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Norman Bates as "One of us": Freakery in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*[1]

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Don't Be Late

On July 16th, 1960, audiences began lining up in New York City to see Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. The preview featured Hitchcock touring the set of his film in the same way a docent might give a tour of the museum. A murder was to happen in a shower. That was where the blood had been cleaned from, anyway. A young man was dominated by a "maniacal woman." Audience members heard Hitchcock describe the film on the radio: "It is not true, as has been suggested, that *Psycho* frightens the moviegoer speechless. I understand that a number of men sent their wives there in the hope that this was true" (qtd. in Rebello 156). Standing outside the box office were 5-foot-tall cardboard standees of Hitchcock, looking just as he had on their televisions hosting *Alfred Hitchcock Presents.* (Rebello 150). The standee held a sign that read:

> WE WON'T ALLOW YOU
> to cheat yourself! You must see PSYCHO from beginning to end to enjoy it fully. Therefore, do not expect to be admitted into the theatre after the start of each performance of the picture. We say no one – and we mean no one – not even the manager's brother, the President of the United States, or the Queen of England (God bless her)!
>
> Alfred Hitchcock

Audiences arrived early and stood outside sweating, waiting to get into the air-conditioned theatre. It was near 80 degrees outside that Saturday afternoon, and the sky was clear. It had rained the day before, and it was just humid enough to make a person uncomfortable

[1] I would like to thank Scott Balcerzak, Gail Jacky, Andrew Burt, and Caitriona Terry for their feedback on this paper.

("Weather Reports" 40). Those near the front of the line had arrived at 8 a.m., and had been standing there for hours, sweating and waiting (Rebello 160). Once the crowd walked inside the theatre, they heard Alfred Hitchcock booming:

> The manager of this theatre has been instructed, at the risk of his life, not to admit to the theatre any persons after the picture starts. Any spurious attempts to enter by side doors, fire escapes, or ventilating shafts will be met by force. I have been told this is the first time such remarkable measures have been necessary… but then this is the first time they've ever seen a picture like *Psycho* (qtd. in Rebello 151).

A few audience members laughed out loud. Others smiled. Several ladies then made the choice not to touch up their lipstick, for fear of losing their seat. The lights went down, and the picture began.

From P.T. Barnum to Alfred Hitchcock

P.T. Barnum (1810-1891) is credited with coining the phrase "There's a sucker born every minute," though there is no proof that he ever said such a thing (Nickell 12). Barnum did notice that people enjoyed being fooled, and did quote the following from the poem "Hudibras": "Doubtless the pleasure is as great/ Of being cheated as to cheat" (Nickell 12). Barnum became known for his museum, traveling exhibits, and eventually his traveling circus. Barnum purchased his first museum in 1841, which boasted not only taxidermied animals and fossils, but live shows: lecturers, magicians, and musicians (Nickell 11-12). Barnum's collection of taxidermied animals came from one of his predecessors, Charles Wilson Peale, whose collection comprised one of the first museums in America (Fretz 101). Barnum began exhibiting freaks, both humans and animals, such as Tom Thumb (known as "General"), Joice Heth, a slave woman who claimed to be 161 years old (autopsies proved she was actually 80 years old), and Jumbo the Elephant (Nickell 10, Fiedler 276). Barnum called these his "curiosities" (Fiedler 15).

When Barnum had no performers or curiosities to show, he played the parts himself. In the spring of 1836 Barnum had no black minstrel singers to perform in his show, so Barnum "blacked himself thoroughly" and sang the part himself (Fretz 104). Barnum was masterful at exhibiting the other, and could easily manipulate an audience. One of Barnum's most famous curiosities was the "Feejee Mermaid," a monkey's head sewn unto a fish (Fiedler 169). To market this curiosity, a banner outside his museum depicted a beautiful, larger than life woman (Fiedler 169). Barnum was a part of his exhibits, as he had constructed a name for himself through his museums and his multiple autobiographies, of which there were three. Barnum reinvents his textual self in much the same way that Walt Whitman did: he continually re-writes his history each time he releases a new autobiography (Fielder 276).

Hitchcock too, knew how to manipulate an audience and draw in a crowd. He used his image to market his television show, and his voice to scare and manipulate his audience. By 1960, Hitchcock had become a household name through his television show, and his name attached to a film became part of its performance and appeal, much like Barnum and Bailey's circus. Not only did Hitchcock master the use of his image in his films, he mastered its use in

promotion. Hitchcock hired the McCann-Erickson ad agency to handle advertising for *Psycho*, but the idea to use lettering to dominate the ad rather than image was his own (Rebello 148). Both Barnum and Hitchcock reveal nothing in their marketing: Hitchcock because he revealed nothing or very little, and Barnum because he used false advertising.

Hitchcock reveals nothing so as not to spoil the ending of his film. Of the film, Hitchcock told Truffaut: "*Psycho* has a very interesting construction and that game with the audience was fascinating. I was directing the viewers. You might say I was playing them like an organ" (269). Just as Barnum enjoyed fooling his audience, Hitchcock enjoyed "playing" his. Freak shows like Barnum's museum developed their own language to talk about insiders and outsiders. Those inside the freak show were "with it" (Bogdan 25). Those outside of the freak show, those waiting to be fooled or played were marks, rubes, suckers, or yokels (Bogdan 25). We get the sense that Hitchcock thought of his audience in much the same way: suckers waiting to be had. While Barnum used freaks such as Tom Thumb to gain his popularity, Hitchcock used Norman Bates as his attraction. However, unlike Barnum's freaks, who were advertised in banners as the Feejee Mermaid was, Hitchcock uses his advertising to draw a veil of secrecy around his attraction. Once the veil was drawn back and audiences saw the ending of the film, Hitchcock's audience was transformed from suckers to insiders who were "with it." Audiences willingly played along with Hitchcock's game and did not reveal the ending of the movie to others (Rebello 161). Being in on the secret was part of the attraction for Hitchcock fans.

And Hitchcock had quite the attraction in *Psycho*. Hitchcock's *Psycho* and its protagonist, Norman Bates, constitutes a postmodern version of the freak show, a continuation of the tradition of entertainment Barnum and other exhibitors began in the Victorian era.

The Freak Show

The modern or Victorian freak show might have consisted of persons with bodily anomalies such as "Siamese" twins, bearded ladies, dwarfs, or hermaphrodites. Nudja Durbach argues that these people were deemed extraordinary because of their ability to shatter dichotomies; a person can be both two people in one body, and one body inhabited by two persons, both male and female, both adult and childlike in stature (3). Victorian freak shows might have also been ethnological in nature: displaying pygmies or other unfamiliar peoples as the unusual freakish other. According to Rosemarie Garland Thompson, these freaks, both ethnological and bodily, are not freaks of nature, but instead "freaks of culture" (10). Freakery involves more than the individual bodies of the freaks themselves. Robert Bogdan argues that freakery is "a way of thinking about and presenting people –a frame of mind and a set of practices" (24).

Bogdan explains that the history of nearly every displayed freak was fabricated in some way. For instance, giants were described as being taller than they actually were. Tom Thumb (Charles Stratton) exhibited a baby purported to be his, even though he and his wife were infertile (Bogdan 25). Outside the freak show a "banner line" was erected to lure customers into the show: a series of colorful banners depicting the wonders inside the freak show (Nickell 53). The banners created intrigue by exaggerating or falsifying information about freaks inside. For instance, "Sealo the Seal Boy" was depicted as a human head on a seal's body, when in

actuality he was a human whose hands and feet were fused to his body (Nickell 55-56). These banners were sometimes sold to shows secondhand, as fat ladies, midgets and rubber men were performers in nearly every freak show (Nickell 57). In addition to these banners, customers were attracted by a “speiler:” a talker who stood outside the entrance of the tent, whose job it was to convince the crowd the buy tickets (Nickell 63). These talkers were sometimes assisted by “sticks”: persons planted in the crowd, ready to rush forward to buy a ticket (Nickell 66). In his own way, Hitchcock performed the same function through overhead speakers at the theater, standees, or radio advertisements.

Once inside, customers were lectured either by another talker or by the freaks themselves, who would tell false stories about their histories or bodies (Nickell 69). Barnum’s Joice Heth famously told stories of having been George Washington’s nursemaid (Fretz 103). Audiences were often given informational material, or a “pitch card” once inside (Nickell 69). These might include photos of the freaks along with textual explanations of the freaks origin or life story (Nickell 69). Through these means as well as others, freaks were created and explained by the shows which presented them. If freaks truly are “freaks of culture”, then notions of freakery are not stable, and shift with cultural notions of normalcy. The word “normal” did not emerge with its current meanings until around the year 1840, according the Lennard J. Davis. (Durbach 21). The idea of normalcy in terms of bodies was spurred on in part by industrialization and mass production of clothing items. The growth of the modern freak show then, emerged out of newly defined categories of “normal” and “abnormal.” If the British and Americans had defined themselves as normal, they needed an opposite, an abnormal. Freaks were particularly convenient for this purpose

One might deem the cultures that created these freak shows as freakish themselves. While notions of freakery often revolve around the grotesque, freaks have been created for aesthetic reasons, such as the practice of corseting common during the nineteenth century (Fiedler 251). Bodies are constantly being manipulated in ways that later cultures believe are grotesque. While the modern touring freak show may be a thing of the past, freaks continue to be created. The talk show has been proposed as the new site of freakery. Aesthetic freakery is alive and well in the form of Botox and other plastic surgery procedures. (Certainly, the practice of immobilizing part or most of the face is a type of freakery.) Lady Gaga too, represents a new kind of freak, referring to herself and her fans as “monsters.” Norman Bates and other psychopath killers are also freaks of culture, creations born out of current cultural anxieties.

Freakery and the anxieties it uncovers surrounding the human body are not new. As early as 1573, physician Ambroise Paré was working Teratology, the science of birth defects. In his famous illustrated work, *Des Monstres et prodiges*, Paré describes birth defects he has either heard of or seen. Medical professionals collected and cataloged freaks during the Elizabethan period (Durbach 39). Fredrick Treves became famous for his description of Joseph Merrick, the Elephant Man (Durbach 38). Actual doctors or performers pretending to be doctors were often incorporated into the modern and Victorian freak show. Doctors would lecture audiences on the science of freakery, and possibly offer explanations for the extraordinary body’s existence. In Merrick’s case, there was a struggle for authority over his body between the freak show and the hospital (Durbach 47). Durbach argues that medicine, desired to “constrain, fix, and dominate” the body (46). Paré proposed thirteen causes for the existence of monsters ranging

from the glory of God to "the narrowness or smallness of the womb" (3-4). The desire to explain or contain freaks runs deep.

Prior to what Americans know as the modern freak show, freaks were displayed in their family homes and the courts of princes (Fiedler 279). In Elizabethan England, freakish births were advertised through folk song and on single sheets of paper called broadsides (Blumberg 21). Families received compensation in exchange for a view of the extraordinary child (Blumberg 21). The modern freak show saw its heyday between the years of 1847 and 1914 in Great Britain (Durbach 1). In the United States, the modern freak show partially founded by P.T. Barnum saw its "rise and fall" between 1840 and 1940 (Bogdan 23). During these years, advances in transportation, such as the railroad and steamship, made it possible for freak shows to reach a wider audience (Durbach 2). The modern notion of the traveling freak show was born out of an ability to move these extraordinary bodies to the people who wished to see them. No longer did people have to travel or read books to see freaks, the freaks would be brought to them. Wage labor created an amount of leisure time which had not been previously seen by the lower and middle classes, and freak show promoters were happy to take up some of this new-found time (Thomson 12). The freak show brought affordable entertainment right to the homes of workers searching for it. However, freak shows were not merely intended for the lower and middle classes. The upper classes too, sought out freak shows, and the shows catered to multiple audiences. Some shows held separate shows or special hours for a higher-class clientele (Durbach 6-7). Freak shows even provided women with special spaces in which to view freaks; some freak shows provided private viewing rooms for ladies (Durbach 7). Queen Victoria herself visited freak shows, giving the exhibitions an air of respectability (Durbach 7).

The death of the modern freak show coincided with World War I in Britain. Part of this, perhaps, had to do with soldiers returning from the war missing limbs. This created a new category of persons, who came to be known as "disabled," a term not used in Britain prior to World War I (Durbach 7). Otherwise stable notions of the body were disrupted by war. Persons who had previously looked at freaks as others could no longer do so, as the stability of the body was no longer a guarantee. American freak shows also declined because of a general distaste for exploiting persons with what were later defined as physical disabilities. Two world wars created a population interested in rehabilitation or prosthesis for differently bodied people (Dennett 318). Modern medicine too, demystified some of the genetic mutations which were the cause of extraordinary bodies (Dennett 318).

Durbach argues that it was the rise of film which ultimately spelled the death of the modern freak show. Film could create and present its own freaks for public consumption (Durbach 174). Even the earliest films, such as Méliès's *Trip to the Moon*, include the alien as the site of spectacle. Film had an array of spectacles to choose from in literature, and it too, could easily travel to meet the audience. Films, of course, can be moved more easily than people.

Freaks on Film

Freaks on film took many forms, but the earliest of these were monsters such as Frankenstein and Dracula. Although the modern freak show was hardly grounded in truth, being made up of exaggerations and miscategorizations, the freaks exhibited at least existed

in the real world. Film turned to a new freak: the fictional freak. Silent films could not use sound to evoke physical reaction from an audience, so it turned to visual horrors such as those in the 1922 film *Nosferatu*. Todd Browning made his own version of the tale, *Dracula*, in 1931.

There was one notable attempt to translate the freak show directly to film, Browning's *Freaks* (1932). Unfortunately for Browning, the film did not draw an audience. *Freaks* begins with a talker at a freak show who explains to an audience standing around him: "And yet, but for the accident of birth, you might be even as they are. They did not ask to be brought into the world, but into the world they came." The talker walks over to a pit, and a woman looks down and screams. The talker explains "Friends, she was once a beautiful woman. A royal prince shot himself for love of her. She was known as the peacock of the air." The film's narrative begins after a dissolve to the sideshow grounds. The story is of a trapeze artist named Cleopatra and a midget named Hans, whom Cleopatra marries for his money. As a symbol of solidarity and acceptance of Cleopatra, the freaks begin chant: "We accept her. One of us," at the wedding feast. Cleopatra is enraged that the freaks would think they could make her one of them. "You dirty, slimy, freaks!" she exclaims. Cleopatra then begins to slowly poison Hans, hoping to get all of his money when he dies. When the other freak performers find out Cleopatra's scheme, they seek revenge. The ending of the film returns to the talker looking over the same pit: "How she got that way will never be known. Some say it was a jealous lover, others that it was the code of the freaks, others the storm. Believe it or not, there she is." The film cuts to the pit, where Cleopatra's head is now attached to the body of a chicken.

Freaks failed to draw in audiences, who were disgusted by the picture. Theater owners in rural areas refused to show the film at all (Hawkins 266). Reviewers were confused by the use of real freaks to play the parts in the film. A *Time* review of the film focused on the actors rather than the story itself: "A man without legs walks on his hands. A woman without hands eats with her feet. A Negro with no limbs at all lights a cigarette [sic] with his teeth. Siamese twins have courtships" (qtd. in Hawkins 265). According to Joan Hawkins, the film's thesis, that "freakishness" is merely a physical state, and that so-called freaks have the same life experiences as all humans, holds appeal for a contemporary audience (266). This film's ideals did not appeal to audiences in 1932. These freaks are exhibited on film as though they are "just folks": folks who walk, folks who eat, folks who smoke, and folks who fall in love. The ending of this film, of course, complicates the notion that these freaks are "just folks." If freaks have a "code" which needs to be enforced, and if freaks can easily make a "normal person" into "one of *them,*" than surely freaks are *not* just like us. Herein lies the central problem of Browning's *Freaks* for a contemporary audience: Is this a film which exploits freaks for the sake of our horror and entertainment, or is *Freaks* a film which allows audiences to see freaks as "just folks"?

While there were no more notable attempts at bringing the freak show to film, Hitchcock's 1942 film *Saboteur* included a brief scene in which the audience is asked to believe that freaks are "just folks." Barry, Hitchcock's "innocent man," and his companion Pat, take refuge in one of the cars of a traveling freak show. Inside they find the usual cast of freak show characters: a midget (Major), a human skeleton (Bones), a bearded lady (Esmeralda), a fat lady (Tatania), and a pair of "Siamese" twins (Minnie and Marigold). Barry and Pat pretend that they have been walking because their car broke down, and no one has offered them a ride. "The normal

are normally coldhearted," says Bones. When police begin searching the cars, Barry is forced to reveal that he is wanted for a crime, and the freaks are forced to decide whether or not they will turn Barry in. Hitchcock uses this scene to moralize the war. Bones explains the freaks' current set of circumstances: "In this situation I find a parallel for the present world predicament. We stand defeated at the outset." Bones continues his narration, and each of the freaks is given a role: the sympathetic pacifist, those who hold beliefs but are tempted to let themselves be "overridden by force," the ignorant and confused, and even the "malignant jerk." (The part of malignant jerk is played by the "fascist" midget Major.) Bones suggests that the freaks should take a vote, and again narrates what each person's position will be. All of the votes cancel each other out except for Esmeralda, the sympathetic pacifist. Esmeralda, of course, votes that Barry should not be turned in. "I've been thinking it's the good people that stick when anybody's in trouble, and there aren't many good people in the world. I think that we, all of us, know that better than most," she says. When the Major protests that he is against this democratic decision, he is silenced by Bones, who literally puts his hand over the Major's mouth and tells him "You'll abide by the will of the majority." Barry is hidden in a compartment of the car while the police conduct their search. In Hitchcock's film, as in Browning's *Freaks*, the freaks absorb the normal into their ranks. When the police search the car, they note that Pat looks as though she doesn't belong. "Sure, she's one of us," says Esmeralda, "She's our little snake charmer." The plan works, and Barry is not revealed. "They're wonderful people," Pat notes afterward. Instead of being a potential threat like Browning's freaks, Hitchcock's freaks are the protectors of the world, the democratic nation that rises to save the innocent. This film comes ten years after Browning's *Freaks* and during the decline of the freak show in America. Ten years later the freaks on film aren't the threat, fascists are.

By the time of Hitchcock's *Psycho*, fascists on film were not a great draw. In the 1950's and 60's, Americans had a cold war threat to contend with, but they also had a new freak in their midst: the psychopath killer. In 1957, police in Plainfield, Wisconsin, discovered the remains of at least 10 murder victims in the house of Ed Gein (Rebello 2-4). Gein's house held horrors most Americans could never dream of: a pair of human lips on a string, a cup full of noses, a purse made of human skin, four made up female faces nailed to the wall at eye level, flesh upholstered chairs, a bowl made out of a human skull, and more horrors (Rebello 3). The room of Gein's mother, however, lay undisturbed, its door nailed shut (Rebello 3). Americans were both disgusted and fascinated by Gein and his crimes. If newspapers did not cover the crime, gossip did. People packed themselves and their Brownie cameras into cars to drive to the Gein house (Rebello 5). After his arrest, Gein offered no explanations for his crimes, claiming a sort of amnesia (Rebello 5). Gein lived out the rest of his days in an asylum, where workers described him as "harmless" and "tractable" (Rebello 5). If the modern freak show had ended, a new kind of freak was born in the American imagination. Robert Bloch picked up the story of the Gein murders for his new novel, *Psycho.* Bloch did not know Gein's motive for the murders, so he had to invent a motive. Bloch explained that "…in the late fifties, Freudian theories were very popular and, although [he] much [preferred] Jung … [he] decided to develop the story along Freudian lines," (qtd. in Rebello 9). Hitchcock had begun to use Freud in his films, most prominently in 1945 with *Spellbound*. Bloch's novel, about a murderer with an Oedipal complex, provided the perfect source material for Hitchcock, who was already obsessed with Freud's theories and in need of new villains.

Just as science had attempted to explain abnormal bodies in the latter nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century, it also attempted to explain this new form of abnormality in the mind. Through Freudian theory, Bloch and Hitchcock attempt to explain what comes to be known as a "species of person," the serial killer or psychopath killer (Seltzer 2). A pattern of criminal behavior came to define a new type of person. Doctors once again became invested in explaining this new kind of freak, often using psychoanalysis to tie his crimes to some kind of childhood trauma (Seltzer 4).

While the term "serial killer" was not coined until 1970 by Robert Ressler of the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit, the concept of a killer without motive was certainly a frightening one for the audiences Hitchcock was writing for. A few accounts of psychopath or serial killer behavior began surfacing in the 1950s, such as Jim Thompson's *The Killer Inside Me* or the real-life account of the so-called Lonely Hearts killer, Harvey Glatman, who was executed in 1959 for murdering several women who were previously strangers to him. In such accounts, the focus shifts from "the criminal act to the character of the actor" (Seltzer 30). What was perhaps most frightening for audiences was that the indicators of this new kind of freakery were no longer visible. Instead, serial killers were notable because of their seemingly ordinary appearance and demeanor.

Looking at Freaks and Looking at Films

Freak shows often were a highly exploitive form of entertainment. Freaks were put on display, and made a living off of exhibiting their bodies; in the case of many freaks, their exhibitors made a profit off of them. However, it is not the case that the freak show was always exploitive. These displays were sometimes negotiated by the freaks themselves. Count Orloff, or as he was known, "the Human Ostrich," ran his own booking agency (Durbach 11). Freaks were sometimes in charge of creating their own promotional materials, and therefore controlled the use of their image (Durbach 11). Freaks worked as performers much like magicians or actors. Freaks exhibited themselves as "just folks." They performed the ordinary everyday tasks that their audience also performed. Charles Tripp, "the Armless Wonder," used to light cigarettes with his feet and demonstrate his penmanship (Durbach 19). "The Lobster Claw Lady" engaged in the traditional feminine activities with her deformed hands: sewing, crocheting, knitting, and creating beautiful embroidery (Durbach 19).

The live nature of freak shows allowed for audience interaction. Some freaks acted as though they were receiving guests. Rather than site mutely, freaks would move, sing, speak to visitors, and even allowed visitors to touch them (Durbach 9). The gaze did not move in one direction at the freak show. Performers gazed back at spectators. Chang and Eng, the famous Siamese twins, carefully observed their audiences and spoke about the audience after the show (Durbach 9-10).

Here is a piece of the freak show which film could never replace. Film can reflect its audience, but it rarely returns the gaze. Freaks on screen cannot be touched, and cannot engage with the audience. The film seems to be pure voyeurism, while the freak show is an exhibition. A film audience sits in mute darkness for the duration of most films, while the audience of a freak show might have had the opportunity to speak to the spectacle they came to see. *Psycho* is one of Hitchcock's most voyeuristic films. The film begins by panning across

the cityscape, to a building, moving closer to a window on the building, and then finally enters the window itself. The couple inside the room has not raised the blinds, the camera maneuvers between the ledge of the window and the bottom of the blinds. It moves away from the furnishings until it focuses on Marion's prone body lying on a bed, clothed only in her slip and brassiere, with Sam standing over her. Hitchcock emphasizes the illicit nature of their meeting with his opening captions, specifying the date as "Friday, December the eleventh" and the time as "Two forty-three P.M." Hitchcock tells Truffaut that this detail "allows the viewer to become a Peeping Tom" (266). Unlike the freaks of the freak show, Sam and Marion are not supposed to be performers. While audiences might be aware that there are actors on screen, they are encouraged to think that these people on screen do not know they are being watched, and are behaving exactly as they would if they were not being watched. *Psycho* is full of private moments on film which no one would see otherwise: Marion committing theft, Marion getting dressed and undressed multiple times, Norman watching her through a peephole, Marion taking a shower, a grisly murder, and finally, Norman cleaning up after the murder.

While critics have taken an interest in Marion's shower and its subsequent interruption as voyeuristic, Norman's subsequent discovery of Marion's body and his efficient cleanup is also especially voyeuristic. The scene takes on a tinge of the narcissistic when the audience begins to identify with Norman, and hopes that he is able to cover up his crimes. Truffaut tells Hitchcock: "It isn't necessarily identification, but the viewer becomes attached to Perkins because of the care with which he wipes away all the traces of his crime. It's tantamount to admiring someone for a job well done" (272-273). We still believe Norman is simply trying to protect his sick mother, and empathize when he reacts with horror.

"Mother! Oh, God, Mother! Blood! Blood!" Norman cries out from the Bates house. For the next ten minutes of the film, Norman does not speak another word. His actions exist only for him, but we watch him. He reels backward and places his hand over his mouth in horror at the sight of Marion's dead body. Then he gets to work cleaning up every trace of his crime. With a murderer's foresight, he shuts out the lights in Marion's cabin and the motel office (another sign that no one is supposed to see Norman performing this task). At several points, we cringe for Norman. We hope that he will be able to cover up the crimes of his sick mother, whom he cares for so deeply. The camera follows Norman around Marion's room as he packs all of her belongings into her suitcase. Suddenly, the camera pans back to the bedside table, where Marion's stolen $40,000 still sits. We are reminded that Norman has forgotten something, and hope that he will turn back and get it. Instead, he carries the suitcase outside, and we hear the sound of a passing car. Its light passes over Norman. Again, we cringe. Norman freezes, and so do we, hoping he won't be caught. Norman does go back into the hotel room and removes the newspaper bundle, carelessly tossing it into the trunk. Next, we see Norman pushing the car, which contains Marion's belongings and body, into a sinkhole. Hitchcock cuts between a shot of Norman's face and the sinking car. Norman chews pieces of candy as he watches the car sink. Norman frowns and stops chewing when the car stops sinking. While a film like *Saboteur* asks its audience to identify with an innocent man accused of a crime, *Psycho* asks its audience to identify with a murderer. Freaks shows asked audiences to identify with freaks as "just folks," while Hitchcock asks his audience to identify with someone like Norman, murderer.

Step Up to See the Unique Norman Bates

When we first meet Norman Bates, we are charmed. “Gee, I didn’t hear you in all this rain. Go ahead in, please.” he says politely. It is Norman we feel an affinity with at first. It is hard to see the victims of Marion’s crimes as actual victims. The man she has stolen from openly declares that he cheats on his taxes and drinks in the afternoons. Norman, however, is an innocent. We wonder how this woman Marion, a thief, can be fooling such a polite, innocent young man as Norman. “We just keep on lighting the lights and following the formalities,” he chatters as Marion enters a fake name in his guest register. He cracks jokes. “There’s stationary with ‘Bates Motel’ printed on it in case you want to make any of your friends back home envious.” Norman is friendly, asking Marion if she will have dinner with him. We have not yet seen the “Mother” half of Norman. Finally, it appears: “I don’t set a fancy table but the kitchen’s awful homey.”

Norman begins to vacillate between his own persona and his mother’s. Here, the freakery of Norman emerges. If freaks are freaks because of their ability to shatter dichotomies, to be two things simultaneously, then surely Norman is a freak. He is both mother and child, both man and woman, both living and dead. He lacks the physical markers of freakery, but is a freak, nonetheless. (Certainly, Anthony Perkin’s physicality is unique, though. It seems unlikely that Hitchcock did not see this when he cast the role.) We begin to see the markers of Norman’s freakery in his parlor at the Bates Motel. His nervous stuttering begins. Norman is surrounded by stuffed birds, one of the earliest types of freak show displays. We get the impression that Norman has not chosen to stuff birds as a hobby; he feels compelled to do so. “It’s more than a hobby,” Norman tells Marion. “A hobby is supposed to pass the time, not fill it,” he says. Norman’s freakery cannot be helped, much like the freakery of many of the actors in Browning’s *Freaks.* Taxidermy and the display of “skins” as a mark of serial killing is, according to Seltzer, “akin to the demonstration of nature’s unnaturalness…the emptying of the category of nature as such” (97). Skinned bodies or bodies covered in other skins á la Buffalo Bill, is a form of freakery- akin to heavily tattooed humans in early freak shows. What is natural can be un-made and “freaked” by the serial killer.

According to Leslie Fiedler, many freaks desire to be other than what they are: they wish to “pass” in the world of “normal” people (14). Whatever they were born into does not suit them, and yet it is what they were born in that makes them as they are. Freaks do, sometimes, have the option to change. For example, conjoined twins can be separated, and babies with ambiguous genitalia can have a sex assigned through surgery. Norman simultaneously wishes for and dreads a change to the normal. He tells Marion: “We’re all in our private traps. Clamped in them. And none of us can ever get out. We scratch and claw, but only at the air, only at each other. And for all of it, we never budge an inch.” “Sometimes we deliberately step into those traps,” Marion adds. “I was born in mine. I don’t mind it anymore,” Norman replies. Much like Browning’s freaks, but for the accident of birth, we might be as Norman is. Although Norman understands himself as a born freak, he does not wish to stay that way. Marion tells him he ought to mind being trapped. “Oh, I do,” he replies “but I say I don’t.” Throughout their conversation, Norman expresses both a desire to stay in his trap, to stay and take care of his mother, and a wish to walk away from his birth, to curse his mother and leave all behind. Marion learns the lesson of Browning’s *Freaks*: that she too, could become like Norman. It is

this realization that makes Marion decide to go back home and confess to her crimes before she too becomes stuck in her "trap."

Norman's sexual desires are also marked with freakery. It is clear that Norman is attracted to Marion, although we only hear Mother say so. "I won't have you bringing strange young girls for supper!" she bellows. She refers to the dinner with Marion as "cheap" and "erotic." She identifies Norman's "desire" for strangers. Finally, she says "I refuse to speak of disgusting things, because they disgust me!" Before we hear this exchange, we think of Norman as a man asking a woman on a date. When he brings the dinner, Marion offers that they may eat in her room. Norman takes a step backward and his face falls; he suggests that they eat in the office instead. When Arbogast suggests that Norman has spent the night with Marion, we see Norman's face fall yet again. Norman cannot go into a bedroom with a woman. Norman can, however, watch her through a peephole. (Marion calling Norman "Mister Bates" seems to be a reference to what Norman must be doing when he watches Marion through the peephole.) When Mother refers to "disgusting things," she refers to Norman's own notions of sexuality. Norman is both fascinated and repulsed by women. He stares at Marion in her slip and brassiere, much in the same way the audience has watched Marion without her knowledge over the duration of the film thus far. Norman is not homosexual, nor is he heterosexual in the traditional sense; his sexual activities situate him outside the realm of normalcy and within the realm of freakery. Norman does not dress as a woman for sexual pleasure, nor does he have sex with women. He watches them. He will never act of his sexual feelings for Marion. It is possible that Norman has sexual feelings for his mother. "A son is a poor substitute for a lover," he tells Marion, as though he has tried to be. "My mother and I were more than happy," Norman tells Sam later in the film.

Of course, Norman is both personalities: his mother and himself. Just as Fredrick Treves explained Elephant Man Joseph Merrick, the psychiatrist at the end of the film explains Norman. "He was never all Norman, but he was often all Mother." During Norman's dinner with Marion, Norman shifts between these two personalities with ease. No wig or costume is needed to switch between the two. He simultaneously expresses a desire to stay and care for his mother, and a desire to "curse her and leave her forever." When Marion suggests that Norman institutionalize his mother, it seems as though Mother's voice leaps out of Norman as he lunges forward in his chair, responding to the attack. "People always mean well. They cluck their thick tongues and shake their heads and suggest oh-so very delicately…" he begins. Then he leans back and becomes Norman again. "Of course, I've suggested it myself," he muses. Norman is caught between the mother and the child. His mannerisms as Norman are boyish. He stutters and eats pieces of candy. His room is full of dolls and other childhood toys. His mother still refers to him as "boy." In addition to being a murderer, this seems to be what makes Norman freakish, that he is both mother and son, both man and woman. When Norman is revealed, we get the impression that Lila screams not for fear of the knife in Norman's hand, but because she has seen Norman dressed as Mother. Norman is not a transvestite. If he were he would, according to Norman's psychiatrist, wear women's clothing "to achieve a sexual change" or to achieve "satisfaction." What Norman does falls outside the realm of even the freakish category of transvestite as defined by the film's psychiatrist. He refuses to be defined.

Norman can be both mother and child. He can also be both living and dead. Norman Bates lives in the real world. He runs a motel. Norman's mother was once a person of the world, until Norman killed her. She still exists, however, within Norman. Norman preserves her actual body by stuffing it with sawdust, much like he has preserved his birds. Norman preserves the spirit of life in his birds by stuffing them and moving them into lifelike poses. The owl in the corner looks as though it will swoop down, and the crow above Marion cocks its head as though it is listening. "I hate the look of beasts when they're stuffed," he says. "I think only birds look well stuffed because, well, because they're kind of passive to begin with," he explains. But Norman's dead mother, embodied by the living Norman, is not passive. She takes an active role in the world. She has conversations, she walks around the house, and most notably, she murders people. Or so we are led to believe by Norman's psychiatrist.

The Science of Monsters

When Norman is discovered, a doctor is brought in to examine him. This doctor explains all that Norman is to the audience and characters, much like a doctor explaining a freak at a freak show. And although science has come a long way since Paré's *Des Monstres et prodiges*, there is a great deal unknown about the human mind and body.

Still, the public longed for an explanation and a cure for psychosis after reading about Gein's grisly crimes. If psychotic killers like Gein could not be *cured*, they had to be *explained*. Paré proposed thirteen causes for the existence of monsters ranging from the glory of God to "the narrowness or smallness of the womb" (3-4). A freak like Bates seems to fall under Paré's fifth cause of monstrosity: "the imagination" (4). Paré believed that monsters were created by the "obstinate imagination" of the mother who has a vision "at the moment of conception" (38). Norman is not a bodily freak like the ones Paré describes. His freakery began first in his mind. Norman's psychiatrist explains, "Matricide is probably the most unbearable crime of all, most unbearable to the son who commits it. So, he had to erase the crime, at least in his own mind." Norman becomes a freak then through his own imagination. He cannot bear to think of what he has done, and so he must create a reality in which his crimes do not exist.

Fiedler notes that before there was a science deemed Teratology, the Church attempted to "explain the existence of Freaks not 'etiologically,' in terms of what had occasioned them, but 'teleologically,' in terms of what they were intended for" (230). Freaks then, were not to be explained, but accepted as the will of God and interpreted as such (Fiedler 230). If Norman is a freak created by Hitchcock, what was he created *for*? Surely, Hitchcock needed an attraction for our entertainment. But there's more to freakery than entertainment. Every normal person could "be as they are" but for the accident of birth. In the wake of two world wars, Norman appears as a new postmodern threat. The threat is no longer located outside the self in the form of anarchists, Nazis, or fascists, but rather, within the self.

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