension

> which extends it somewhat outside the bounds of the usual motion picture...Because of the girl you created, the murder of that girl becomes a thing less of horror and more of tragedy...I wanted her to go back and return the money and correct and rectify her mistake. Thank you for being one of the prime reasons why I am proud of *Psycho*. (Leigh 2, 123)

Stefano's lauding of her screen performance is just a definitive way of expressing the emotional ante Leigh brought to the production through her portrayal of Marion Crane. The empathy he expresses feeling during her screen time is part of the monumental audience success—without her contribution, the film would have been had a very different, and certainly not necessarily better, emotional tone.

In terms of narrative, if the second half of *Psycho* is a whodunit like thriller, focusing on the will-they-catch-Norman/Mother, will-Norman/Mother-catch-them, the punch of the first half relies on its soap opera style melodrama. Particularly indeliable to the created image of Marion are the scenes before she even steals the money or meets Bates, which this section will focus on.

Leigh's Marion, in classical women's film fashion, is caged—a fundamentally "good" person hemmed in on all sides by the constraints of her social position. As a working girl hedging her thirties, coping with the frustration of a dredge job and a seemingly dead end relationship with a man more obliged to his debts than to her, the theft of the money is a solution, impulsive but workable. Marion steals oilman Cassidy's money to "buy off unhappiness", mirroring the rich man's solution system presented in his flirtatious dialogue with Marion. With fifty two thousand dollars, an instant remedy is produced, suddenly making attainable all the status goals (financial stability,

respectability, marriage) Marion believes will make her happy. The idea of a woman's happiness depending intrinsically on settling into marriage and the middle class all smack of a late fifties/early sixties conception of respectability which Leigh plays letter perfectly, in intense juxtaposition to the performance of Anne Heche in the latter film. Neither is to be specifically blamed for their approaches in creating the Marion character, as both are stepping up to the plate with the full context of their own internal views as to how Marion is to be perceived, perhaps how they themselves would approach the situations Marion Crane finds herself in prior to her onscreen death. However, Leigh has the vantage/advantage point of being contemporary to the emotional climate created in the screenplay; Heche, without the benefit of the cultural context the film's narrative operates on, is left floundering unlikeably in implausibility and grating coquettishness.

III: ANNE HECHE (*PSYCHO* 98)

"You get to add your personality to someone else's behavior, and that's just wacky!" –Anne Heche, Universal Website for Psycho 98

Where Anne Heche works her own interpretation into Marion '98, avoiding the obvious pitfall in remakes of simply replicating the successful earlier performance, her reading of the character results in a completely tone deaf rendering of a pivotal role in the film. Physically, she retains the same birdlike quality of Janet Leigh's Marion, small boned, but much more fluttery, inconsistent in her actions. Onscreen, her Marion is chirpier, more flippant, more "kooky" than her predecessor. The unavailability of Loomis to Marion '98 isn't so much an obstacle as a bargaining point, something to tease him

about. In the 1998 context, Marion's not being able to marry same is less of a tragedy, more of an inconvenience—if she doesn't land Sam, Marion '98 isn't immediately branded an old maid, terminally single, but instead is seen as independent, able to stand on her own as woman. The drastic shift in societal values and attitudes towards traditional marriage in the almost thirty years between the two films alters the point of screenwriter Stefano's words—with nothing at stake, the opening scene isn't a beautiful girl desperate for respectability, but a vacuous exchange between two lovers post coitus more or less sarcastically delivering lines that were sincere in their original context. The empathy level for Marion '98 is greatly diminished from Marion '60 based, in this scene, primarily on the fact that Heche gives no sign of being actually unhappy, or even wistful, but freewheels flirtily through the dialogue with a confidence that strikes the viewer as brash, egotistical. "Anne Heche's...frequent joking and the absence of a serious quarrel make the tone of the first scene playful, not tense," Thomas Leitch writes of the scene, summing up the loss of significance between the sixties' opening scene and its nineties' counterpart. Marion '98 risks nothing—to be with Sam Loomis in this cheap hotel on her lunch hour isn't an act of compromise, but of agency. Marion chooses to do what she does, and seems only mildly inconvenienced by it. The removal of a burden of shame unevenly levens the situation, reducing a key narrative-establishing scene to something almost superfluous.

Van Sant chimes in on Marion's interactions with men in the screenplay: "I think such [sexist] treatment is still commonplace today... Marion is locked into this weird world where all men might as well be the same guy. We just played the way the guys came on to Marion in the manner it was originally written. Men still act the same" (Parish,

265). The director completely overlooks in this myopic statement the change in the way women perceive *themselves* in these situations which has occurred in the last forty years. Marion '98 loses something of her integrity in her flirty exchanges with the leering men in the screenplay—where Marion 60's steely, polite reserve serves effectively enough to keep the wolves at bay as well as build an image, in a 60's context, of Marion as a "good" girl, Marion '98's participation in the seductive glance, even if the emotion created is more nervous than reciprocal, minimizes her ability to come off with the upper hand. Anne Heche's Marion seems slightly open to the overtures made over the desk, if only to keep in a team-spirit type attitude that denies the offence given by the male's overt sexual innuendos or female bias. By treating women as a type, either viable sexual object or lesser cognitive being (Cassidy the oilman being more guilty of the first, the used car salesman more guilty of the latter), both male characters lose their power and add to that of Marion, in the denial of access created by her cool responses. The relative safety Marion '60 sees in Norman, her almost bemusement at his nervous, boyish attributes, is in a way a reaction to the male characters put forth in the narrative up until that point—she is warmer, kinder to Norman than anyone else in the film. Even her lover Sam Loomis is treated with a kind of desperate irritability created by her sense of frustration in their relationship status—Norman, ironically her murderer, seems to be the one male Marion finds herself able to trust, based on mixed feelings of pity, superiority, and casual affection engendered by his social ineptitude and child-like enthusiasm that pops up intermittent to his strange rants on the subject of his mother. Anne Heche, by virtue of her performance virtually ignoring the difference between the male/female

relationships in Marion's life, in a way denies empathy or larger understanding of the Marion character as well as the men.

Heche's performance in the real estate scene is one of the least effective of the entire film—Marion is presented as a flibbertigibbet, a slightly mincing flirt, grinning emptily or laughing nervously at Cassidy's advances. Anne Heche herself is quoted as saying, in reference to her character's appearance on paper: "I looked at the character and thought, what a lame brain. She pays no attention to what she's doing. She doesn't even think about the consequences. Who is this doofus? So I kind of went with that. I went with her flightiness" (Parish 266), ignoring the importance of creating empathy for the character to the story's narrative structure. In reinventing her character, she only succeeds in trivializing the impact of her performance—without looking at the story as a whole, she minimalizes Marion to the point that audiences are left not caring what happens to this "doofus" because there exists no identification with her plight. Without the gravity of her cultural setting, her needs and wants, Heche appears as a blank, vacuous screen presence whose death is merely a footnote to spur on the second half of the movie's plot, rather than a lasting impression that almost overshadows the second act of the film.

III: ANTHONY PERKINS (*Psycho 60)*

"A boy's best friend is his mother." Norman, Psycho screenplay, Joseph Stefano

Perhaps even more difficult (in terms of iconography) than recreating or expanding upon the role of Janet Leigh as Marion Crane is the role of Anthony Perkins as Norman Bates. Allotted much more screen time and development, Bates is the central character of the latter half of the film, suddenly removed from a supporting player role in

the pre-murder sequence of *Psycho* 60 into a vivid spotlight of neurosis and loneliness, and it is the vision of his static, smiling face at the end of the film that seals the horror of the denouement. Nonetheless, his participation and interaction with Marion in the scenes preceding Marion's death serve a vital function within the narrative of setting up his character—lonely, boyish, trapped, he is referred to again and again in critical texts of the earlier film as Marion's double (Durgnat, 94), another character presented initially as basically good and caught up in a situation that oppresses and defines them to a point of frustration that is almost madness itself. It is Marion's comfort level with the innocuous looking Bates that seals the upped-ante factor of the shower murder scene—the audience is, despite the occasional bitter ranting in the parlor conversation scene in reference to his mother, deceptively lulled into confidence in the young man as essentially harmless. "Mother" is much more of a threat to Norman in the fifteen minutes before the shower scene—Marion seems to see Norman being oppressed and being unable to seek alternate options to his current trap, and in her empathy sees the ease with which she can ameliorate her situation as compared to the dead end quality of Norman's torturous relationship with his mother. The same sad eyed empathy is suddenly switched in the conversation scene in the motel's back parlor from Marion to Norman—her tacit superiority to a man trapped in a boy's situation makes his lonely, repetitious life that much more pitiable. Marion seems to draw her strength in this scene from her own empathy/sympathy with Norman's situation, and the resolve to return the money and set back to the trap she now sees a solution to. "You've never had an empty moment in your whole life. Have you?...It's too late for me," are lines that shakes with Norman's submerged bitterness, with his sad-eyed isolation, and which make the jarring quality of

his later anger at Marion's suggestion of institutionalizing the domineering "Mother" Norman keeps referring to all the more off-putting.

Anthony Perkins, in the role of Norman, has a decided upper hand physically for the role over his successor. His bird-like angularity, boyish good looks, and slim, spare frame all calculate significantly into the mothering (no pun intended) sympathy the audience and Marion feel for him. Despite successful turnouts in a varied number of roles before his casting as Bates[2], the rest of his career would be stamped indelibly with his contribution to *Psycho* 60, going so far as to reprise the role in three subsequent films (respectively, *Psycho*'s II through IV). It is *his* Norman Bates, thin, shadowy, that remains the iconic figure looming near the gothic mansion-on-the-hill overlooking Bates motel in most of the film's publicity shots to this day. In keeping with Hitchcock's intent to pull a certain double-whammy with the picture's major name star being killed in the first reel, he transposes the figure of the novel's Norman Bates—plump, balding, bespectacled, middle aged (Bloch, 8)—into the youthful, sweet faced, slightly effete Anthony Perkins[3]. The idea of the novel's Bates as a schizophrenic, a serial killer, and a cross dresser seems much more plausible in a fifties' context, in which the outsider status alone of the character would paint him as more dangerous, less empathetic, more likely to kill in the audience's mind, in Bloch's simplistic portrayal, more in keeping physically with the novel's inspiration, the real life case of serial killer Ed Gein (Hoberman). The climactic scene in which Bates, dressed as Mother, comes rushing at Sam Loomis and

---

[2] *The Tin Star (1957), The Matchmaker (1958), Desire Under the Elms (1958),* and *On the Beach (1959)* were all moderately to well received pictures in which Perkins figured prominently (http://www.imdb.com). -LS

[3] In preparation for this project, I actually came across a copy of a Screenstars magazine from the late fifties' featuring both a just married Janet Leigh and Tony Curtis on the cover, as WELL as a layout featuring popular "dreamboats" of the day that included a shirtless (why!!) cheesecake shot of Perkins. How their careers would change.... -LS

Lila Crane, is all the more shocking because even in open view of Mother's corpse, it still seems unthinkable *Norman* is actually the one to blame, setting up the difficulty in reconciling the last close up of his face and the fly.

Perkins, as Bates, creates his most endearing moments as the polite, nervous motel-keep he presents himself as in his first exchanges with Marion Crane. Hurrying out to the office to offer her an umbrella in the pouring rain, munching on candy corn, laughing nervously in an almost helpless way, he's repressed in a specifically late fifties' way. Possibly latently homosexual, certainly a voyeur, his intensely private life creates an inability to cope with the outside world that cripples him in conversation with a lovely girl—the same good looks that make Leigh's Marion vulnerable to the unwanted advances of Cassidy in the office scene likewise leave her superior in her interactions with Bates. The same looks that create lust in Cassidy and motivate him to continue in his leering advances make Norman even more nervous, even more at Marion's mercy, in a unique inversion of male/female relations peculiar to strong women and emotionally underdeveloped men. Lulled into the flattering idea of superiority, Marion 60 ventures the polite assertiveness of inquiring as to why Norman hasn't put Mother "some place", which changes the entire tone of the dialogue from Norman's side, irrecovably shattering the easy rapport Marion 60 felt with him. Her ability to cope with the outside world, her well-intentioned, clueless assessment of Norman's home life, suddenly pricks up the hairs on the back of Norman 60's neck, and he suddenly veers into shrill debasement of "her" kind of people, people who would see more fit to lock their elders away than to care for them. At this juncture, based on the earlier assessment of Norman's character, it is hard to tell if Norman is suddenly on the brink of veering into the other character, if his

forceful diatribe on the unsuitability of mental health care is an act of self-preservation leaking over from the Mother side of his brain, or if this slight glimpse of danger is simply another portion of Norman, giving the audience and Marion 60 a vague premonition of what the harmless looking Norman is actually capable of. It is within the range and control of Anthony Perkin's voice, his careful hand gestures, his rising tone, that these issues become apparent. Again in keeping with Hitchcock's innate trust in his actors if that initial trust had not been broken, Hitchcock is quoted as responding to a request from Perkins to change some of Bates's dialogue as: "Oh, they're all right—I'm sure they're all right. Have you given these a lot of thought? You've really thought it out? And you like the changes...? All right, that's the way we'll do it" (McGilligan, 591). Again, if Hitchcock's actors were cattle, they were certainly well-treated, well-adjusted, extremely talented cattle, especially in the case of Leigh and Perkins, having a great deal to do with the outcome of the finished film *Psycho 60.*

IV: VINCE VAUGHAN (*Psycho 98)*

"We all go a little mad sometimes..." – Norman, Psycho screenplay, Jospeh Stefano

One of the least well received, critically, of the entire cast would be Vince Vaughan in the role of Norman Bates. Roger Ebert offers, in almost a personal slight: "Possibly no actor could have matched the Perkins performance...but Vaughan is not the actor to try". Even director Van Sant, technically responsible for the majority of creative decisions on the film set, comes out much cleaner review-wise than his star. Half the casting of Vaughan as the principal character was based in Van Sant's almost repetitious

determination to both adhere to earlier standards from the 1960 production and to somehow simultaneously subvert them.

> At first it was hard to imagine the part without envisioning Anthony Perkins...What helped was looking back at the novel and seeing what the original character was like-he was nothing like Perkins. It helped me to focus on finding someone new, someone conceivable as this character, yet who didn't play into the way Perkins did it so much (official site).

Ignoring the subtlety in Hitchcock's casting choice, Van Sant reverted to the original interpretation of the book's Norman, decidedly less effective onscreen even visually than Perkins. James Naremore writes: "In the original, Norman sometimes looks feminine and avian, sometimes like a dark-haired leading man, and sometimes an angular stick figure—in the climactic scenes...in the cellar, [Vince Vaughan's] Norman looks like a fullback wearing a fright wig". In reference to Vaughan's interpretation, Naremore stresses the idea that even despite the physicality, the sheer singularness of Perkin's nuanced performance reduces Vaughan to the unenviable task of simple replication, a point that Vaughan denies in interviews contemporary to his film's release: ""Clearly, Anthony Perkins did a brilliant job, his signature performance... But I'm Vince Vaughn and I've had my own life experiences that I bring to the screen. I tried to pay tribute to his performance and honor his choices, while at the same time changing things to a certain degree" (official site). The blasé quality of this statement mirrors the lackluster interpretation Vaughan applies on film—mimicking the same gestures and nervous tics as Perkins rings as false as his attempt to add gravity or intensity to some of the more bitter lines delivered in the parlor scene. Unable to bring new vigor to the role as perhaps his

director has intended, instead Vaughan succumbs to simple replication, which, at the very least, Heche's ineffective interpretation avoids at the cost of even her plausibility. Vaughan's Bates "isn't odd enough. Norman's early dialogue often ends with a nervous laugh. Perkins, in the original, made it seem compulsive, welling up out of some secret pool of madness. Vaughan's laugh doesn't seem involuntary, it seems like he means to laugh" (Ebert), pointing out even Vaughan's practical failure at following a successful blueprint. Vince Vaughan's physicality might have hindered his ability to make Bates his own, but certainly, without the coupled effect of his lack of presence, would not have entirely negated the possibility of his success in fashioning a character even with the constraints presented to him.

Costuming/hair and makeup- wise, an attempt is made at making six foot five, jugheaded, good looking Vince Vaughan as Norman 98 more feasible—his crew-short haircut emphasizes the boyishness of the Bates character, and his semi-vintage clothes, looking like something from the *Leave it to Beaver* era of plaid short sleeve shirts and canvas windbreakers, hang on him in a not-entirely flattering fashion. Nevertheless, his physicality is as insuppressible as Anthony Perkins—as Perkins would always be, in his entire film career, slightly emaciated, slightly youthful, Vaughan continues to this day to be slightly hulking, extremely masculine.

Another added facet, clashing with the original early sixties' conception of the character and what amounts to the "right" tone for Norman, is the jarring addition of a masturbation context to the scene in which Norman watches Marion through a hole in his parlor wall as the girl disrobes and steps into the shower. The sexless, or indeed implied homosexuality, aspect of Norman 60 intensifies the effect of the issues of transvestitism

and murder character analysis faces when confronted with Norman, making the audience question what is really at the heart of Norman's psychosis. Adding an overt sexual connotation to the voyeuristic look, the "murderous gaze" Robin Wood refers to titularly in his book on Hitchcock films, reduces the act to sexual frustration, as opposed to multi-level mental disturbance. The same guilt flags both scenes as a possible precursor to the Mother/Norman as a murderer debate, but in its outward expression of misguided sexual energy, the debate is limited to an emotionally stunted, isolated man unable to express his sexual needs in a culturally acceptable way outside of masturbating to, and later murdering, an unwary, attractive female. The act of Norman 98 stabbing Marion in the shower (as, with audiences more than likely aware of the "surprise" ending of the film, it is clear to the viewer at that point that the backlit, heavily muscled character with the fright wig and knife is ostensibly *not* Norman's overbearing mother, but Norman himself) has much more of a phallic connotation based on the expressly overt nature of Norman's sexual repression.

In terms of cultural context and the transposition of physicality and demeanor in Vaughan's Norman, Alexander Walker hits the nail on the head in his review of *Psycho* 98: "[Vaughan's] Norman is built like a football quarterback and has such a creepy line in small talk that he'd scare away any of today's wised up working girls into instant flight". The same vulnerability and innocuousness that lulled Marion 60 into a false sense of security with Norman 60 is destroyed in *Psycho* 98 by the fact that the mere physical presence of Vince Vaughan in comparison to the birdlike, waifish Anne Heche presents a visual threat immediately to the audience if not to Marion 98. There exists a "scary" quality to Norman 98 that makes the viewer already suspicious of him at first glance, a

presupposition that is in no way countered by the added creepiness of his banter with Marion 98 in the parlor scene. The vicious way in which he intones the lines "They click their thick tongues and suggest oh so delicately" affect more of a vicious connotation than simple bitterness—Anne Heche, for her part, in Marion 98 looks slightly afraid more than Marion 60 would have reacted to the same line as slightly flustered at having upset the delicate Bates. The consequences of upsetting Vaughan's Bates are more palpable, more seated in the threat of physical violence than the stringy Bates 60 could ever hope to convey, and the result is confusing—is he or is he not capable of violence? The answer in the case of Bates 60 is clear—offhand, no. The shock of his murderous streak as exposed at the end of the film has a great deal to do with the audience almost sympathizing for the cover up task he has to undertake to protect his dear Mother. It remains plausible to the viewer, and the end of *Psycho 98*, that Bates 98 was completely capable of all these things based on the general malaise he inspires in both the onscreen characters and those off screen.

In sum, Vince Vaughan remains the most misguided of the *Psycho 98* experience based on his inability to create his own character, stemming both from possibly his own acting shortcomings as well as the extreme pressure of recreating a role dozens of esteemed critics laud as almost letter perfect. Under these constraints, Vaughan seems to have chosen, to the detriment of both his contribution to the film and to the film as a whole, simple recreation, and a botched recreation at that, again reaffirming the strength of the earlier interpretation within the cultural setting of the time (the late fifties'/early sixties') it was set.

V: CONCLUSIONS

"Read the book! See the movie!" – cover blurb from the re-release of Bloch's Psycho coincident with Psycho 60's *theatrical release*

In the end, Gus Van Sant's failure to recreate, if not the mood of the original *Psycho,* even the success of the groundbreaking film which he thought significant enough to attempt to rediscover for a modern audience, does not lie in his inability to adhere to the same strict regulations and constraints under which the first *Psycho* was produced. While meticulous detail was given to set construction, sound, scene layout, and dialogue, without the context of the original film and the viewership of the earlier audience, without the participation of the original principals in the original temporal setting, his "updating" was in a sense not a real updating at all, but an exercise in historical re-enactor-like, slavish imitation. *Psycho 98* exists as a botched attempt to negotiate the time difference of almost a half century without making any real attempt or acknowledgement of the fact that there was a difference at all—in sensibilities, in acting, in interpretation. While he, as a filmmaker, probably gained great insight into the mind of one of the 20th century's greatest *auteurs*, Gus Van Sant missed, in the long run, the general point of most narrative filmmaking—not only to entertain but to, inadvertently or not, capture a sense of the time and the audience of the film's release and that of all those involved in its production. By waylaying the heart of the production with a catchy, infectious byline of making new of the old, of indulging in intertextual and metafilmic possibilities that turn film school go-er's knees to jelly, Van Sant may not have succeeded as a director, but certainly raised an interesting answer to the question of actors' and context's

contribution to the films of Alfred Hitchcock. The work of the original creators of the roles in the film *Psycho* is two-fold as appreciable when watching the same lines fall out of the same characters' mouths stale and flat as they never were in the original film, bringing new light to their own special mark made in film. Never before has a "re-tooling" of an original property gained so much notoriety, debate, and, in a way, failed so parlously as *Psycho 98*, which in itself, invites more criticism and thought given to the nature of film authorship and context.

WORKS CITED

Bloch, Robert. *Psycho* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960

Durgnat, Raymond. *A Long Hard Look at 'Psycho'* London: BFI, 2002

Ebert, Roger. "Review: *Psycho*" *Chicago Sun Times* 8 Dec. 1998

Fallaci, Oriana *The Egoists: Sixteen Surprising Interviews* Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1963

Hoberman, J. "Taking Another Stab" *Village Voice*, 9 Dec 1998

Knight, Arthur "Conversation With Alfred Hitchcock" *Oui*, Fev 1973: p 116-121

Leitch, Thomas "Hitchcock Without Hitchcock" *Literary Film Quarterly.* 31.4 (2003) 248-259

Leigh, Janet *There Really Was a Hollywood* New York: Doubleday, 1984

-- *Psycho: Behind the Scenes of a Classic Thriller* New York: Random House, 1995

McGilligan, Patrick *Alfred Hitchcock: A Life in Darkness and Light* New York: Harper Collins, 2003

Naremore, James "Remaking Psycho" *Hitchcock Annual* (1999-2000), 3-12

Parish, James Robert *Gus Van Sant: An Unauthorized Biography* New York: Thunder's Mouth, 2001

Walker, Alexander. "Psycho the Remake Just Doesn't Wash" *Independent* 10 Dec 1998: p.10

Wallace, Amy. "So Just What's In Store For the Psycho Remake?" *Los Angeles Times,* 22 Jul. 1998: F1

http://www.imdb.com

http://homevideo.universalstudios.com/psycho/production/productionwhy.html