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**INSIDE THE MADHOUSE:  
BERNARD HERRMANN'S *PSYCHO***

A Thesis in  
Music Theory  
by  
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## Abstract

Bernard Herrmann's score to *Psycho*, Alfred Hitchcock's definitive slasher film from 1960, enhances the emotional and mental aspects of the characters through musical techniques designed to complement the image track. This thesis explores the connections between the plot design and character development of Marion and Norman in a musical context, focusing on their juxtaposition through the first half of the film. While superficially different, both lead characters fall to temptation and commit crimes. Marion's larceny eventually leads her to Norman, while his homicide catalyzes the second half of the plot. The character shift from Marion to Norman is prepared by the shift in musical language from tertian to atonal in the Madhouse cue. The culmination of the thesis examines this cue's status as a musical hinge in the film's two-part structure.

Through his use of form, pitch material, rhythm, and motives, Herrmann gives voice to the wordless subconsciouses of Marion and Norman. This thesis demonstrates the compositional design through a variety of film and musical analytical techniques, revealing a soundtrack sensitively composed to function within the diegesis without being present in the world of the story. It centers on the analysis of cues selected for the significance of their scenes and the development of the characters. The problematic nature of diegetic and nondiegetic definitions and the examination of the more traditionally humanistic versus nonhumanistic aspects of the cues underlie the connection of the music to the minds of the characters with which they are associated. The music is analyzed according to form, pitch material, and rhythm, enhanced by their context in the story. Due to the wide-ranging structure of the cues from traditional, tertian schemes to nontertian, atonal material, the techniques vary from harmonic, set class, interval class, and contour analyses.

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## Introduction

Well-crafted media buzz guaranteed that movie theaters would be filled to the brim with people jostling to see Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* in 1960. For almost half of the movie, Marion Crane soaked up the audience's attention; everyone watched nervously as she succumbed to the temptation of \$40,000 and ran away to start a new life. The disturbing shower scene, however, ground expectations to a halt with the murder of the protagonist, shifting the focus of the movie from the tragic Marion to the sinister world of Norman Bates and his mother. The abrupt change in the movie's direction was guided by Bernard Herrmann's score. Musical cues hint at a deep parallel between the characters while directing a change in focus from Marion to Norman in the scene preceding the murder. Herrmann's music is the perfect complement to Hitchcock's cinematographic style and gives voice to the characters' innermost feelings, even demonstrating that Marion and Norman have more in common than initially appears.

Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* was based on the book of the same name by Robert Bloch, with some alterations.<sup>1</sup> It tells the dark tale of two characters: Marion Crane and Norman Bates. The film first introduces Marion, a beautiful young secretary, with her lover Sam, a man financially crippled by alimony payments. When Marion is trusted with \$40,000 to deposit in her company's bank account, she snatches the opportunity to establish monetary independence for her and Sam in hopes of enabling them to start a respectable life together. She sets off for his store in California, and on the way encounters a heavy rainstorm. Marion stops at the Bates Motel for the night, and there meets the introverted young owner, Norman. Over dinner that night, they have a tense conversation that reveals the domineering nature of his mother and the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Bloch, *Psycho* (Mattituck, NY: Rivercity Press, 1959; reprint 1976). In Bloch's book, Norman is unseemly, overweight, and repulsive from the first chapter, and Hitchcock's Marion is actually Mary. By making Norman more likeable in the beginning of the film, the shock of the ending was more jarring.



intense protection he feels for her, alarming Marion while also inspiring her to return the money she stole. However, she is stabbed to death in the shower by what appears to be Norman's mother. This infamous scene forces the story to turn to Norman, and the subsequent investigation of Marion's disappearance by Detective Arbogast, Sam, and her sister Lila. Eventually, it is discovered that Norman killed his mother and her lover years before, and since has kept his mother's skeleton in the house on the hill dressed in her clothes. The persona of Mother invaded his mind, and possessed him entirely by the time of Norman's arrest at the close of the film. The story presents many controversial issues of morality, sexuality, and the human psyche.

### *Review of Literature*

While a vast amount of writing has been done on the life and films of Alfred Hitchcock and a wide variety of approaches have investigated the production, reception, and design of *Psycho*, very little has been written about Bernard Herrmann's musical contribution. Many books on *Psycho* only mention the impact of the stabbing strings in the infamous shower scene. Philip J. Skerry's 300-page investigation of the 45-second scene only acknowledges the music in two interviews with people who worked closely with the movie. Instead of pursuing the leads provided by Joseph Stefano and Danny Greene, Skerry comments on how films today are "getting louder."<sup>2</sup> Other writers, such as Stephen Rebello<sup>3</sup> and Jack Sullivan,<sup>4</sup> explore the tenuous relationship between Hitchcock and Herrmann and only skim the surface of the music's characteristics and impact.

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<sup>2</sup> Philip J. Skerry, *Psycho in the Shower: The History of Cinema's Most Famous Scene* (New York, Continuum, 2009), 185.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Rebello, *Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Jack Sullivan, *Hitchcock's Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

Graham Bruce and Royal S. Brown have done the most in-depth work on the subject, perhaps spurred largely by Fred Steiner's early article, "Herrmann's 'Black and White Music' Music for Hitchcock's *Psycho*."<sup>5</sup> Steiner focused on what he dubbed the "Psycho Theme" – the most singable melody of the Prelude (first played at m. 37) – and how it was used to outline major events in the movie's development. Bruce's published dissertation<sup>6</sup> examines the composer's stylistic tendencies and techniques in the realm of film scoring, in particular his use of motivic cells. Brown's article on the irrational,<sup>7</sup> which later appeared in his film music survey *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music*, explores Herrmann's technique of moving from familiar tertian harmonies to more dissonant and unstable atonal sounds. Most of Brown's analytical work on *Psycho* focuses on the use of minor major seventh chords, what he dubs the "Hitchcock chord," and how their bipolar modal nature "...immediately throws the viewer/listener off the rationalized center of normal Western tonality and into a more irrational, mythic domain in which oppositions have no implications that will be resolved by the passing of time, but exist only as two equal poles of the same unity."<sup>8</sup> More recently, Stephen Husarik revisited Steiner's "Psycho Theme" and demonstrated its connecting thread throughout the film.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Fred Steiner, "Herrmann's 'Black and White Music' Music for Hitchcock's *Psycho*," *Film Music Notebook* 1-4 (Winter 1974-5): 26-46.

<sup>6</sup> Graham Bruce, *Bernard Herrmann: Film Music and Narrative* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> Royal S. Brown, "Herrmann, Hitchcock, and the Music of the Irrational," *Cinema Journal* 21/2 (Spring 1982): 12-49.

<sup>8</sup> Royal S. Brown, "Herrmann, Hitchcock, and the Music of the Irrational," in *Psycho: A Casebook*, edited by Robert Kolker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 105-106.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Husarik, "Transformation of 'The Psycho Theme' in Bernard Herrmann's Music for *Psycho*," *Interdisciplinary Humanities* 29/2 (Fall 2009): 144-158. Husarik refers to the entire film through Marion's murder as introductory material, offsetting the balance of the film rather than examining it as a story in two acts, as will be explored later in the paper.

## *Thesis Overview*

This thesis will utilize a variety of critical approaches drawn from film studies and musical theory to explore the connections between the madnesses of Marion and Norman, culminating in a detailed study of the pivotal Madhouse scene. I will focus on the music up through and including the infamous shower scene, analyzing the music through a battery of lenses. Roman numeral, pitch centricity, intervallic, and motivic cell analysis will all be used to identify patterns in the music, and their associative meanings within the context of the plot as it unfolds.

Chapter One will explore the narrative of *Psycho* and the relationship between the characters, the camera, and the audience. Herrmann and Hitchcock's working partnership will be examined, most importantly analyzing the interaction between the music and film and how Bernard's compositional style complemented the director's vision. Just as Hitchcock directs the viewer's gaze through framing, camera angles, and camera movement, Herrmann's disembodied music dictates the emotions of the audience. The music is not simply representative of the characters or even driven by leitmotifs, but rather indicative of their deeper subconscious. It is the outward illustration of their innermost feelings, giving voice to their expectations, dread, temptation, and rage. Similar to how Hitchcock turned everyday life on its head, Herrmann's music is rooted in traditional Western techniques and sonorities. His treatment of triadic harmonies and melodies, however, is colored with characteristics of something less familiar, creating an unsettling aural environment.

The second chapter will explore the parallelism between Marion and Norman, particularly as demonstrated by their music. The primary character trait they share is the sin of temptation: the temptation of money for Marion, and the violent and sexual temptation of flesh

for Norman. The lure of these immoral covets are reflected in the striking similarities between the Temptation cue, voicing Marion's plan to run away with \$40,000, and the Peephole cue, illustrating Norman's sexual desire as he spies on Marion before her fateful end. Both characters succumb to their weaknesses. The Temptation and Peephole cues and their relationship to the visual elements of the film will be analyzed. Phrase structure, rhythmic character, melodic contour, and pitch material will all be examined to highlight striking similarities and differentiations between the related musical cues. Norman's and Marion's cues demonstrate their neurotic likeness through the use of similar registers, rhythms, and melodic motives.

The third chapter will examine other parallels between the two main characters, highlighted by the Flight and Murder cues. The psychoses of Norman as well as Marion reveal themselves in disjunct registers, avoidance of resolution, articulation, melodic contour, and obsessive rhythmic ostinatos. The music of the Marion's Flight cue, with its aggressive asymmetry and unrelenting momentum, embodies Marion's change for the worse. Her financial temptation surmounts her self-control, her escape from Phoenix illustrated by the thumping strings. The violent downbowed chords of the Flight cue are alluded to in the stabbing music of the shower scene, where Norman is finally overcome by his (or his mother's?) need for Marion's blood. The soundtrack of Marion crossing the threshold from temptation to action foreshadows the ultimate end of the unwitting protagonist, and inextricably ties the characters together.

The Madhouse cue will be the culminating subject and final chapter of the thesis due to its structural significance in the film and its music, meriting a thorough investigation as the musical turning point of the film. The more human character of the earlier music dissipates as he spits out objections at the suggestion of institutionalizing his mother. The music changes course from a tertian soundscape to a dissonant atonal vocabulary that further illustrates the film's

shifting focus from Marion to Norman. The analysis will involve pitch centricity, intervallic patterns, and motivic cell development. A detailed analysis of the cue and its place will reveal how Herrmann wove terror out of the threads of traditional Western tertian sonorities. The music, paired with the cinematography, beckons us into an alien world estranged from consonant tertian harmonies and into the dark caverns of Norman's mind. "We all go a little mad sometimes," he states chillingly. Herrmann seems to agree.

## Chapter One: Herrmann, Hitchcock, and *Psycho*

Hitchcock wanted to collaborate with Herrmann early in his career, yet he did not secure him for a project until *The Trouble with Harry* in 1955. Herrmann's score was just as Hitchcock had envisioned for the film, and as Donald Spoto describes it, "... the director was delighted that the music never intruded upon the sound of the body being dragged over the ground, the 'little noiseless noise among the leaves' that recalled Keats and, now, Hitchcock."<sup>10</sup> Thus began a powerful partnership that lasted a decade, ending with *Torn Curtain* in 1966 wherein Herrmann refused to write the pop score that the director and the movie's producers demanded.<sup>11</sup> In between, they also worked together on *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1955), *The Wrong Man* (1956), *Vertigo* (1958), *North by Northwest* (1959), *Psycho* (1960), *The Birds* (1963),<sup>12</sup> and *Marnie* (1964).

While Herrmann was not one to take orders, he worked closely with Hitchcock, aiming to align his music with the director's artistic vision. Their long partnership inextricably linked their two expressive arts and gave outlet to what Spoto called "a dark, tragic sense of life, a brooding view of human relationships, and a compulsion to explore aesthetically the private world of the romantic fantasy."<sup>13</sup> Fortunately for Hitchcock and movie lovers alike, Herrmann's music had the complementary yet independent commentary required for a more interesting musical accompaniment, possibly influenced from his experience composing for radio programs. The radio programs' intense time demands and their limitation of the audience's sensory experience

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<sup>10</sup> Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1983), 356.

<sup>11</sup> "With this unfortunate clash between Hitchcock's persistence (dictated by stubborn commercial consideration) and Herrmann's persistence (dictated by equally stubborn aesthetic considerations), a decade's creative collaboration was broken and another sad cleavage in Hitchcock's life occurred." Spoto, 491.

<sup>12</sup> Herrmann did not compose music for *The Birds*, but instead acted as a sound consultant.

<sup>13</sup> Spoto, 355.

to strictly listening inspired Herrmann to compose music that acted as another character working within the story, complete with appropriate pauses, modulations, timbral shifts, and other techniques to signify scene changes, mood, and character details.<sup>14</sup> His compositional style resulted in music that interacted with the stories rather than simply accompanied scenes.

Early in the production of *Psycho*, Hitchcock had second thoughts about the story's worth and was considering scaling down the production to make it a smaller television event. Herrmann, on the other hand, saw potential in the film and convinced him otherwise largely through the help of his score. Hitchcock intended the shower scene to be without any music to allow the violence to speak for itself with Marion's terrified screams and the ambivalent running water of her last shower. Despite these direct orders, Herrmann composed music for the scene. The impact of the stabbing violins sold Hitchcock on *Psycho* and reassured him that he had a project well worthwhile in the making, and Hitchcock was "so pleased" with the score that he nearly doubled the composer's salary, raising it to \$34,501.<sup>15</sup>

*Psycho* is often regarded as the zenith of their artistic collaboration, preceded chronologically and prepared artistically by *Vertigo* and *North by Northwest*. Just as the trio of revered and loved films covers a wide range of plot genres, from suspense to witty action to horror, the scores differ wildly. Perhaps it is *Vertigo* that takes the middleground, with *North by Northwest* rife with humor and varied orchestral timbre and *Psycho* a monochromatic string score preoccupied with dread. The pair had already made three films together by the time production began on *Vertigo*, and their artistic styles intermingled and became increasingly sensitive to the other's with each subsequent project. While these films were vastly different in

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<sup>14</sup> Bruce, 41. Bruce explores Herrmann's score for Orson Welles's *The Amazing Ambersons* in great detail, outlining the composer's sensitivity to the storyline.

<sup>15</sup> Rebello, 139.

execution and mood, they all featured a characteristic suspense that, with *Marnie*, was harmonically manifested largely through the seventh chord.<sup>16</sup>

### Characteristics of Herrmann's Music

#### *Harmony*

One particular seventh chord – a minor triad with a major seventh – is what Brown dubs the “Hitchcock chord.” As Bruce observes, it appears in the preludes of *Psycho* and *Vertigo*, the title music of *Marnie*, and the transitional music in *North by Northwest*.<sup>17</sup> By nature, the seventh chord is an unstable sonority. In conventional voice leading the dissonant seventh is required to resolve down to a consonant interval in the following chord. The Hitchcock chord is made up of major and minor thirds, very much in line with the Western aural canon, but the major seventh creates an unrelenting dissonance that in Herrmann's treatment does not give the audience the satisfaction of resolution. Its uncanny sound also has to do with the fact that it does not occur “naturally” within the major/minor tonal system, and instead is a hybrid of both.

In Brown's words, “The essence of Herrmann's Hitchcock scoring lies in a kind of harmonic ambiguity whereby the musical language familiar to Western listeners serves as a point of departure only to be modified in such a way that norms are thrown off center and expectations are held in suspense for much longer periods of time than the listening ears and feeling viscera are accustomed to.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, Herrmann toys with sounds the audience was familiar and comfortable with and alters them just enough to create musical unease. This translates to the physical unease inspired by effective horror films. Herrmann uses it to paint the picture of

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<sup>16</sup> Bruce, 118.

<sup>17</sup> Bruce, 118-120.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, 17.



Scottie's vertigo in broken, oscillating chords, using the unstable sound to demonstrate the protagonist's own dizzy physical (and emotional) perception. In *Psycho*, this chord is the very first sound of the movie, appearing in five downbowed strokes in the opening gesture as a Bb-minor triad with an added major seventh, shown in Figure 1.1.

Allegro (molto Agitato)  
tutti con sordino

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Cello  
Bass

Bb minor-major<sup>7</sup>

Figure 1.1. Prelude cue, mm. 1-3

Brown sites the stability of the third and its inherent place at the foundation of traditional Western tonal music as a key in the mutability of Herrmann's sound. His analysis of the opening of *The Trouble with Harry's* Prelude<sup>19</sup> applies just the same to the *Psycho* Prelude, introducing both movies with a frustrating musical refusal to obey rational law, similar to the actions of their characters. The stacked thirds of the opening minor major-seventh chord of the *Psycho* Prelude have a built-in tension that, according to the familiar canon, should move towards a resolution.

<sup>19</sup> Brown, 18-19.

Instead, it also is repeated without a release of its dissonance so that it becomes an entity unto itself rather than part of a progression, transfiguring into a melodic motive of the same harmonic makeup. *Psycho*'s tertian beginning hints at the grotesqueries to come by straightforwardly presenting tertian music in an unexpected context. In Brown's words, "One might think, then that the stability of the third would, in Herrmann, counterbalance the instability of the oft-used seventh. In fact, however, the third, when isolated from the major or minor triad, can be manipulated so that its identity becomes quite ambiguous."<sup>20</sup> Nothing is quite as it seems.

Herrmann and Hitchcock depended on this departure from the everyday to the more surreal to give impetus to their work. Both moved from the more familiar and comfortable into the stranger realms of expression, finally diving into the extreme ends of the human experience. Their shared interest in the irrational was executed by the composer by "taking the triadally oriented harmonic system familiar to listeners within that ethos and, while using it as an ever-present base, turn it against itself."<sup>21</sup> This theme of irrational transformation will be further explored in the culminating chapter on the Madhouse cue.

### *Orchestration*

One of Herrmann's greatest strengths was his compelling and exciting orchestration. His scores are tirelessly varied, as he sought to find just the right color to fit the mood of the story and its characters. In the early 1940s, when Herrmann was coming into his own as a film composer, film scores were largely expected to utilize the resources of a full symphony orchestra. Similar to his aversion to long lyrical melodies reminiscent of nineteenth-century opera, Herrmann eschewed the common Hollywood practice of consistently utilizing a full

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<sup>20</sup> Brown, 20.

<sup>21</sup> Brown, 46.

orchestral sound, choosing instead to create a scintillating range of smaller instrument combinations. Even more unthinkable to Herrmann was the convention of handing off the score to an orchestrator to finish the parts. His vocal protest to this practice shows that “the instrumentation and harmony were a totality envisaged in detail at the point of composition, a process in which no second person could participate.”<sup>22</sup> The wide variety in the orchestral size and makeup of the ensembles used for his radio programs and movies indicate his understanding and interest in instrumental color.

Herrmann composed the score for *Psycho* for a string orchestra, omitting winds and percussion partially for budgetary reasons. While this instrumentation could easily result in a monochromatic sound, he arranges the instruments in such a way that it mimics Hitchcock’s deft use of black and white film (keeping in mind that, of course, he could have filmed in color). Herrmann uses the string choir timbre to create a cohesive yet unsettling depiction of the triumph of the id in *Psycho*’s universe, achieving many striking shades within the string family just as Hitchcock achieves images out of shades of black. As with Marion, we would suspect nothing strange or hostile from this homophonic choir of stringed instruments, but Herrmann coaxes an underworld of conflict and temptation out of the hollow bellies of violins, violas, celli, and basses. He succeeds in creating this color through the successively downbowed *marcato* attacks of the Prelude and Murder cue, techniques like *sul ponticello* and *senza vibrato*, and the extreme timbres of high and low registers in cues such as the Madhouse cue. Bruce observes:

The frequent use of the mute upon the strings, with the resulting dampened sound, implies his withdrawn condition. The use of polyphonic scoring within a single sound color, the various contrasting voices allotted to each of the divided sections of the string family, is an effective analog of a split personality, while the use of the extreme registers

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<sup>22</sup> Bruce, 75.

of the upper and lower instruments suggests our privileged incursion into the darkest reaches of Norman Bates' mind.<sup>23</sup>

Additionally, the lack of vibrato communicates a chilling lack of emotion.<sup>24</sup>

By limiting himself only to strings, however varied the timbral shades, Herrmann enhances one common horror genre theme: claustrophobia. Protagonists often find themselves racing for their own lives or are killed after inadvertently trapping themselves in an enclosed space. As Ross Fenimore writes, "The timbral homogeneity of the orchestration shrinks the perception of space in the music. This sense of running out of space, even running out of time, is pivotal to setting up Marion's demise."<sup>25</sup> Herrmann's orchestration seemingly limits the potential for color variety, similar to how Marion's disposition seems doomed from the moment of her moral indiscretion. No matter how far she drives, she cannot escape the guilt of her crime, just as the wall of strings never relents to a different instrumental group.

Aside from their overt use of claustrophobia, there were other horror genre conventions that Hitchcock and Herrmann employed to create the consummate thriller. In the tradition of Edgar Allen Poe, the Bates Motel is isolated, set on an old highway with no neighbors in sight, and the attractive, solitary, blond lead arrives at the hotel at night in a hellish rainstorm. The Bates residence, perched on a scraggly hill overlooking the motel, seems to be watching over the action below omnisciently, casting a gloomy shadow over the scene and ultimately setting the standard for haunted houses on hills in horror movies even today. Hitchcock relished the genre, flexing his dark humor when Norman watches nervously for the car to sink all the way into the swamp. The promotional film the director made for *Psycho* is a tickling display of his love for

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<sup>23</sup> Bruce, 183.

<sup>24</sup> The second chapter will demonstrate the place of these techniques and their use alongside certain harmonies and ostinatos to connect Marion and Norman.

<sup>25</sup> Ross Fenimore, "Voices that Lie With: The Heard and Unheard in *Psycho*" in *Music in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear*, ed. by Neil Lerner (New York: Routledge, 2010), 85.

the genre, his understanding of its conventions, and his humor. Herrmann, in turn, used dissonance and a range of articulations to mimic the bleak world where Marion and Norman collide. By employing the extremes of register, both high and low, he paralleled Hitchcock's study of the dark, hidden recesses of what people are capable of beneath what seems like an otherwise benign surface.

### *Diegetic and Nondiegetic Music*

Hitchcock ensured that the diegesis of *Psycho* was one void of music. The question of diegetic versus nondiegetic music in film stimulates an intriguing examination of how the presentation of music effects its connotation. Music that comes from the film space, such as a band playing in a crowded nightclub or a car radio innocently doling out pop tunes, lends a more human and in-the-now sense to the scene. The musical world of *Psycho*, however, is purely nondiegetic, allowing it to function in a separate and omnipotent fashion.

While the film was designed to have no diegetic music, Hitchcock furthermore did not want much nondiegetic music in his initial vision of the movie, believing that the absence of music would make the film scarier and further estranged from normalcy. He would later explore this notion in *The Birds* (1963). In *Psycho*, the absence of diegetic music limits the humanistic notions of expression, thus alienating Norman and Marion from the world around them and, more provocatively, suggesting “what we hear underneath the film emanates entirely from the subjective world of Hitchcock's characters themselves.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the music seems to originate *inside* the diegesis.

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<sup>26</sup> Fenimore, 81.

Herrmann's *Psycho* music treads a line between nondiegetic and diegetic music, bolstering the argument that those two finite definitions are inherently problematic. The traditional concept of nondiegetic music separates the music from the storyspace, which also removes it from the characters and their actions onscreen. In this film, the source of the music cannot be seen in the film, but the sounds of the string orchestra emanate from the world of the characters all the same. The simple classification of film music into one of two categories is not a sensitive enough process to allow for other, more nuanced interpretations.

Ben Winters suggests a new organization of film music into extra-fictional and fictional, with extra-fictional music falling outside of the realm of the story (such as intermission or closing credits). Fictional music can be broken down further into two subcategories, extra-diegetic and intra-diegetic, wherein "the extra-diegetic might be understood as music or sound whose logic is not dictated by events within the narrative space." Intra-diegetic music, on the other hand "may be considered to be produced by the characters themselves (either as a result of their physical movements, as with mickey-mousing, as an expression of their emotional state, or as a musical calling-card), or by the geographical space of the film."<sup>27</sup> In the case of *Psycho*, Winters's description of intra-diegetic provides an appropriate label for the score's place in the narrative.

Herrmann and Hitchcock limit the visual film space through directive camera angles and panning, and the aural space with music that directs the emotions of the audience. The music is not simply some form of external commentary upon the characters, but rather serves as a representation of their deeper subconscious. The music is the outward illustration of their innermost feelings, giving voice to their expectations, dread, temptation, and rage. For example,

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<sup>27</sup> Ben Winters, "The Non-Diegetic Fallacy: Film, Music, and Narrative Space," *Music & Letters* 91/2 (May 2010), 237.

the Temptation cue, paired with the innocent envelope of cash sitting on Marion's bed, tells us what she is going to do perhaps before she has even decided. Norman's Peephole cue indicates a deeper flaw in his character than one initially predicts. Once Marion flees Phoenix, the additional element of the disembodied voices takes full advantage of the tension that can be created by the disconnection of vision and sound.

The most direct outward manifestation of the psyche, the Murder cue of *Psycho*, draws the audience into the minds and bodies of the hunter and its prey, isolating them inside Marion's bathroom trap. The entrance of the panicked and grinding dissonance coincides with the opening rip of the curtain, reflecting Marion's fright at finding death before her. The stabbing violins mirror Norman's actions and his derangement while mimicking her terrified heartbeat and suggesting grotesquely shrill birdcalls. The austerity of the orchestration reflects the stark black and white images and the inevitability of her end; the music's register descends and falls silent as her blood spills out and her heart slows to a stop. Herrmann's violently disconnected string stabs echo Hitchcock's many shots, cut apart to show the murder from all angles and sewn together to create a bloody mosaic.

It is here that the music, which functioned primarily as an outward expression of the inner mind of the characters, "betrays"<sup>28</sup> Marion's trust and becomes a witting part of her murder while simultaneously giving voice to her fear, Norman's rage, and the audience's shock.<sup>29</sup> We do not see the weapon penetrate flesh, but we do hear it, portrayed in part through the Foley effect of the casaba melon and more strongly through the music. Danny Greene, the movie's sound editor, recalled about the scene "Hitchcock would say to them, 'Okay, just have a hint of

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<sup>28</sup> Fenimore, 89.

<sup>29</sup> The multi-mirror effect of the music's portrayal of both of the main characters as well as the viewer's horror will be addressed further in the third chapter.

that, and keep the music up,’ because the music was the thing that really made the scene. It enhanced it so much. It just put it over the top.”<sup>30</sup> Joseph Stefano remembered, “I could hardly believe the greatness of the score. Heartbreaking music. So heartbreaking.”<sup>31</sup> The music’s violent downbowed sonorities confirm its realignment with Norman in preparation for the remainder of the film.

### *The Relationship to the Image Track: Counterpoint versus Mickey-Mousing*

Film music is perhaps at its most successful when it counterpoints the visual content of the film in some subtle way, rather than mickey-mousing its every movement and dramatic turn. In such cases, the visual and aural elements of the story combine to create a greater, more effective whole, as with the artistic collaboration of Hitchcock and Herrmann. On the most basic level, they were both artists with strong opinions who relished in the exploration of the irrational. The relationship of the music to the characters of the story and the significant relation of monochrome filming to an all-string soundtrack are perhaps the most obvious signs of the artfully sensitive nature of their collaboration, even within the potentially campy slasher genre. This is largely accomplished through the inventive purpose of Herrmann’s score itself.

Herrmann chose not to use leitmotifs in his later work, but rather employs the music to demonstrate emotion and transformation within the characters, especially when considered in the visual space of the film. Rhythmic ostinato plays a major role in the representation of inner conflict and obsession. One instance of this motivic rhythmic ostinato appears in the Temptation cue (see Figure 1.2). The relentless repetition of short motives illustrates Marion’s rumination over stealing the money while camera angles alternate between her packing and tightly-framed

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<sup>30</sup> Skerry, 185.

<sup>31</sup> Skerry, 59.



shots of the cash on her bed. This scene demonstrates the independent yet intertwined nature of the music, which embodies Marion's emotions without distracting from the image with mickey-mousing. The music exhibits its own structure of transposed ostinato-like motives with a consistent timbre to subtly underscore the tone of her actions without mimicking them.



Figure 1.2. Temptation cue, mm. 1-2.

An example of emotional transformation occurs in the parlor during Norman and Marion's conversation over sandwiches. The new musical material of the Madhouse cue's indicates a shift in Norman's mind when Marion suggests he put his mother "somewhere," awakening a dark recess of his mind not under his control represented by atonal motives and gestures. During this cue, he leans forward, filling more of the frame, and creating a strange optical illusion that imposes his head over the body of the bird of prey mounted behind him. Later, the Peephole cue's compulsive rhythmic nature suggests something dark in him, and indicates his tortured maternal issues surfacing while paired with images of him pacing the parlor and spying on Marion while she undresses.

## *Voice*

Michel Chion has explored the idea of the disembodied voice, or “acousmatic” sounds, and the effect that films can employ by stimulating our omnidirectional hearing while limiting the visual frame into the movie world.<sup>32</sup> The significance of a character that is heard but not seen creates sensory anticipation and discomfort for the viewer, especially in a genre where dialogue is so intimately paired with camera shots that reveal the speaker. The technique is richly employed by the visionary Hitchcock/Herrmann duo in *Psycho*, which many would argue is the pinnacle of their collaboration. This powerful “dislocation between what we hear and see creates a fundamental tension that blurs the known and unknown, what we hear and what we do not (or what we think we hear, but quickly deny).”<sup>33</sup> Along these lines Herrmann’s music functions as a voice without a physical source in the diegesis, deftly complementing Hitchcock’s own highly-orchestrated camera work which controls the audience’s experience of the story.

In other words, the unheard voices that Herrmann creates in the score are established by Hitchcock’s “looking” camera.<sup>34</sup> At the root of *Psycho* lies the dilemma of Norman’s mother who, as far as the audience knows at the time of Marion’s murder, is alive. Despite Norman’s talk of his mother to Marion and the voice we hear projecting from the house on the hill, the lack of bodily presence allows her to maintain a sense of mystery and tension. The missing connection between a voice and its source is a technique well suited to the horror genre. As Chion explains, “*Psycho* explores a parallel situation of an impossible attachment of a voice to a body, or what I am calling impossible embodiment.”<sup>35</sup> The menacing voice of the unseen

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<sup>32</sup> Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, ed. and trans. by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> Fenimore, 80.

<sup>34</sup> Fenimore, 83.

<sup>35</sup> Chion, 140.

mother is an amalgam of three voice actors: two women and one man spoke Mother's lines, with their voices layered on top of each other to create her severe, harsh voice.<sup>36</sup>

### *Melody*

If "Melody is the most rational element of music,"<sup>37</sup> then Herrmann's musical style is the fitting accomplice in the expression of the irrational. The importance of melody in film music is an heirloom from the tradition of opera that was passed to film through the European-born composers of the early twentieth century.<sup>38</sup> Relatable music exudes memorable lines and thoughts that are akin to human experience, so well expressed by melodies. They are the elements of a piece that a listener will most readily be able to recall and describe. Instead of long lyrical themes, Herrmann favors small motivic cells, whose potential is perhaps best described by Bruce, who explained, "The brief phrases which he preferred to long-spanned melodies provided him with a flexible unit whose brevity and simplicity allowed infinite possibilities of development. These simple, cellular units allowed repetition, variation and expansion in accordance with the dramatic needs of a particular scene; yet the developed material retained a firm structural relation with the original unit."<sup>39</sup> The potentially complex expressive demands of film practically demand an elastic method to fully complement its own quick shifts.

The lack of extended melodies and the calculatingly aggressive nature of some of the cues of *Psycho* recall expressionist music, often considered appropriate for the manifestation of the subconscious and irrational. "With aesthetic foundations tied to Freudian psychoanalytic ideas, and development roughly concurrent with that of early cinema, musical expressionism was

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<sup>36</sup> Fenimore, 90.

<sup>37</sup> Royal S. Brown, "Herrmann, Hitchcock, and the Music of the Irrational," *Cinema Journal* 21/2 (Spring 1982), 23.

<sup>38</sup> Bruce, 5-7.

<sup>39</sup> Bruce, 33.

perhaps destined to constitute the traditional sound of the filmic psychopath,” declares Stan Link.<sup>40</sup> Even the more “melodic” cues of Marion are made up primarily of motivic cells; short, measured pieces of music are layered and repeated to create longer lines. For instance, the main motive of the Marion cue is made up of a three-note rising and falling gesture, shown in Figure 1.3. Herrmann’s cell method speaks to the fragmentary nature of the characters, in carefully disguised or overtly presented ways.



Figure 1.3. Main motive of the Marion cue, first violins, mm. 1-4.

Repetition is not normally thought of as an imitative technique, which implies some sort of transformation. The first cue of *Psycho* exemplifies Herrmann’s economical compositional technique. The opening of the Prelude (shown in Figure 1.4) demonstrates plainly the segmented, repetitive design of this cue.

Figure 1.4. Prelude cue, mm. 1-20.

<sup>40</sup> Stan Link, “Sympathy with the Devil? Music of the Psycho Post-*Psycho*,” *Screen* 45/1 (Spring 2004), 1.

The musical score for the Prelude cue, measures 11-20, is presented for five instruments: Violin I (Vls. I), Violin II (Vls. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The score is in 2/4 time and features a variety of musical notations including triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings such as *mp*, *p*, and *pp*. The Viola and Contrabass parts include *pizz.* (pizzicato) and *arco* (arco) markings. The score is divided into measures 11 through 20, with measure numbers indicated at the bottom of each staff.

Figure 1.4. Prelude cue, mm. 1-20, continued.

### *Ostinato*

The music's fixation on one or two measures of material is not only indicative of Herrmann's technique, but also appropriate to the portrayal of the id. The extensive use of ostinati reveals the obsessive nature of Norman and Marion and the darker, less easily controlled aspects of human nature. The relentless characteristics of the repeated rhythms are highlighted by their melodic stasis. While the characters fixate on thoughts of money or sex, among other things, their "intra-diegetic" music is likewise consumed with small motives that repeat *ad nauseum*. Thus, Herrmann fortifies his music with the structure of repetition based on rhythm and pitch rather than the direction of harmonic progression or melodic linear direction, providing yet another manifestation of the claustrophobic world of Hitchcock's trapped and desperate characters.

While the Prelude opens the film with strongly repeated patterns, the Temptation and Peephole cues exhibit the strongest ostinati, aligning with the film's simultaneous exposure of Marion's and Norman's secret obsessions. By turning the same pattern over and over, Herrmann

constricts the pitch space of the music similarly to the thoughts of the characters as already suggested. The frequent use of repeated cells that fill a small melodic space settles the music into that nebulous category wherein it is sent forth from the characters without existing literally in diegetic space. Ostinato sections of the score generally stand on their own in the aural makeup of the scenes they accompany. For example, the Marion and Madhouse cues run alongside dialogue, but the pair of temptation cues described above occur in wordless diegetic silence, seemingly speaking for the characters in times that they find themselves alone with their demons. Herrmann's use of ostinato will be examined closely in Chapter Two.

### *Split Natures*

"I prefer to see *Psycho* as a two-act film rather than the standard three-act structure-film... If one views the film's form in this way, then one can see the shower scene as a structural device that allows the story to shift narrative gears and move away from Marion and toward Norman," explains Skerry.<sup>41</sup> The collective work of the artistic team, namely the director and composer, divides the plot in two. Even the split nature of the story and the film themselves aligns with Hitchcock's investigation of multiple personalities. There are two main characters, two acts, and two primary settings: Phoenix and the Bates Motel. On the one hand is sanity and reality (working, relationships, having a home) and on the other is a bleak demonstration of physical and moral estrangement. First we have music with discernable melodic lines made up of small, recognizable blocks, and then a strange atonal void.

This bipolarity is reflected further in characters themselves, the design of the film, and small details hidden throughout. The most obvious of these bipolarities is the central impetus of

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<sup>41</sup> Skerry, 260.

the film: the duality of Norman as son and Norman as Mother. Subtler is the conflict between Marion in white lingerie before committing crime and Marion in black lingerie, symbolizing her moral downfall. In the office where Marion works, two landscape paintings adorn the same wall: one of a desert, indicative of the solitude her crime brings her, and another of a mountain scene perfectly reflected into a lake below. Even in the room Marion stays in at the Bates Hotel, the wall by the bathroom holds two small paintings of songbirds. She stays at two hotels, drives two cars, and the film follows two days of her life. Take into account the plethora of mirrors in the film, and the extreme abundance of dualities is staggering.

It is not surprising then, that many of Herrmann's musical cues are interrelated in pairs as well. Musical connections between Marion's and Norman's temptations will be explored in the next chapter, as demonstrated in a comparison of two musical cues. Later, the complementary nature of other cues, such as the Prelude and the Murder cue, will be further analyzed. The structural hinge of the movie and of culmination of this thesis will be examined in the final chapter, wherein the significance of the Madhouse cue will be enumerated. Herrmann's score for *Psycho* reveals itself to be an intertwined web of tertian and atonal sonorities that reflect the complex human condition in various stages of distress. We will find that, like Norman and Marion, the widely varied musical cues have more in common beneath the surface.

## **Chapter Two: Marion, Norman, and Temptation**

The relationship of conflicting and complementary dualities is replete in the unexpected pairing of Marion and Norman. The primary character trait Marion and Norman share is the sin of temptation: the temptation of money for Marion, and the violent and sexual temptation of flesh for Norman. The lure of these immoral covets is reflected in the striking similarities between the Temptation cue, voicing Marion's plan to run away with \$40,000, and the Peephole cue, illustrating Norman's sexual desire as he spies on Marion before her early end. The pair of cues provides a voice for the characters' wordless struggle with their demons in the respective scenes. The first shows Marion packing with the money waiting for her on the bed in a tongue-in-cheek sexual parody. The second brings the audience closer to Norman by chronicling his discovery of her fake persona and then sharing with the audience the experience of spying on Marion while she undresses. Both characters succumb to their weaknesses, ending in physical death for one and in psychotic oblivion (and perhaps, less dramatically, arrest) for the other. The cues add another dimension to the psychological battles taking place and document the shifting nature of the two main characters.

While Hitchcock articulates their downfalls through montage and meticulously designed visual shots, Herrmann introduces their crumbling morals through the soundtrack. Herrmann fortifies Hitchcock's character development through his own musical evolution, achieved through cues consisting of two textural layers: a repeating ostinato pattern and a two-note descending motive. The relationship between the ostinato and the melodic descents creates an iridescent harmonic world where functional progressions are evaded as often as they are suggested. The brackish world between tertian and atonal harmonies adds an otherworldly depth to the scenes, suggesting the wordless subconscious.



This chapter will first analyze the pair of cues separately, and then draw conclusions about their similarities and differences. Phrase structure, rhythmic character, melodic contour, and pitch material will all be examined to highlight striking similarities and differentiations between the related musical cues.

### Marion's Temptation Cue

The Temptation cue enters while Marion is changing clothes in her bedroom. The camera pans from Marion's back (and suggestively black lingerie) to a close up of the envelope of cash sitting on the bed. Hitchcock's directive eye forces us to stare at the money, whetting our appetites and giving us a taste of what Marion feels with a corner of the envelope's flap provocatively peeled open. Herrmann's music begins only after the camera's zoom has settled on a tight frame that only has room for the money. The combined effect is the devil on our shoulder, begging us to consider doing what we know we should not, and expressing Marion's own inner turmoil. She is packing a suitcase, suggesting that she has already decided to leave with the money, but because of the lack of a clear tonal center the music feels less decided at first. Clearly bothered by her dilemma, she keeps looking back to the envelope while she finishes gathering her things. The bathroom is innocently in view, visible through an open door. For each of the three times she looks at the money, Hitchcock's camera work forces us to do the same, bringing us closer to her crime.

The Temptation cue is comprised of a rhythmic ostinato pattern counterpointed against a two-note descending gesture (see Figure 2.1). The cue runs for the length of the scene, except for the opening shot on Marion, and ends with the sound of the closed door, cutting directly to

her in the car. For the entirety of the scene there is no dialogue, voiceover, or ambient sound that would suggest a world outside of her bedroom, effectively closing Marion off from the world and shrinking the perceived environment of the film. Not all of the music Herrmann originally composed for this scene was used. The scene cuts to Marion in the car before the music has been played in full, and so we shall explore the nature of the music with regard primarily to what is played in the film, but still consider the entirety of the written music.<sup>42</sup>

The musical score for the 'Temptation cue' (mm. 1-2) features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. Violin I is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C). It plays a continuous, rapid sixteenth-note pattern, marked with the instruction 'tutti con sordino' and 'p (sotto voce)'. Violin II, Viola, and Cello are also in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. They play sustained, low-register notes, marked with 'pp'. The score is divided into two measures, with a double bar line between them.

Figure 2.1. Temptation cue, mm. 1-2.

### *Ostinato*

The ostinato is made up entirely of sixteenth notes punctuated with occasional rests. The pattern, as shown in Figure 1, is two measures long divided into two parts. The second part consistently sequences the first part down a step. The pattern's transposition level changes every measure, while the pattern's rhythmic pattern changes every two bars. The rhythmic changes are made in small increments – never more than a sixteenth note at a time. The overall effect is that,

<sup>42</sup> While it is largely conjecture, the fact that Herrmann composed more music than was used for the scene suggests that the scene may have initially been longer. Hitchcock may have decided to cut some of the action, therefore truncating the Temptation cue.

on the surface, the cue feels rhythmically consistent, despite the slight changes over the course of the cue. The small transformations of the ostinato reflect Marion's own transformation and battle with her morals as she packs her suitcase. Despite the small changes, the first sixteenth note of each beat in each measure is always sounded, and the first two sixteenth notes of the first beat of each measure are almost always slurred.

As shown in Figure 2.2, the ostinato is transposed and altered so that it takes on six different forms (a, b, c, d, e, and f). In the figure, I have reduced the ostinato to its three-note cell, temporarily removing the rhythm to highlight the repetition of transpositions at different levels. The most common form of the motive, a, invites a tangent to explore the underlying pitch organization through its relationship to three key motives in Herrmann's score.

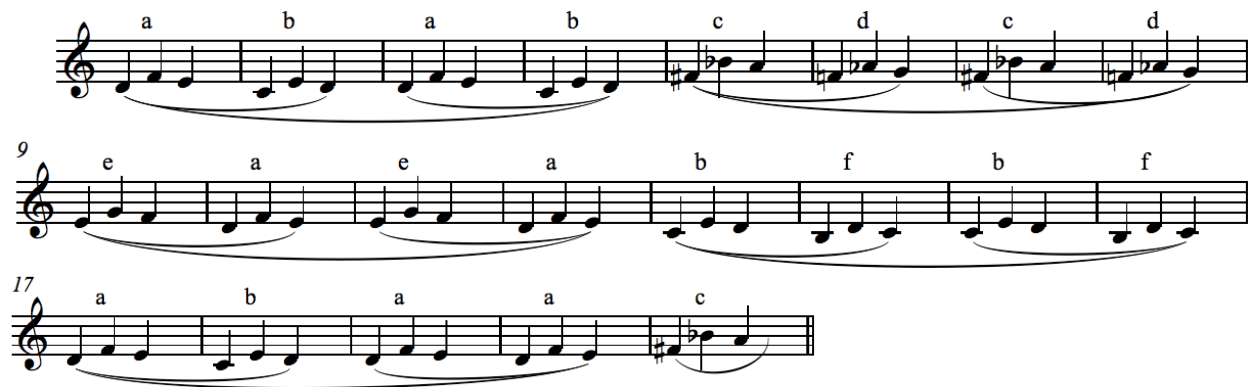



Figure 2.2. Transpositions of the ostinato cell in the Temptation cue, mm. 1-21.


Form a features notes  $D_4 - F_4 - E_4$ . As shown in Figure 2.3, this (013) cell is closely related to the Madhouse cue, Marion's cue, and the Murder music. It is a contraction of Marion's cue, which is made up of pitches  $D_5 - C_6 - F_5$  (025), and it has the same prime form (and contour) as the principal motive from the Madhouse cue, manifested as  $F_3 - E_{b4} - D_3$ . The music of the Murder cue is made up of four notes:  $E_b - E - F - G_b$ , or (0123). Either the pitch

classes themselves, their representative set classes, or the same contour intertwine these four important motives. In this manner, Herrmann maintains a tight range of motives in his expression of the human psyche. Furthermore, Herrmann uses the (013) in both tertian and non-tertian contexts, making it a flexible vehicle for musical expression.

a.)



b.)



c.)

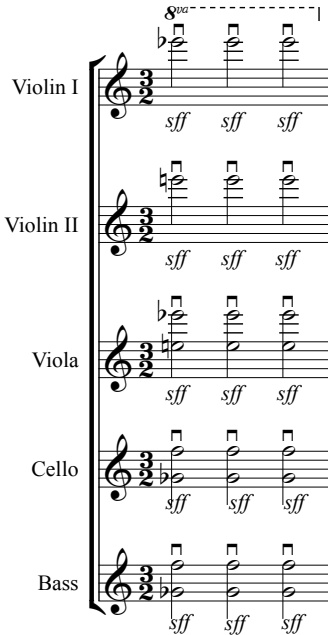


Figure 2.3. a.) Marion motive, b.) Madhouse motive, and c.) Murder cue opening.

While the ostinato of the Temptation cue is transposed (Figure 2.2) and transfigured by small sixteenth-note alterations and articulation changes, four out of the six versions of the motive have the same prime form (Figure 2.4): cells a, d, e, and f are all transpositions of (013). Of all the cell forms in the cue, thirteen of the twenty-one played in the cue (or twenty-two of the thirty-two in the entire written cue) – roughly 2/3 of the cell forms – are transpositions of (013).

| <u>Cell letter</u> | a         | b         | c           | d          | e         | f         |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| <u>Pitches</u>     | D – F – E | C – E – D | F# - Bb – A | F – Ab – G | E – G – F | B – D – C |
| <u>Prime form</u>  | (013)     | (024)     | (014)       | (013)      | (013)     | (013)     |

Figure 2.4. Table of ostinato transpositions and prime forms in the Temptation cue.

Mapping out the repetitions and returns of the various ostinato cells reveals that the cue is made up of two sections, the second of which is a near literal repetition of the first. However, the final movie version only utilizes up through the fifth bar of the second half (see Figure 2.5). On a local level, the cue is organized in pairs: every two bars are repeated before a new pair is introduced. Thus, measures can be grouped into sets of four. The first half is comprised of four sections of four that are repeated nearly verbatim for the second half of the written cue.

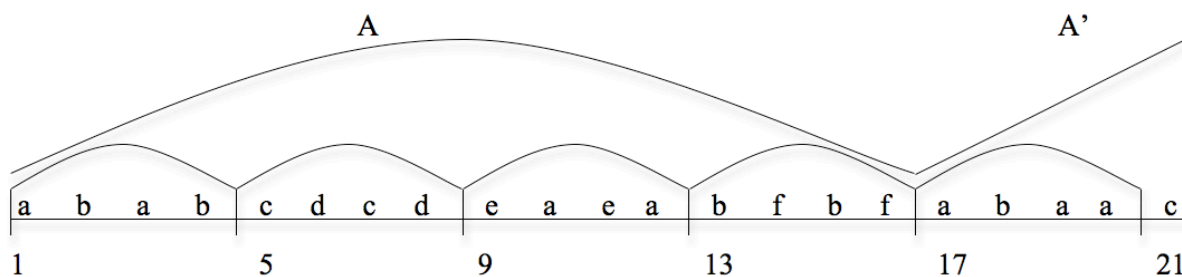


Figure 2.5. Form chart of the Temptation cue, outlining phrases and ostinato transpositions.

Notice that a slight change in slurring articulation results in a rhythmic hiccup in the fabric of the Temptation cue at m. 20 (see Figure 2.6). It is the first measure of the cue to feature a syncopated articulation. In this four-measure group from mm. 17-20, we expect the ostinato to be organized as abab in accordance with mm. 1-4 and the two-part form of the written cue (see Figure 2.5). Instead, the ostinato is organized as abaa, disrupting the original pattern of the cue. This slip of articulation and pitch pattern is the only sync point between the music and the image track, and is lined up with Marion's final step in packing: stuffing the envelope of cash into her purse.



Figure 2.6. Temptation cue, violas, mm. 17-20.

### *Harmony*

Breaking the Temptation cue into its two separate layers helps reveal important aspects of the music's harmonic substance. Since the ostinato pattern is confined to the upper voices and

has a prominent rhythmic profile, the strongest sense of harmony comes from the melodic descending gestures. Consider the sustained line of whole notes and dotted half notes that form dyads throughout the cue, as shown in Figure 2.7. The numbers beneath the staves indicate the interval classes of the dyads.



Figure 2.7. Sustained dyads with ic in the Temptation cue, mm. 1-21.

Only five out of the twenty-one dyads are dissonant (the diminished fourth in m. 7 is heard as a major third). The vast majority of the intervals are thirds – the staple of consonant tertian harmony. Each pair of consecutive pitches moves by whole- or half-step in descending motion. The primary voice-leading principle underlying this passage seems to be one of smooth voice-leading accomplished primarily by neighboring motion.

When considering the entire texture, there is little to suggest the presence of an overall pitch center. Herrmann's music drifts from one potential pitch center to another without giving any strong sense of confirmation beyond the pairs of measures. The fundamental progression from dominant to tonic, so important to Western tonal music, never sounds in its typical spellings of a major dominant chord to a tonic. Instead, pitch centricity is established largely through salience and atypical use of dominant chords.

A complete harmonic reduction of the Temptation cue is provided in Figure 2.8. The black noteheads indicate lower-level neighbor tones within the ostinato pattern. The slurs indicate the groups of repeated two-bar patterns, as introduced in Figure 2.2. Beneath the staves, I have indicated the root and quality of the chords. Delineating the neighboring significance of the nonharmonic pitches reveals a nearly entirely third-based cue.

Figure 2.8. Harmonic reduction of the Temptation cue.

The pitch center of D is suggested by its sheer frequency (salience), and strengthened by the use of A-rooted chords. However, the functional relationship between the D-based and A-based chords is unclear, due largely to the lack of a dominant or dominant seventh sonority and the diminished quality of the D triads. Thus the “dominant pitch” A is flattened in the referential tonic chord of D triads (mm. 1, 8, 10, 12, 17, 19, 22, 26, 28) weakening the potential strength of the dominant scale degree.



Clearly, the chord progressions of this cue are not based on functional harmonic syntax, despite the smooth voice leading, tertian construction, and homophonic texture. Herrmann's potentially D-based tertian sound has been destabilized in such a way that it is difficult to discern, aurally or analytically, any harmonic trajectory in the music. The music lacks any strong confirmation and is undermined by the appearances of D half-diminished sonorities and the absence of a functional dominant. Any suggestion of typical tonic to predominant to dominant to tonic progression is avoided, resulting in a chordal stasis that explores the D-minor realm without confirming it.

Herrmann introduces a new sonority at the end of the written cue – a whole tone collection (0268) – that is omitted in the actual film. It is also the place of the lowest bass register, with E<sub>2</sub> grounding the chord. The tertian sonorities of Marion's Temptation are abandoned at the close of the original scene by a migration to the symmetrical world of whole-tone pitch space. Furthermore, Herrmann's strategic avoidance of harmonic motion or even pitch centricity persists even through the close of the written cue.

The audience is assured that the music is Marion's because of the tightly-framed shots that follow her around her room as she packs. Most importantly, her duality is suggested as she stands in front of the mirror. As her movements quicken, the steady music takes on a determined quality, obtained largely through the repetitive insistence of the ostinato. Rather than mickey-mousing or breaking up the line into more distinct phrases, Herrmann's motivic cells come one after the other to form a nearly invisible layer within the story. The steadfast but doubting nature of the music reflects her own resolve to break the constraints of Sam's monetary woes in spite of

breaking the law, breaking the trust of her boss, and the sheer irrationality of her actions. Her desire for respectability and love for Sam proved stronger than her moral fortitude.

### Norman's Peephole Cue

Just as the Temptation cue illustrates Marion's psychological turning point in the film, the Peephole illustrates a fundamental shift in Norman's psychological condition. The Peephole cue begins ominously as Marion leaves the parlor to return to her room for the night. Like the scene of her temptation, this scene is characterized by Hitchcock's technique of directive filming, wherein tightly-framed POV shots control the viewer's experience. We see what Norman sees when he checks the guest register, view him among the birds of prey, and join him as he looks through the hole in the wall to look in on the unsuspecting woman. The process of discovering Marion's real name and watching her undress seems to change him, as his expression takes a serious quality and he repeatedly looks towards his mother's house. Under our gaze (and with our ears), Norman is suddenly considering dangerous options.

### *Ostinato*

Norman's temptation music, the opening of which is provided in Figure 2.9, is, like Marion's, marked by a rhythmic ostinato counterpointed against a descending two-note melodic pattern. The rhythms of Norman's ostinato pattern resemble the rhythms of Marion's ostinato pattern, but his patterns are steadier and less varied rhythmically. In the Peephole cue, the ostinato is two measures long (1+1). The rhythm of the pattern never changes, and the pattern itself is syncopated (rather like the syncopated articulation of m. 20 in the Temptation cue). Violins play the ostinato, as they do in the Temptation cue, but inhabit a lower register. In

contrast to the pulsing ostinato, the solo viola slips around in half-step motion characterized by repeated descents.



Figure 2.9. Peephole cue, mm. 1-10.

The Peephole cue consists of two main sections, with the first section splitting into four subsections (see Figure 2.10). Each of these segments features a whole-step dyad in the violins, which is transposed in each subsection so that the dyad of the second subsection occurs at T1 (m. 11), the third at T2 (m. 18), and the fourth at T3 (m. 24), shown in Figure 2.11. Four sets of the motive each a semitone apart presents the dissonant structural set (0123), which will be composed out in the forthcoming Murder cue.

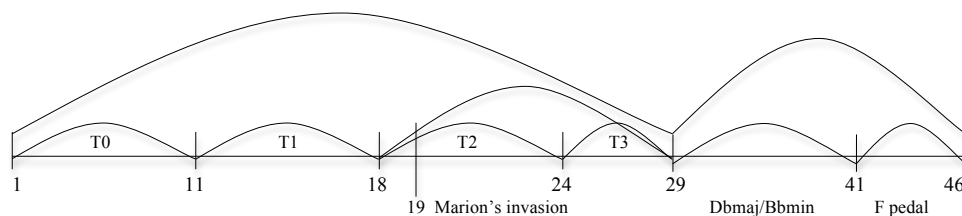


Figure 2.10. Form chart of the Peephole cue.



Figure 2.11. Ostinato transpositions in the Peephole cue, mm. 1-29.

The texture of the cue, which is initially thin and delicate, gradually thickens until the ostinato overwhelms all of the string parts. The two layers condense into one in the second half of the cue, beginning in m. 29 (Figure 2.12) as the ostinato pattern moves from the violin and viola to the entire orchestra. In other words, pitch complexity increases while the texture is simplified, with as many as five different pitches sounding as compared to the two or three in previous sections.

### *Melody and Harmony*

As with the Temptation cue, in the Peephole cue the motion within individual voices is governed by smooth voice leading primarily moving by common tone, whole, or half step motion. For example, the lower instruments alternate between Db major and Bb major chords in mm. 29-39, with conflicting dyads in the treble instruments that suggest bitonality. Simultaneously, the dyads in the treble instruments sound tritones in every other measure, planting conflict on top of what would be an otherwise consonant foundation.



Figure 2.12. Peephole cue, mm. 29-33.

While the ostinato rises one semitone at a time (see Figure 2.11), the melodic contour of the cue is characterized by descent. The “melody” in the first half, alternates between primarily descending semitones and descending tritones (see Figure 2.13). Semitone movement occurs in the descant violin melody (see Figure 2.14) as well as the lower viola melody that begins the cue. Tritones and semitones thus permeate the texture of the cue, delivering a sense of foreboding as the two intervals are the most closely associated in cinema with fear and evil.



Figure 2.13. Peephole melody, mm. 3-17.

The cue changes with the sight of Marion through the peephole. Suddenly, the music launches into the highest tessitura of the violin, and expands into an implied 4/4 time rather than the notated 3/4 (see Figure 2.14). The dynamic range is also drastically altered, featuring a tense push from *pp* to *ff* in the space of merely four beats, exploring the full range of dynamics possible on muted stringed instruments. The invasion of Marion into his hotel has disturbed his usual routine and has awakened something more sinister that begs release, as demonstrated by the change in the music's timbre and texture.

The musical score for measures 19-28 features three staves: Violin I, Violin II, and Viola. Violin I is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 3/4 time signature. It begins with a *pp* dynamic, followed by a crescendo to *ff* over four measures, then a decrescendo back to *pp* and another crescendo to *ff*. Above the staff, there are markings for *8va* and a dashed line indicating an octave shift. Violin II is in treble clef with the same key signature and time signature. It plays a continuous eighth-note pattern in the first four measures, then rests, and returns in measures 19-20 with a *mf* dynamic. Viola is in alto clef with the same key signature and time signature. It has rests in the first four measures, then enters in measure 19 with a *pp* dynamic, playing a semitone/tritone melody. Above the staff, there are markings for *pp*, *>*, and *solo* with arrows indicating dynamics and phrasing.

Figure 2.14. Peephole cue, mm. 19-28.

Despite the descant's impact on the texture and perceived meter of the music, it does not alter the pitch material of the Peephole cue. Shown in Figure 2.15, the first section of the cue consists entirely of dyads and trichords, falling into five set classes: (02), (013), (024), (025), and (026). The dyad ostinato in the violins restricts the pitch space by providing a pedal against the semitone/tritone melody. The small collection of pitch classes features constant dissonance due to the ic 2 in the ostinato. Noticeably absent from this cue are tertian sonorities, which are everpresent in the cues associated with Marion. Norman's world, by contrast, is clearly nontertian.

The figure displays three systems of musical notation for the Peepphole cue, measures 1 through 28. The first system includes Violin I, Violin II, and Viola staves. The second system includes Violin I, Violin II, Cello, and Bass staves. The third system includes Violin I, Violin II, and Viola staves, starting at measure 19. Set class analysis labels are provided below the staves, indicating the set class of the notes in parentheses. The labels are: (02), (024), (025), (013), (02), (02), (026), (013), (02) for the first system; (02), (024), (025), (013), (02), (026), (025), (02) for the second system; and (024), (025), (026), (025), (013), (02), (013), (02), (024), (025), (026), (025), (013) for the third system. The score is in 3/4 time and features various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Figure 2.15. Set class analysis of the Peepphole cue, mm. 1-28.

The final section of the Peepphole cue, starting at m. 41, takes an odd turn (see Figure 2.16). Instead of turning to the most wildly dissonant chords for the close of the cue (a cue that signals Norman's own dark desires and the lurking presence of Mother), the music paradoxically changes to the stability of triadic consonance. In the last nine measures of the cue, a low pedal F plays the ostinato rhythm while a chain of sustained major thirds descend chromatically before

settling on Ab and C, resulting in an F-minor chord. However, in the movie the music ends at the penultimate bar, robbing us of the final resolution.<sup>43</sup> The move to rest on the minor triad is arrested and left on F – A – Db, the penultimate sonority, leaving us with a symmetrical augmented chord (048). The specific set of three pitches also makes up three of the four notes of the opening Psycho chord, Bb – Db – F – A.



Figure 2.16. Reduction of the closing section of the Peephole cue, mm. 41-46.

In the movie, the end of the Peephole cue immediately leads into the Bathroom cue, which is one reason Herrmann may not have wanted to the Peephole cue to end with a stable sonority. The Bathroom cue is one of the returns of the City cue (first presented with the opening skyline shot of Phoenix), and its entrance is seamless, picking up where the Peephole cue left off in a smooth *attacca* (see Figure 2.17). Instead of the pure F-minor sonority that Herrmann originally provided at the end of the Peephole cue (see Figure 2.16), the first chord of the next cue is an alteration of F minor, with an added seventh and raised fourth. The F root is provided by the violas in an ostinato figure new to the City cue and its subsequent appearances, and is a diminution of the syncopated pattern of the Peephole ostinato. It is also rhythmically altered to fit a more square 4/4 meter, with no syncopation across the written beats. The effect is a smooth transition that blends the two cues together.

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<sup>43</sup> This has been indicated in the figure by the double bar-line.



The musical score for Figure 2.17 consists of five staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Bass. The score is divided into two sections: 'Peephole cue' (mm. 45-46) and 'Bathroom cue' (mm. 1-2). The 'Peephole cue' is in 3/4 time, and the 'Bathroom cue' is in 4/4 time. The score shows a change in tempo and key signature at the transition. The 'Peephole cue' features a low pedal tone in the Cello and Bass, and a chain of major thirds in the Violins and Viola. The 'Bathroom cue' features a more complex harmonic structure with a mix of major and minor thirds.

Figure 2.17. Peephole cue, mm. 45-46, *attacca* to Bathroom cue, mm. 1-2.

The conventional tonal elements – the low pedal tone and the prominence of thirds – that float to the surface at the end of the Peephole cue raise another question about what is taking place in Norman’s mind, since the music of *Psycho* can be interpreted as an outward expression of the character’s inner thoughts and emotions. Exactly how does the chain of major thirds at the end of the Peephole cue correlates to a change in Norman’s countenance. He removes himself from the motel, seemingly to calm himself down, away from Marion’s sensuality on the other side of the parlor wall. While distancing himself from the temptation of Marion, he enters his mother’s house, symbolic of her twisted control over him during life and over his mind in death. The tertian sonorities at the close of the cue may be interpreted as indicating his newfound obsession with Marion through her previously established association with tertian sonorities, describing his occupation with her as he plots from the safety of his mother’s stronghold.

## Parallels and Differences

Marion's Temptation cue and Norman's Peephole cue both give voice to obsession and the lure of something immoral, drawing the characters together. Both cues enhance dramatic turning points for the two leads, wherein Marion decides to take the cash and leave town and Norman discovers Marion's lie and reveals his sinister side by looking in on her as she undresses. The scenes set the two acts of the film into motion by both defining and triggering each of their downfalls. Norman and Marion's temptation music, while similar in many respects, also highlights what sets them apart.

The Temptation and Peephole cues both consist of rhythmic ostinato patterns two-measures long. Moreover, motivic cells of each are defined by changes in pitch by small increments in every other bar. While the pitch material migrates without harmonic direction, the consistency of the rhythm creates a drone that underpins the action on the screen with a sense of unrelenting persistence. Marion's ostinato is less syncopated, with each beat outlined, contrasted by the syncopated but exactly repeated ostinato of Norman.

For both cues, waxing and waning dynamic hairpins provide Marion's and Norman's half-step motives with direction and unease. The Temptation hairpins are maintained for the entirety of the cue, and the pattern of the Peephole cue's hairpins are only interrupted by the entrance of the Marion descant in the first violin beginning at m. 19 (refer back to Figure 2.14). The constant push and pull of the dynamics create a tension that complements the obsessive rhythms and strange harmonic movement.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Herrmann uses a similar dynamic technique in the score of *Taxi Driver*, another film about a psychotic character wherein "the swell and fall, together with the side drum beating out its relentless rhythm, suggest the barely repressed surges of repulsion Travis feels, the violent impulse of which will break forth in the last part of the film."<sup>44</sup>

While the time signatures of the cues are different (the Temptation cue is in 4/4, and the Peephole cue is in 3/4), the meter of the Temptation cue exerts influence in the realm of Norman's Peephole cue. Neither cue changes meter, except in the Peephole cue when Norman sees Marion changing (m. 19). It is there that the sustained melodic layer of the music jumps to the highest tessitura of the viola in a contradictory 4/4 meter against Norman's obsessive 3/4 ostinato. As I have shown, this metrical shift marks an important psychological shift in Norman's mental state.

The relationship between the pitch material is also subtle. Both cues are strongly related by a half-step motive which is supported by a slowly evolving progression of nonfunctional chords. In Marion's music the fortification of (013) throughout the various statements of the ostinato paired with the consonant dyads of the other voices complicates the nature of the music and imbues it with an unnatural yet still tertian sound. The ostinato in Norman's Peephole cue exhibits a more literal description of his own psychotic personality. The pairing of its chromatic stepwise ascent with the semitone and tritone movement in the melody exhibits a restricted collection of set classes that avoids tertian structures. His schizophrenia could be hinted at in the bitonal Bb minor/Db major closing section. And finally the semitonal transposition of the ostinato through the first half of the cue foreshadows the (0123) set class of the Murder cue.

The pair of cues demonstrates a similar manifestation of human obsessive thought through repeated rhythmic patterns and inner conflict through the dissonant relationship between the two textural layers. Both toy with hints of familiar, traditional sonorities (i.e. tertian pitch fields), but the strength of chromatic half-step motion pulls it away from the comfort of the traditional Western realm. The relationship between the Temptation cue, Marion's cue, the

Peephole cue, Madhouse cue, and the Murder demonstrates Herrmann's representation of the twisted nature of the id.

### Chapter Three: Parallels of Irrational Acts

Despite Marion and Norman acting as contrasting foils for each other, they – and so, their music – have a great deal in common. Their cues demonstrate their neurotic likeness through the use of similar registers, rhythms, and melodic motives. The difference in the degree of their madness is portrayed in disjunct registers, the avoidance of resolution, varied articulation, and impulsive melodic contour. By tracing the manifestations of multiple, conflicting personalities through the score, we can more fully understand the elusiveness of sanity and normalcy in Hitchcock's film world.

Marion and Norman's shared tragic flaw (although perhaps for Norman there is more than one), outlined in the last chapter, comes to the fruition of downfall in the Flight<sup>45</sup> and Murder cues. These cues share a violent character, easily associated with German expressionism. As Stan Link explains, "With aesthetic foundations tied to Freudian psychoanalytic ideas, and development roughly concurrent with that of early cinema, musical expressionism was perhaps destined to constitute the traditional sound of the filmic psychopath."<sup>46</sup>

#### Marion's Flight Cue

While the Temptation cue describes Marion's mindset as she decides to take the money, the Flight cue describes her mindset when she takes action by driving away with it. It

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<sup>45</sup> The Flight cue is one of the returns of the Prelude, with a few changes. It is much shorter, and one third of the written cue is not used in the film. Herrmann omitted one of the motives, restricting the melodic space and shortening the cue, perhaps to fit the final cut of the scene. Finally, the Flight cue ends on the only motive not built on an eighth-note melody, the flowing "Psycho theme," rather than continuing through the returns of the motives like the Prelude.

<sup>46</sup> Stan Link, "Sympathy with the devil? Music of the psycho post-*Psycho*," *Screen* 45/1 (Spring 2004), 1.

accompanies the scene directly after the Temptation cue, practically segueing in the film from the first cue to the next. The Flight cue begins just after Marion, sitting at a red light in her car on her way out of town, locks eyes with her boss as he crosses the road in front of her. She had claimed to feel ill and left work early, saying that she would stop by the bank to deposit the cash on her way home. Her boss's face shows his surprise at seeing her driving around town. After a sheepish smile, panic takes over as the Flight cue starts and she leaves Phoenix. Its end parallels Marion's exhaustion as she falls asleep behind the wheel.

### *Rhythm and Meter*

Like the Temptation cue, the Flight cue is in duple meter. The compressed 2/4 metrical organization emphasizes repetitions of two beat cycles with a strongly defined pulse. The relentlessness of the pulse is achieved largely by the total absence of anacruses. None of the motives are initiated on a weak beat, but instead start directly on the first beat of the measure. There are also no ties across barlines until the closing phrase, further compartmentalizing the motives and increasing the effect of articulated attack points completely in phase with the meter. Figure 3.1 shows mm. 1-8, which contain the motivic material for the majority of the cue. Each motive is set in strongly articulated two-measure groups, reinforcing the cue's metrical structure. The relentlessness of the rhythmic drive is suffocating, expressing Marion's simultaneous distress and determination.

Allegro (molto Agitato)

tutti con sordino

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Bass

*sff* *sff* *sff* *sff* *mp* *p* *pp*

*pizz.* *pizz.*

Figure 3.1. Flight cue, mm. 1-8.

The cue's rhythmic and metrical characteristics result in an aggressive physicality that induces a visceral tension, especially in combination with the image track. The texture, articulation, and dynamics further enhance the bodily associations of the music. The opening chords create a powerful sonic punch with the combination of repeated downbow markings (which require of the performers a quick slashing arm motion) and *sff* dynamics. The violent chordal fanfare presents the full string orchestra in its low register, condensing the strings into a unified wall by the double stops in the violins and violas. Beginning the cue with downbowed chords at such a strong dynamic level creates a rhythmic shock amidst the relative quiet of the action on the screen.

Directly after the introductory jolt, the dynamic level decreases as the violas decrescendo from each downbeat, and the basses, cellos, and second violins only play *pizzicato* downbeats. The overwhelming result of the articulation is an ever pressing beat now without the full

dynamic force of *sff* but created instead by short decrescendos and the distinct *pizzicato* technique. The first violin motive echoes the dynamic contrast of the viola, alternating with a *staccato* measure that delineates the metrical organization. The ensuing consistent texture of melody and accompaniment continues for the remainder of the cue, with all strings but the first violins making up the accompaniment. The lower strings create a quarter-note pulse that is consistently grouped into two-measure motivic fragments by the first violins.

In the closing phrase of the cue, shown in Figure 3.2, the tyranny of the quarter-note beat finally subsides. Beginning at m. 37 the entrance of a lyrical theme accompanies Marion's night driving and parallels her exhaustion as she falls asleep behind the wheel. Stepwise, *legato* quarter notes played with slurs across the four-measure phrases create a marked contrast to the previous material of the cue. The change in articulation effects a metrical shift from an emphasis of each quarter-note beat in the first part of the cue to a half-note beat emphasis from m. 37 to the end, resulting in a type of rhythmic augmentation. Just as Marion's body relaxes into sleep, the primary beat level shifts from the quarter-note to a more relaxed half-note pulse.

Hypermeter: 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Figure 3.2. Flight cue, mm. 37-47.



The end of the cue suggests a suspension of action as a four-measure hypermeter is interrupted by the cue's premature end. Instead of concluding with a full four-beat cycle, the music ends just shy on hyperbeat 3. This creates metrical irregularity that feels unresolved, hinting that the story is far from over and that Marion's decision to steal the money may not be final.

### *Melody and Harmony*

The opening motive of the Flight cue is a setting of the Hitchcock chord, Bb minor-major<sup>7</sup>, with F in the bass (see Figure 3.3). This chord does not occur "naturally" in major or minor keys, but instead exhibits characteristics of both modes: the minor third of the minor mode and the major seventh of the major mode. Familiar because of its tertian structure, yet unfamiliar because of the sequence of qualities of its constituent thirds (minor/major/major), the sonority exhibits an uncanny sound. The (0148) set class reveals the chord's close relationship to the augmented trichord (048), demonstrating the sonority's peripherally tertian nature.

The next motive, shown in the same figure (mm. 5-8), is an altered form of the Hitchcock chord, now with Bb in the bass and with the upper F – A in the first violins expanded into a melody, decorated by the additional G# and E. This illustrates the overall harmonic stasis of the Flight cue and the economical nature of much of Herrmann's music. Rather than creating coloristic interest through harmonic movement, a single chord is manipulated throughout the majority of the cue. The persistent rhythmic momentum and distinct articulations drive the music, while the pitch material remains fairly constant.

Allegro (molto Agitato)

tutti con sordino

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Bass

Bb minor-major<sup>7</sup>

Figure 3.3. Flight cue, mm. 1-8.

While the melody, played entirely by the first violins, primarily composes out the Hitchcock chord, other lines contain a subtle relationship to the four notes that make up the first half of the Murder cue: E, F, F#, and G. The first three pitches of that set occur in the accompanying viola motive that begins in m. 29, shown in Figure 3.4.

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Figure 3.4. Flight cue, mm. 29-30.

The missing note, Eb, enters at m. 37 as part of the accompaniment for the “Psycho theme”<sup>47</sup> (see Figure 3.5). The remainder of the theme emphasizes the other three pitches again, completing a subtle allusion to the Murder cue within the tertian realm of Marion’s crime. Emphasizing first Eb minor and then E minor, the melody moves again to F# before its resolution to F over the Hitchcock chord based on Bb. Note that this section also features an increase in harmonic movement compared to the first section of the cue, but at the end of the theme it once again settles on the Bb minor-major<sup>7</sup> sonority.

The musical score for the Flight cue, mm. 37-47, is presented for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The time signature is 4/4. The key signature is Eb minor. The score features a melodic line in Violin I and accompaniment in the other instruments. The key signature changes from Eb minor to E minor, then to Gb/F# saliency, and finally to Bb minor-major<sup>7</sup>.

Figure 3.5. Flight cue, mm. 37-47.

### The Murder Cue

During Marion’s tense conversation in the parlor with Norman, she comes to terms with her decision to steal the money and repents her action. After tallying the money she has spent, she turns to the shower – a symbolic cleansing of her sin. However, it is too late for redemption,

<sup>47</sup> Stephen Husarik explores the possible transformation of this theme in his article “Transformation of ‘The Psycho Theme’ in Bernard Herrmann’s Music for *Psycho*,” *Interdisciplinary Humanities* 29/2 (Fall 2009): 144-158.

and the source of the most unsettling disembodied voice, Norman's mother, makes its appearance in the form of a chilling, knife-wielding silhouette with the opening rip of the shower curtain synchronized to the stabs of the violins. The infamous Murder cue demonstrates and embodies Norman's fall to temptation.

### *Rhythm*

The Murder cue, like the Flight cue, has an unforgiving pulse that heralds the end of Marion's brief stint with crime. As suggested by the rhythmic reduction below, the cue divides rhythmically into two main sections. The first section, mm. 1-16, articulates every beat in every measure with a *sff* downbowed gesture. All of the strings exhibit the exact same expressive markings and rhythms, entering one instrument at a time at one-measure intervals. The effect of the successive downbeats played with that dynamic force is one constant metrical stress on the downbeat that mimics the violence of Norman's attack and the incongruity of his rage. Closing your eyes to Hitchcock's choreographed murder shots will not prevent you from witnessing the murder through the stabbing of the strings. Their alarming rhythmic constancy changes slightly with the space created by the quarter rests in mm. 9-16, when the surprise of the violence has waned but Norman's crime is not yet complete.

The grouping organization of the Murder cue is defined more by rhythm, articulation, register, and texture than by melodic organization, especially for the first half of the cue. As Figure 3.6 demonstrates, which outlines the rhythmic transformations of the first violins, the half notes set in the 3/2 meter give way to quarter notes, and finally only the beginning of each measure is articulated. The measure(s) are repeated, as indicated by the measure numbers underneath the gestures, and segmented into five groups by double barlines. This representation

rests.

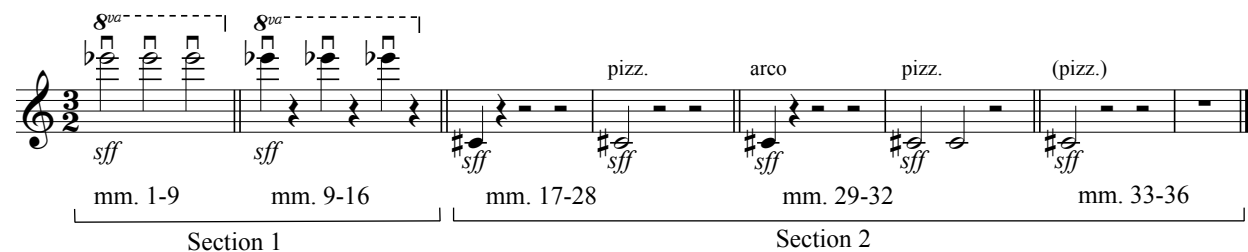


Figure 3.6. Rhythmic organization of the first violin part in the Murder cue.

basses.

<sup>48</sup> The first violins have rests for mm. 8, 9, 15, and 16. However, the other voices as before, maintaining the same rhythmic character.

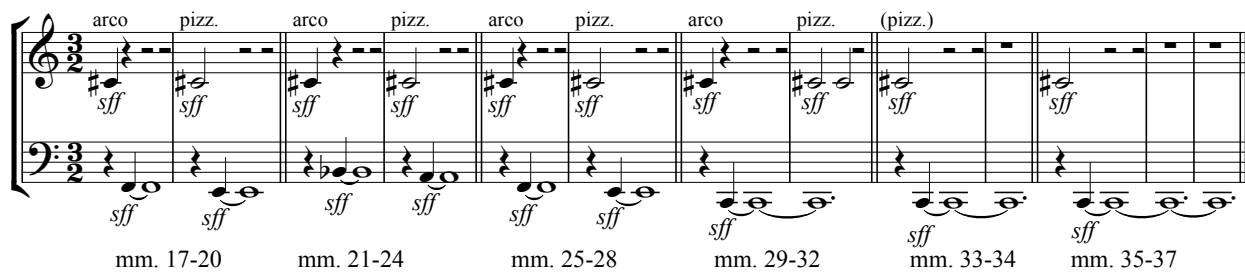


Figure 3.7. Murder cue, first violins and cellos, mm. 17-37.

### *Set Class Analysis*

As I have argued, the five sections of the Murder cue can be grouped into two sections, according to characteristics of rhythm and texture (paralleling the two-part division of the visual track into Marion's murder and subsequent death). Figure 3.8 shows the form with a rhythmic reduction, and Figure 3.9 shows the set class analysis, which also supports a two-part segmentation. Most noticeable in the form chart below is that even though the registers, articulations, and set classes are very different in the two main sections, the cue impresses a continuous, gradual change from violence to decay through its rhythmic character.

Examining the score in Figure 3.9 also highlights the fact that there is no melody in this cue. This is the first cue in the film that lacks a melody or melodic motive. Instead, the cue is driven by other elements such as rhythm, sonorities, texture, and register. The absence of melody further demonstrates the extent of Norman's psychosis, or perhaps demonstrates Mother's possession of his mind in her life after death.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> The final image of Norman in the film superimposes Mother's skull upon his face.

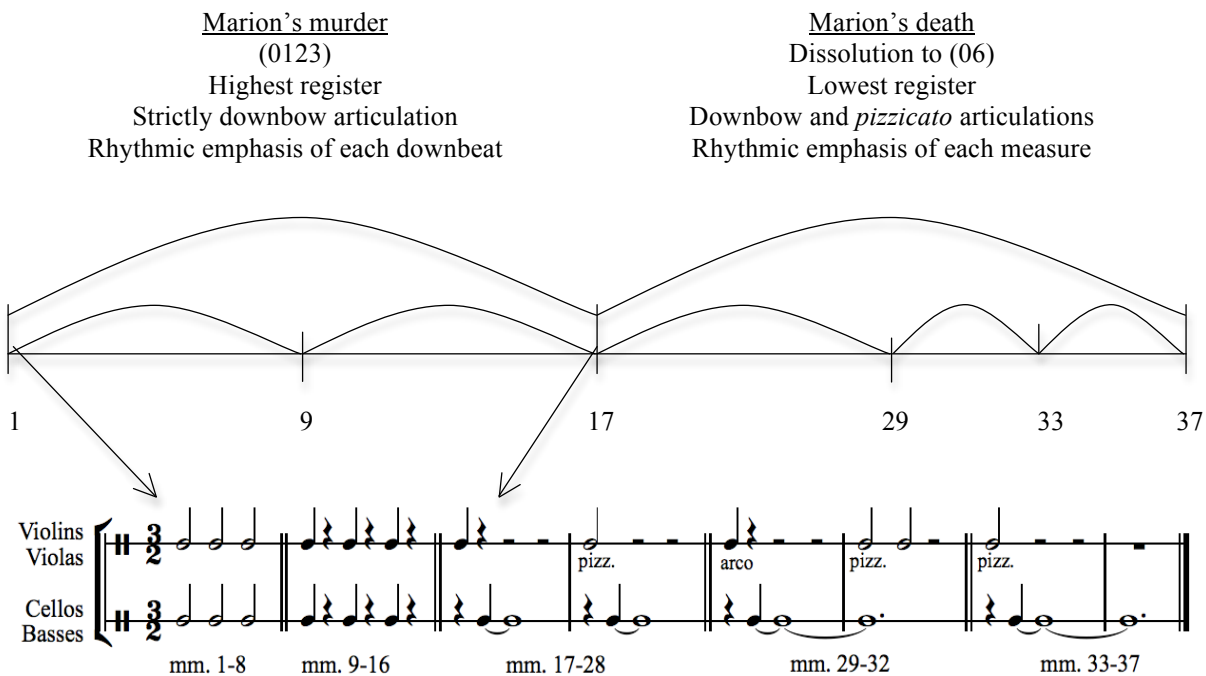


Figure 3.8. Form chart of the Murder cue with rhythmic reduction.

Molto Forzando e Feroce  
Vivo

(01)                      (012)                      (0123)

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Cello  
Bass

*sff (simile)*  
*sff (simile)*  
*div. sff (simile)*  
*div. sff (simile)*  
*div. sff (simile)*

Figure 3.9. Set class analysis of the Murder cue.

(01) (012) (0123)

9

Vln. I *sff* (*simile*) *8va*

Vln. II *sff* (*simile*) *8va*

Vla. *div. sff* (*simile*) *8va*

Vc. *div. sff* (*simile*)

Db. *div. sff* (*simile*)

17 (0147) (01367) (01469) (01267) (0147) (01367)

Vln. I *sff* *pizz.*

Vln. II *sff*

Vla. *sff*

Vc. *sff*

Db. *sff*

Figure 3.9. Set class analysis of the Murder cue, continued.



Figure 3.9. Set class analysis of the Murder cue, continued.

The first half of the cue (mm. 1-16) features an incessantly articulated four-note (0123) chromatic cluster with all instruments playing in their highest tessituras. The staggered entrances of the instruments at one-measure intervals create a descending curtain of increasing dissonance as semitones are added to the texture from a single pitch (Eb) to two pitches (Eb–E), to three pitches (Eb–E–F), and finally to four pitches (Eb–E–F–Gb). The density of the pitch material, coupled with the aggressive articulation, results in the most abrasive sound of the entire film, first foreshadowed in the Madhouse cue (as will be outlined in the next chapter).

The second half of the cue (mm. 17-37) consists of alternating atonal groupings in the lowest regions of the strings' ranges, in contrast to the extreme high registral setting of the first half. The repetition of two-bar fragments displays Herrmann's compositional economy and emphasizes the cue's physical character, in opposition to the melodic contour of earlier cues. The latter half of the cue exhibits a more complex harmonic makeup with alternating set class pairs of (0147) and (01367), (01469) and (01267), and (012568) and (012567). All six set

classes contain at least one semitone and at least one tritone. Set (012567) is the most dissonant of the set classes, with four semitone dissonances and two tritone pairs in the form of two simultaneous (012) trichords.

The cue ends with a tritone, F# - C. First sounded by the cellos and basses as a sustained artifact of the plucked cluster of the higher strings, the tritone ultimately gains its own harmonic significance through its length and status as the closing sonority of the cue. While the first half of the cue incites the terror and violence of the image track through its semitone confrontation, the second half explores a more complex series of semitone and tritone colored sonorities before settling at last on the tritone. The overall effect is a visceral manipulation of the two most dissonant harmonic intervals with a gradual shift of emphasis from one to the other.

While there is no discernable melody in the Murder cue, the overarching descending contour creates a powerful horizontal trajectory. The divide between the registral characteristics of the two halves of the cue is one of the most direct parallels to the image track. While Norman murders Marion, each instrument plays in its highest tessitura. When Norman runs out of the bathroom and leaves her to die alone, the strings have abruptly shifted to the lowest ends of their respective ranges. The limping rhythmic effect of the upper and lower strings during the second half of the cue again moves from higher instruments to lower. Remarkably, the higher instruments are ultimately reduced to the short vibrations of pizzicato articulations while the cellos and basses increase the length of their *sff* dyads. The cue's definitive concluding tritone announces Marion's last breath before giving away to the unsympathetic drone of running water.

### Herrmann's Musical Irrationality

The Flight cue and the Murder cue accompany the actions that mark Marion and Norman as highly irrational characters. The first expresses the completion of Marion's transformation to the criminal by illustrating her state while leaving town after being spotted by her boss, while the second expresses her end while describing Norman's state of mind as he commits homicide. The pair of cues demonstrates the inner agitation of the characters, connecting them in their dual illogicality as they rail against prudence and morality for the sake of satisfying their temptations and desires.

The perspectival ambiguity of the Murder cue makes it all the more potent in its expression of the film's defining event. The music's rhythmic insistence does not align with the stabbing motions of the knife, providing a sense of motivic independence within the frame of the cue. Herrmann's string gestures mimic Norman's knife strokes and exemplify his uncontrolled rage while paralleling Marion's screams, horror, and even pain. Simultaneously, the music also mirrors the shock of the audience. Likewise, Hitchcock imbues the cue with three points of view for the viewer to experience: Norman killing Marion, Marion being stabbed by Norman, and a voyeuristic third party.

Herrmann's specific tempo and expressive markings reflect the unstable mental states of the respective characters: Marion's Flight cue is marked *Allegro (molto Agitato)* and Norman's Murder cue is marked *Molto Forzando e Feroce*, paralleling their respective panic and rage. Even more fundamentally, the same texture marks both cues. Rather than using a melody and accompaniment texture to portray Marion (as the Marion cue did), the majority of the Flight cue resounds with powerful chords played by the full string orchestra. Only when she drifts off to

sleep does the orchestration regain the feminine color of the Marion cue. Likewise, the Murder cue takes advantage of the full setting of strings within a predominantly chordal texture.

Violent articulation and rhythmic momentum may be interpreted dismissingly as mickey-mousing, but as the characters' actions are, of course, products of their inner psychoses that the music continues to mirror. The propulsion of the Flight cue indicates Marion's own motivation to leave town against her moral values while the Murder cue mimics Mother's undisputable control over Norman at the moment of attack. The way in which the opening downbows of the Flight cue foreshadow the symbolically significant downbows of the Murder further connects the two characters. Indeed, it is as if the strings are committing the crime while expressing both Norman's rage and Marion's fear simultaneously. These characteristics connect the two cues in their physicality. The overwhelming rhythmic insistence of both of the cues strikes the listener as expressing bodily action: one of chase, and one of murder. The Flight cue's agitated rhythms eventually slow to quarter-note divisions as Marion sleeps, and the Murder cue's initial stabs grind to a halt as Marion dies.

Harmonic uncanniness further illustrates their irrationality as they pass the point of no return, committing the acts that seal their status as criminals. In the case of Marion and the Flight cue, the abnormal reasoning to justify running off with the cash is reflected in the unnatural design of the Hitchcock sonority. Norman's psychotic act (doubled by Marion's terror) finds legendary musical expression in the semitone and tritone, with a gradual drift from the former to the latter over the course of the cue. Even in Marion's criminal act, her emotions are described in tertian sonorities, while Norman is given the completely inhuman sounds of atonality.

Both cues exhibit harmonic perversion and aggressive rhythmic character, marking the likenesses of Marion and Norman as they cross the threshold from temptation to action as their irrationality overtakes them. The differences lie mainly in their harmonic language and the use of melody. While many parallels exist between their musical cues, the qualities of pitch material, vertical and horizontal, differ according to their relation to natural human expression. Marion steals the money, but her Flight cue still contains a recognizable (and easily singable) melody, in stark contrast to the total absence of melody in the Murder cue. This pair of cues demonstrates Herrmann's musical distinction between the extent of the two characters' irrationality by composing Marion's subconscious on the brink of tertian language while Norman-as-Mother cannot find expression in the natural language of the sane.

## Chapter Four: Herrmann's Madhouse

While the most jarring event in *Psycho* is Marion's murder, a more subtle and important event takes place in the parlor during her conversation with Norman in the previous scene. What begins as a pleasant chat abruptly turns dark when the topic of Norman's mother arises. Marion, who has just heard his mother shouting at him from the house on the hill, suggests that he place his mother in a mental institution. This idea enrages Norman, who defends his mother and expresses his complete disgust. Norman's diatribe is underscored by the sounds of the Madhouse cue.

The sudden surfacing of Norman's instable psychological condition distresses Marion and the audience. The unexpected intensity of his character rattles the trajectory of the movie and indicates a change in focus from Marion to Norman, with the Madhouse cue functioning as a sonic structural hinge. The disintegration of the innocuous chat and the revelation of Norman's hatred toward mental institutions (as if he has experienced life in one) is further played out by the ominous atmosphere created by Hitchcock's framing and by Herrmann's music.

Straight from the school of Edgar Allen Poe, the setting of the parlor scene creates tension from the isolation of the characters (except for the opening and closing shots, they occupy separate frames), the stormy weather outside, and the nocturnal setting. Hitchcock's *mise-en-scène* allies Norman with the stuffed birds of prey and Marion with the delicate songbirds, an association echoed by the songbird paintings in Marion's hotel room and Norman's own observation that she eats "like a bird." When Marion begins to talk about his mother, the camera angle shifts strangely below Norman and centers him among the owls and the two paintings depicting the Biblical story of Susanne and the Elders, from the Book of David. At the

mention of putting his mother “someplace,” his face changes and the Madhouse cue enters to indicate his transformation.

In the Madhouse cue, Herrmann employs an atonal vocabulary, completely abandoning the predominantly tertian sonorities of the previous cues. The dissonant, muted strings remove Norman from the world of Marion and the audience. Human rationality in the music dissipates as he spits out objections at the suggestion of institutionalizing his mother, warping the aural world and revealing his own moral distortion. A variant of the Madhouse cue reappears only at the close of the film, when Norman (or is it Mother?) sits quietly thinking over the events that have transpired. The cue’s reappearance affirms the strange psychological link Norman has to his mother through the soundtrack’s “intradiegetic”<sup>50</sup> nature.

What does the music of the Madhouse cue represent, with its churning dissonances and quiet asymmetry? No action breaks the tension of the scene, and the quiet level of the cue emphasizes Norman’s deliberate selection of words and Marion’s alarm. If the music of *Psycho* does emanate from the characters themselves rather than outside of the diegesis (as a type of narrative voice), then the dramatic change in the musical structure, from the instrumental timbre to the melodic lines and asymmetric phrasing, speaks from the Norman’s mind intradiegetically. Up until this stage in the film, the focus has been on Marion, and the music expressed her unspoken anxieties. Here the music changes alliance. To uncover the methods Herrmann employed to achieve this change, we start with the structure of the cue.

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<sup>50</sup> As explained in Chapter Two, Ben Winter’s coining of the term “intradiegetic” explains the potential for nondiegetic music to come from the diegesis in spite of its literal separation from the story space.

## The Madhouse Cue

### Structure

While the previously analyzed cues of *Psycho* fall into defined phrases most often demarcated by the use of an ostinato pattern and delineated melody, the Madhouse cue is less homogeneous. As shown in Figure 4.1, the music divides into four major sections.

**A (mm. 1-3)** :13

**B (mm. 4-7)** :26 :39

**C (mm. 8-10)** :52 :1:05 :1:18

**D (mm. 11-19)**

**Closing (mm. 16-19)** 1:31 1:40

Figure 4.1. Form of the Madhouse cue.



The cue is bookended by the Madhouse motive, the three-note rising and falling gesture first appearing in the cellos and basses (m. 1) and closing in the violas, cellos, and basses (mm. 16-19.) The statements of the main motive provide structure to a cue that is otherwise divided according to texture and melodic gesture. As demonstrated above, sections A, B, C, and D all exhibit different textures ranging from homophonic to contrapuntal. Section A, after the initial statement of the Madhouse motive, continues with a highly dissonant duet. Section B features a violin melody with atonal accompaniment, while section C exhibits strong homophony with a brief melody suggested by the upper notes of the texture (F# - F in the first violins falling to F in the violas). Section D returns to the polyphonic design of A.

Asymmetry is the rule of the Madhouse cue. The sections of the cue vary from a scant three measures to nine measures in length, creating a highly unstable musical form. The melody of each section rejects the melody of the preceding section. No audible thematic design leads our ear through the cue in a predictable way. The Madhouse motive is the only musical anchor provided to us by Herrmann.

In spite of an overall arc design that departs from and returns to the Madhouse motive, the separate sections of the Madhouse cue are not obviously related. The variety of styles and inconsistency of melody or accompanying texture removes the music from the formal designs of the earlier cues. The structure of the cue, instead, is defined by its differences. Herrmann uses changes in register and orchestration to imbue the music with more audible organization.

### *Phrase Rhythm*

All of the previous cues in *Psycho* exhibit a strong sense of pulse and clear grouping organization, as demonstrated by the clear and predictable structure of the Marion cue, the

ostinato patterns of the Temptation and Peephole cues, and the parsed motivic repetitions of the Prelude. The Madhouse cue is the first cue of the film that lacks both a consistent or clear metrical organization and a clearly defined grouping organization. What occurs in the Madhouse cue, in contrast to the earlier cues, is a series of short melodic fragments that drift without the frame of an ostinato or consistent homophonic accompaniment. The consistency of the metrical and grouping characteristics of the earlier music provides a striking contrast to the music that accompanies the revelation of Norman's twisted psyche and effectively dislodges the music from rational organization.

Metrical drift is a key rhythmic characteristic in the Madhouse cue. As explained earlier, the structure of the cue's opening is established by the repetition of the Madhouse motive. The first statement of the motive enters on the beat three pick-up, with a strong agogic emphasis on the third and final pitch of the motive. The next statement of the motive is shifted in metrical space; it begins in the cello on the second eighth of beat one (see Figure 4.2). Dislodged from the notated meter, the cello line continues with a syncopated melody against the violas. It is unclear which part holds rhythmic control over the other; the effect is instead one of duality.



Figure 4.2. Madhouse cue, violas and cellos, mm. 1-3.

The return of the Madhouse motive at the end of the cue (Figure 4.3) in canonic entrances provides a sense of rhythmic consistency, but the metric position of the motive challenges the perception of the notated meter. The consistent second beat entrances undermine the strength of the first beat of the closing measures, in contrast to the opening statement of the motive by the cellos and basses, in which the third and final pitch fall on beat one (refer back to Figure 4.2). The metrical drift of the motive in mm. 16-19 results in the presence of two metrical divisions: one that defines the space of the motive, and one that defines the space of the remaining voices. Herrmann thus uses meter as a place of action in which lines rhythmically emancipate themselves from the notated barlines, creating competing metrical patterns across the cue.

The image shows a musical score for five instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Bass, spanning measures 16 to 19. The score is written in 4/4 time. A dashed line with a 'g' and a 'g' with a 'g' (likely indicating a guitar or similar instrument) is positioned above the Violin I staff. The Violin I staff has a melodic line with a slur over measures 16-18 and a final note in measure 19. The Violin II staff has a similar melodic line. The Viola staff has a melodic line with a slur over measures 16-18 and a final note in measure 19, with a '(Harm.)' marking above measure 18. The Cello and Bass staves have a melodic line with a slur over measures 16-18 and a final note in measure 19, with a 'pp' marking below measure 18. The score is written in 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Figure 4.3. Madhouse cue, mm. 16-19.

### *Motive*

The high degree of dissonance (both melodic and harmonic) and the abundance of half-step motion are the most direct and immediately visceral methods Herrmann utilizes to indicate

Norman's psychological condition. Figure 4.4 demonstrates the vastly semitonal nature of the Madhouse cue's melodic gestures. Each circle indicates a fragment of chromatic stepwise motion. This melodic analysis of the Madhouse cue reveals a nearly continuous stream of half-step movement across the entire nineteen measures of music through both primary melodic lines and secondary accompaniment. Including half-step motions across octave displacements reveals many more semitonal gestures in the form of major sevenths and minor ninths, together accounting for the vast majority of the notes, as shown in the figure.

The musical score for the Madhouse cue is presented in three systems, each containing measures 1 through 7, 8 through 15, and 16 through 19. The instruments involved are Violins (I and II), Violas, Cellos, and Basses. The score includes various performance markings such as *con sordino*, *pp* (pianissimo), *ff* (fortissimo), *espr.* (espressivo), and *tenuto*. Circles are used to highlight semitonal motion, and dashed boxes highlight motion by major 7th and minor 9th intervals. The score is divided into three systems, each with measures 1-7, 8-15, and 16-19. The first system includes measures 1-7, 8-15, and 16-19. The second system includes measures 1-7, 8-15, and 16-19. The third system includes measures 1-7, 8-15, and 16-19. The score is divided into three systems, each with measures 1-7, 8-15, and 16-19. The first system includes measures 1-7, 8-15, and 16-19. The second system includes measures 1-7, 8-15, and 16-19. The third system includes measures 1-7, 8-15, and 16-19.

Legend:

- Semitonal motion
- Motion by M7 and m9

Figure 4.4. Semitonal motion in the Madhouse cue.

A variation of the octave displacement technique appears in the violins in mm. 10-15, as shown in Figure 4.6. Here, the displacement occurs across two voices, further obscuring the chromatic line. The anacrusis of the first violins introduces the chromatic descent in the second violins before pursuing its own stepwise chromatic line that ascends and descends in sets of three pitches.

[illegible]

71

The register shift of the Madhouse cue to the high, thin violin tessitura in the closing prepares the aural environment for the Murder cue appearing around the corner. The prevalence of the high semitonal relationships in the violins foreshadows the tension of the Murder cue, and breaks down the musical language to something less immediately relatable to the viewer. Over the course of the cue, the register expands upward, demonstrating a ripping of sanity leading up to Norman's chilling conclusion, "She just goes a little mad sometimes. We all go a little mad sometimes. Haven't you?" The saturation of semitone relationships in the high tessitura is, in a way, a composing out of the Murder cue. The slashing chords in the first half of the Murder cue consist of only four notes, Eb – E – F – Gb, most clearly expressed as (0123). The closing gesture of the violins in the Madhouse cue uses the same register and exhibits melodic halfsteps.

The Madhouse motive is the primary motivic material of the music. It is emphasized with the only *fortissimo* dynamics of the written cue in the opening (albeit the film version does not sound *fortissimo*), and it is the last gesture we hear at the end of the cue. The motive's contour and transposition level is maintained for these iterations. All of the other instances of the Madhouse motive are hidden within the texture through contour alterations, inversions, transposition, or some combination of the three. All iterations of the motive are related by their membership in set class (013). Figure 4.7 outlines the instances of (013) in the Madhouse cue, marking the original transpositions, subsequent transpositions (which also exhibit alterations in contour), and gestures whose contour mimics that of the Madhouse motive.

Figure 4.7 displays musical notation for the (013) Madhouse motive across three systems of staves, illustrating transformations and transposition levels.

**System 1 (Measures 1-7):** Shows the initial (013) Madhouse motive in Violins I and II. The motive is marked *pp* (pianissimo). The Violins I staff includes the instruction *con sordino* (with mutes). The Violins II staff includes the instruction *tenuto* (sustained). The Viola, Cello, and Bass staves provide accompaniment, with the Cello and Bass staves marked *pp* and *con sordino*. The measure numbers 13, 26, and 39 are indicated above the staves.

**System 2 (Measures 8-15):** Shows the (013) Madhouse motive in Violins I and II. The motive is marked *pp*. The Violins I staff includes the instruction *espr.* (espressivo). The Violins II staff includes the instruction *pp*. The Viola, Cello, and Bass staves provide accompaniment, with the Cello and Bass staves marked *pp* and *con sordino*. The measure numbers 52, 1:05, and 1:18 are indicated above the staves.

**System 3 (Measures 16-18):** Shows the (013) Madhouse motive in Violins I and II. The motive is marked *pp*. The Violins I staff includes the instruction *espr.*. The Violins II staff includes the instruction *pp*. The Viola, Cello, and Bass staves provide accompaniment, with the Cello and Bass staves marked *pp* and *con sordino*. The measure numbers 1:31 and 1:40 are indicated above the staves.

**Legend:**

- (013) at original transposition level (solid circle)
- (013) at different transposition levels with different contours (dashed circle)
- Different three-note set classes with the same contour as the original (013) setting (dotted rectangle)

Figure 4.7. Transformations of the (013) Madhouse motive.



First, consider the Madhouse motive in its original form. Its placement at the opening and closing of the cue establishes it as the structural frame of the Madhouse cue, with its distinct leaping contour. Presented initially in unison by the low strings, the second statement by the celli in m. 2 is obscured by the rhythmic and melodic independence of the violas. While the literal rhythms and pitches are the same, the metrical placement (as already discussed) changes. This occurs again with the closing section, mm. 16-19. Again, there are three instrumental statements of the motive, but now they are composed out through canon. The statement in the violas is an octave higher than the highest statement at the opening, and the final statement in the bass omits the lowest octave from the opening, essentially moving the motive up one octave. While minor changes describe the movement of the Madhouse cue at the beginning and end, the motive in its original form is never complicated by grouping overlap.

The body of the cue features various transformations of the Madhouse motive. While the contour of an ascending major seventh and descending minor ninth is never literally transposed, it is mimicked (as shown by the boxes in Figure 4.8). For example, all three supporting strings in mm. 4-6 exhibit the same shape (the added notes in m. 5 do not alter the overall contour of the section). In mm. 9-10, no single instrument exhibits the contour, but the conglomerate motion of the violas and violins completes the gesture.

Now, consider the (013) set class of the Madhouse motive, disregarding the original melodic shape. The original transposition level of the motive (F – Eb – D) only reappears at mm. 12-14 (see Figure 4.8) hidden within a twisted contrapuntal section before returning in its original contour again at the denouement from mm. 16 to the end. The octave changes of the middle statement change the jarring contour of the motive's original form to the intervallically

compressed motion of descending major second and descending minor third, hiding the pitch class relationship within a gradual chromatic descent.

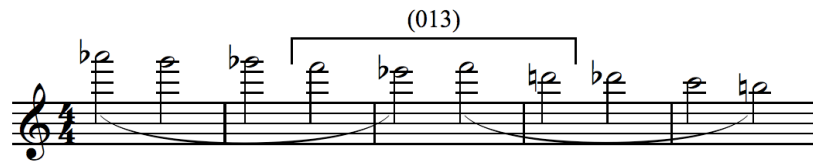


Figure 4.8. Madhouse cue, second violins, mm. 11-15.

None of the transpositions of (013) feature the same contour as the original motive. In the first melodic entrance played by the violas (see Figure 4.9), the inverted motive first leaps an augmented octave and then descends an augmented second. It is immediately followed by another (013) in a different form, this time with a diminished unison that leaps down. Both of the (013) forms are marked by brackets in the figure. The pair of (013) iterations leads directly into a chain of semitonal motion moving from E up to F# and then descending an octave higher from F to Eb, thereby exhibiting two of the melodic gestures of the cue.



Figure 4.9. Madhouse cue, violas, mm. 1-3.

As shown by Figures 4.4 and 4.7, almost every melodic line features either stepwise chromatic descent or some form of the (013) motive (including contour mimicry). The

disorienting contours of the Madhouse melodies are enhanced by the complicated texture. Rather than exhibiting a straightforward solo with accompaniment design, throughout the cue the melodic lines of the Madhouse wind in and out between different instruments to ever changing secondary lines. The accompaniment ranges from statements of the Madhouse motive to three-voice homophony to counterpoint before its close, resulting in a widely varied texture. The connectivity of the forward motion of the cue lies in the manipulation of stepwise chromatic motion and transformations of Madhouse motive, even in the accompanying figures.

It can be argued that the insanity of the Madhouse cue lies partly in its disjunct melodic lines (I will discuss other aspects later). Herrmann eschewed the romantic, long, lyrical lines of other film composers for his own brand of expressionistic melodies spun out of small motivic cells. It seems as if melodic fragments are constantly attempting to connect to something longer, more conventional in design, and more human, but they always succumb to the chromatic in some combination of a transformation of the Madhouse motive or straight semitonal motion. Moreover, the melodic characteristics of the cue are controlled, as we shall see in the next section, by a highly dissonant application of atonality that departs from the primarily tertian attributes of the music that precedes it.

### *Harmony*

Harmonic analysis reveals no traditional chord structure or even a hint of tertian progression. The overwhelming melodic dissonance of the cue, created by the characteristic (013) pitch collection of the Madhouse motive and its pairing with stepwise chromaticism in the melodic lines, parallels (and, partly ensures) the dissonance of the verticalities. The lack of harmonic progression, with its constant pull to a stable and consonant tonic, ensures a static

sound. Figure 4.10 is a harmonic analysis of the Madhouse cue. The variety of texture in the cue requires slightly different analytical tools. Portions with only two voices are analyzed by interval values, while textures with more than two voices are analyzed by prime form. Only voices functioning within the same textural layer are analyzed together (i.e., the violin melody in mm. 4-7 is not included with the homophonic accompaniment) according to the aural effect of the music.

The figure displays a musical score for the Madhouse cue, featuring Violins (I and II), Violas, Cellos, and Basses. The score is annotated with harmonic analysis data, including intervallic content (ic) and specific chordal structures.

**Violins I and II:** The first system shows measures 13, 26, and 39. The second system shows measures 18 and 1:18. The third system shows measures 1:31 and 1:40. The fourth system shows measures 16, 17, 18, and 19. The fifth system shows measures 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15. The sixth system shows measures 3, 4, 3, 2, 5, 4, 1:31, 5, 5, and 1:40.

**Violas:** The first system shows measures 13, 26, and 39. The second system shows measures 18 and 1:18. The third system shows measures 1:31 and 1:40. The fourth system shows measures 16, 17, 18, and 19. The fifth system shows measures 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15. The sixth system shows measures 3, 4, 3, 2, 5, 4, 1:31, 5, 5, and 1:40.

**Cellos and Basses:** The first system shows measures 13, 26, and 39. The second system shows measures 18 and 1:18. The third system shows measures 1:31 and 1:40. The fourth system shows measures 16, 17, 18, and 19. The fifth system shows measures 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15. The sixth system shows measures 3, 4, 3, 2, 5, 4, 1:31, 5, 5, and 1:40.

**Annotations:**

- Violins I and II:** *con sordino*, *pp*, *espr.*, *tenuto*, *pp*.
- Violas:** *con sordino*, *pp*, *espr.*, *tenuto*, *pp*.
- Cellos:** *con sordino*, *ff*, *pp*, *espr.*, *tenuto*, *pp*.
- Basses:** *con sordino*, *ff*, *pp*, *espr.*, *tenuto*, *pp*.

**Harmonic Analysis Data:**

- Violins I and II:** *ic: 2 3 1 2 1 2 2 3 4 3 4 3 2 1*
- Violas:** *ic: 5 6 2 1 1 2 5 3 2 6*
- Cellos and Basses:** *ic: 3 4 3 2 5 4 1:31 5 5 1:40*

**Chordal Structures:**

- Violins I and II:** (0146) (015)(015) (015) (0145)
- Violas:** (016)(0148) (015) 2 3 1:05 1:18
- Cellos and Basses:** (01236) m. 13: (016)(015)(025) m. 14: (016)(016)(027)(016) m. 15: (027)(016)(026)(037)

**Annotations:**

- Squared off boxes:** indicate two-voice textures analyzed with ic values.
- Rounded boxes:** clarify groupings of three or more voices where spacially manageable.

Figure 4.10. Harmonic analysis of the Madhouse cue.

The most striking feature the analysis reveals is the profusion of simultaneously sounding semitones, especially in the sections with three or more voices. The vast majority of trichords and tetrachords in the cue contain at least one semitone – no product of chance considering that only five out of the twelve possible trichords contain at least one semitone. Contrapuntal and homophonic sections alike are predominantly dissonant.

The first homophonic section occurs at mm. 4-7, with an accompanied violin melody. Since the melody and accompaniment are heard as two separate layers, the harmonic analysis excludes the melodic pitches. The overall harmonic motion is from (0146) to (0145) with three transpositions of (015) in between. Ultimately, this marks a move to an increase in semitonal dissonance, especially if one considers the melodic pitch Eb, which together with the accompaniment form (01256). Contrary to the conventional melody and accompaniment texture, the accompanied chords do not fall into conventional triadic structures, coming into direct conflict with the more consonant nature of the previous cues associated with Marion.

Measures 9 and 10 exhibit similar characteristics to the previous homophonic passage, but with rhythmically independent lines whose combined effect is that of the Madhouse contour. Again, on every beat of the music there is at least one semitone pairing (either literal or through octave displacement) despite overriding disparate contour. Again, the harmonic movement is that of increasing dissonance, culminating with the cluster (01236).

Polyphonic sections texturally contrast with the homophonic sections, with similar harmonic effects. The first section occurs at mm. 1-3 with the rhythmically offset duet between the violas and the cellos. The disaligned metric organization causes a series of quasi-suspensions, similar to mm. 11-15. Both passages mimic traditional counterpoint in their rhythmic design, but not in harmonic practice. In the second passage, shown in Figure 4.11, the

second violins enter with a chromatically descending melody, followed by the violas two measures later. While the violas enter canonically with the same pitches in a lower octave, their line is altered to create whole- and half-step dissonances against the first line starting on the second beat of m. 14. This gesture is nothing more than an imitation of contrapuntal style with none of the harmonic qualities of the historic technique. For example, the counterpoint between the second violins and violas begins with paired notes that rhythmically resemble the preparation, suspension, and resolution of two-part species counterpoint, but do not follow the rules of consonance and dissonance. In m. 13 a consonant P5 “preparation” leads to a M6 “suspension” before “resolving” to a m7. As the lines descend further, dissonant intervals take hold and give way to a restatement of the main motive.

Violin II

Viola

ic: 5 3 2 5 1 2 1 2 1 2 3  
P5 M6 m7 P5 M7 m7 d8 m7 M7 A6 M6

Figure 4.11. Grotesque counterpoint in the Madhouse cue, mm. 11-15.

Unexpectedly, the harmonic character of the Madhouse cue moves to a more consonant vocabulary during the closing section (mm. 16-19). The half-step harmonic dissonance of the cue’s earlier passages provides a marked contrast with the cue’s conclusion. As indicated by the ic values in Figure 4.10, the degree of consonance between the first and second violins increases, finally leading to Bb and Eb before setting on A and D. While voiced as a perfect fourth in the

violins, the other instruments validate D as the fundamental note. In retrospect, the sudden declaration of a stable sonority centered on D presents the possibility of hearing D as a pitch center, potentially corroborated by the introductory statement of the Madhouse motive. The suggestion of a D centricity is weak, however, since the vast majority of the cue (mm. 2-15) avoids any suggestion of a pitch center. The harmonic disparity between the earlier material of the cue and the last consonance suggests a precedence of unexpected endings played out by *Psycho*'s plot.

### The Marion Cue

As can be seen in Figure 4.12, the primary motive of the Madhouse cue is reminiscent of the opening motive of the Marion cue, played by the first violins. The Marion motive shares the same contour as the Madhouse motive, with its upward leap followed immediately by descent. The demonstrative rise and fall of Marion's motive is indicative of her trajectory in the film. Played so early in the film, her music helps the audience empathize with her doomed character through "feminine" rhythmic weak beat entrances, slurred lines, and a quiet, muted timbre. This is one of the most comfortably tonal cues, and provides a more familiar tonal space for the average audience member. It also sets up the contrast for the invasion of more dissonant cues as the plot progresses.

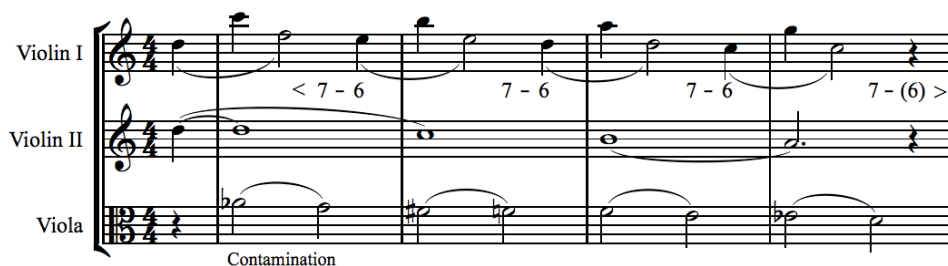


Figure 4.12. Marion cue, mm. 1-4.



Overall, the Marion cue is marked by descent. The melody and all of the accompanying lines descend by step within each four-bar phrase. The chromatic descent in the viola in mm. 1-4 and in the cello in mm. 7-10 (Figure 4.13) are the same pitch classes found in mm. 11-15 of the Madhouse cue (refer back to Figure 4.8). The only missing pitch of the Madhouse descent is the E. This gap results in an (013) figure with the same pitch classes as the original form of the Madhouse motive. In the environment of the Marion cue, the semitone contamination functions as a coloristic effect within the realm of D Dorian and emphasizes the overall downward trajectory of the cue, enhancing the tragic quality of the music and therefore Marion's character. The dissonance of the chromatic line, its connection to the Madhouse cue, and its outline of a descending tritone (Ab – D) brands it as a death sentence for the first protagonist.

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Bass

Contamination

G minor-major<sup>7</sup>

Figure 4.13. Marion cue, mm. 6-11.

Harmonically, the Marion cue is built on tertian sonorities. Rather than using functional T-P-D-T progressions, the harmonic movement is marked by overall descent according to a linear intervallic pattern that contains a series of 7-6 suspensions in the first violins (see Figure 4.12). The accompanying descending line in the second violins moves from D down to A,

suggesting a move to the dominant within the cue. The strong presence of D and A aligns with the functional syntax of tonality without manifesting them in an obvious goal-oriented progression.

The idea of imminent death is corroborated by the closing harmonies of the Marion cue (see Figure 4.13). Instead of ending with a traditional V – I cadence, it concludes with the Hitchcock chord of G minor-major<sup>7</sup>. Despite the largely tertian nature of the cue, the closing chord departs from the expected, recalling the anxiety of the Prelude and its abundance of Hitchcock sonorities. The denial of a proper resolution increases the tension of the scene and provides motivational impetus for Marion's irrational act of stealing the money to make a better life for her and Sam.

Part of the songlike nature of Marion's cue is inherent in its symmetrical and clear-cut phrasing. The melody is constructed out of well-defined melodic ideas that group into two four-bar segments with two measures of connecting material, as shown in Figure 4.14.<sup>51</sup> The Madhouse cue, on the other hand, does not exhibit a consistent pattern of segmentation (Figure 4.15). The irregularity of the melodic fabric (bound together by intervallic pitch class likeness rather than outward contour) is an expression of the instability of Norman's mind and hints at the extent to which his mother has poisoned him. By contrast, Marion's regular phrase structure indicates the fundamental strength of her own rationality in spite of the dissonant descending line that contaminates the tertian qualities of the cue.

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<sup>51</sup> In the written cue, the Marion cue is made up of four phrases, each four bars long. In *Psycho*, however, the cue lasts only eleven measures, as shown in Figure 16.

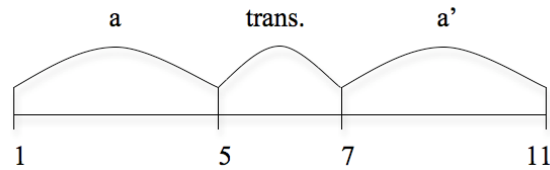


Figure 4.14. Form chart of the Marion cue.

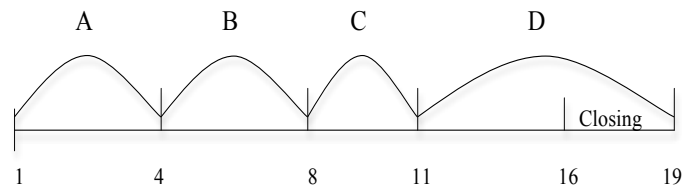


Figure 4.15. Form chart of the Madhouse cue.

### *Mimetics and Musical Subjectivity*

Part of the comfort associated with the Marion cue comes from the tessitura of the melody. Although it begins on the high end of the human range in the first violins, it soon relaxes downward with a natural, singing quality. It embodies Marion's dreams, expressing their cautious optimism as they are pitted against the chromatic descent in the violas. The cue begins as a plaintive song and ends as a death sentence, the lower range and dissonance of the concluding Hitchcock chord brought about by the action on screen as Sam's dialogue shifts from making his relationship with Marion more respectable to ranting about paying off his father's debts and paying his wife's alimony. His financial complaints incubate the seed growing in Marion's mind as the orchestration moves down from the delicate soprano to a throatier, darker timbre. Even the organization of the music into a lyrical melody with accompaniment suggests

the natural structure of a song, lending a relatable, human quality to the cue and therefore to Marion's character. Despite covering a wide range, it remains entirely within the realm of a female vocal range.

The human or nonhuman characteristics of the various musical cues of *Psycho* can be explained through the work of Arnie Cox, who has explored the "mimetic participation" of the listener and its consequences for the subjective understanding of music.<sup>52</sup> Hypothesizing that humans covertly mimic the sounds they hear to understand them according to their own experience, Cox makes a strong case for the significance of the voice's role in listening to music, even for instrumental pieces. "In the case of human sound production, because most of us have made vocal sounds everyday since birth, the voice becomes our central basis for understanding the sounds made by other humans,"<sup>53</sup> whether the sounds are made by a singer or speaker. Even a person playing an instrument could be considered an extension of the "voice" since instrumentalists who use their fine motor skills to produce a sound are addressed in the same way as vocalists. Cox explains further:

The imagination looks (automatically and largely unconsciously) for any basis for comparison: one is the experience of making the same or similar gestures; another is the experience of making sounds that are in some way(s) acoustically similar to those heard. In this sense, anyone with vocal experience has a basis for understanding most instrumental sounds, without needing to have ever actually played any of the various kinds of instruments.<sup>54</sup>

True to Cox's argument, we know that it is vocal terms that are most often used to describe instrumental sounds, rather than the inverse. This approach to musical understanding is a compelling one, especially in the world of drama where human characters are so closely tied to

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<sup>52</sup> Arnie Cox, "The Mimetic Hypothesis and Embodied Musical Meaning," *Musicae Scientiae* 5/2 (Fall 2001): 195-209.

<sup>53</sup> Cox, 197.

<sup>54</sup> Cox, 202.

the various elements of production, and provides a strong hypothesis to help explain why we listen to and speak about music the way we do.

Marion's cue, by the standards of Cox's mimetic measurement, is an emotionally relatable cue because of its humanistic expression. The division of melody and accompaniment is clear, suggesting a soloist singing to an evenly grouped accompaniment that serves as a foundation. The violin timbre is warm, featuring some of the only vibrato in *Psycho*, and stays within the female vocal range. While the melodic contour leaps, the repetition of the gesture and the stability of the diatonic pitch material create a fluidly directed melodic line. The harmonic substance of the cue is the most traditional of the entire film, with consonances and familiar chordal sonorities that practically guarantee the audience will connect with Marion.

The Madhouse version of the motive is a grotesque parody of Marion's cue. While strings are often used to evoke romance and emotion, the strings of Herrmann's *Psycho*, aside from the Marion cue, are dry and metallic. The straight, vibratoless sound of the Madhouse cue rings cold and soulless. The high range especially, when not warmed up with rich vibrato, effectively removes any hint of the human voice and of human emotion. The extensive use of mutes further distances the music from natural expression and suggests the secret whisper of Mother's influence over Norman.

While the shape of Marion's motive, an ascending minor seventh followed by a descending perfect fifth, stays within the confines of D Dorian, the Madhouse cue is a strange pairing of an ascending minor seventh with a descending minor ninth. The change of the second interval simultaneously removes the motive from the familiar realm of tertian music and comfortable vocal gestures. The stretch of the resolution to the octave below, doubled in empty voice leading, creates a chasm avoided by the closer voicing of Marion's cue.

Wide leaps are unnatural for the human voice and the extensive use of registral extremes, both low and high, further removes the music from the natural, comfortable, and sympathetically relatable world of normal human expression and interaction. The Madhouse motive is played in the ominous, deep register of the low strings instead of the singing treble of the violins that embody Marion. In stark contrast, the violins and violas are scored well out of natural vocal range for the second half of the Madhouse cue. The high tessitura of the violins results in a thin, cold character far from the warmth of Marion's cue. Cox argues that we understand music largely through our ability to reproduce the sounds with our own voices, and the extreme range of the Madhouse cue acts to estrange Norman from our perceived rational world.

Harmonically, the Madhouse cue's intense dissonances also lie outside of the natural realm of human expression. The unconventionally pervasive use of semitonal dissonance and the music's strict avoidance of traditional harmonies and harmonic progression connect the unnatural to the deviant in the film's diegetic world. All together, the atonality, asymmetry, awkward leaps, and extreme range of the cue remove the music from human understanding and reveal the deadly insanity lurking beneath Norman's shy exterior.

### From Marion to Norman

By breaking down the already unstable tonal world of the soundtrack, an extra premonition of tragedy finds its way into the viewers' ears, casting suspicion on Norman and his eerily protective relationship with his mother. This musical suspicion, coupled with the strange shots associating Norman with the birds of prey and Marion with the defenseless songbirds, signifies a move in the movie's central catalyst from Marion to Norman. Killing off the main character is a radical move that completely denies the expectations of the audience. As I have

demonstrated, Hitchcock and Herrmann prepare the shift through the strange conversation of the parlor.

Norman's mind finds its sonic analogue for the first time in the Madhouse cue, effectively using the orchestra as a musical vehicle for the revelation of his insanity. Up until the Madhouse cue, the music expressed Marion's emotions, using tertian structures that exhibited some harmonic direction within well-defined, symmetrical phrasing. Here, the music expresses Norman's twisted psyche for the first time and hints at the danger that lurks beneath his friendly exterior.

The puzzling sonority that closes the cue – an open perfect fifth (D – A) – is an unexpected turn from the harsh dissonance that preceded it. The use of D Dorian in Marion's cue and the Madhouse cue's eventual definition of D as a pitch center places them within the same centricity, despite their contrasting treatment of consonance and dissonance. Both of the cues end unexpectedly, with the Marion cue closing with the dissonant Hitchcock chord and the Madhouse cue ending on a perfect interval. Marion, a likeable character hoping for a better life and striving to make it happen through illegal means before repenting her larceny, finds a tragic end in the shower of the Bates Motel. Norman, of course, is discovered to have a twisted relationship with his dead mother and a mental instability that drives him to kill women he is attracted to. Thus, the Madhouse cue parallels the larger movement towards the unexpected through its harmonic treatment.

## Conclusion

Bernard Herrmann's score for *Psycho* projects the innermost thoughts of Marion and Norman with wordless communication. His music enhances the image track and creates an emotional depth that reveals to the viewer another dimension of the characters' experiences on the big screen. Rather than dilettante mickey-mousing or obvious commentary, the music projects from the diegetic world of the character in focus. The potentially problematic and unusual juxtaposition of two main characters that divides the film in half is handled with a musical fluidity achieved by the manipulation of various elements.

The first half of the film presents Marion: a likeable character that goes to great lengths in order to free her lover from his heavy financial burdens in hopes of making their relationship morally legitimate. Our connection to Marion is practically demanded by the music that accompanies her introduction, falling within the comfortable realm of traditional Western harmony and illustrated by a bittersweet violin melody that mimics the female voice. In accordance with Cox's exploration of the mimetic connection of the human voice to the perception of the music, she is immediately marked as "one of us." Moreover, the important musical theme of rising and falling is introduced within this context.

Once Marion returns to her room with the envelope of cash, the music injects the scene with a sense of obsession and foreboding, achieved through the ostinato figures and intervallically compressed motive. The original contour of the Marion cue is condensed into the (013) set class that musically ties her obsession to Norman. The harmonic motion does not follow traditional progression schemes, but instead wanders from one tertian sonority to the next



according to maximally smooth voice leading. Tension and release becomes increasingly ambiguous in Marion's music.

The Temptation cue demonstrates the complexity and instability of her mental state. This leads directly into the Flight cue – the first cue driven by action. The harmonic stasis and unnatural structure of the dominating Hitchcock chord illustrates Marion's stress as she crosses the threshold from considering a crime to committing one. Powered by the aggressive downbow articulation and unstoppable pulse, the music takes on a physicality that dismisses rational thought. When her exhaustion takes over, the pitch material shifts, alluding to the set classes of the Murder cue, and the primary metrical beat broadens from the insistent quarter note to a more relaxed half note.

When Marion first meets Norman at the Bates Motel, he seems like nothing more than a boyish, awkward man who has spent a few too many years alone in his dreary lodge, an impression confirmed in the return of earlier musical cues. The introduction of strange details – the stuffed birds, the shouting match with his abrasive mother – comes to a head during their parlor conversation with help from the Madhouse cue. The tertian musical language of Marion's music is promptly abandoned, although motivic artifacts appear through related pitch class sets and contours. The inconsistency of the music's texture and range demonstrate Norman's psychological instability. The dissonance of the set classes and strangeness of the melodic character cast a shadow over our initial impression of Norman as harmless.

The Peephole cue shares many parallels with Marion's Temptation cue. It also uses rhythmic ostinato to demonstrate moral weakness and obsession. However, the harmonic makeup once again consists of atonal groupings in contrast to the tertian construction of Marion's less dissonant, more singable cues. We witness Norman as he spies on Marion, and

become accomplices in the act. His thoughts of Marion are starkly represented by the high violin melody set in a contrasting meter that conflicts with the metrical organization of the cue.

Marion's murder is the literal turning point in the plot of the movie, anticipated by the Madhouse cue. Broken up into two parts, the first half of the cue exhibits the same relentless forward thrust of the Flight cue. The registral shift and change in pitch material to the most dissonant (0123) set class results in violent music that serves three perceptive ends: Norman's insane anger and physical stabbing, Marion's fear and pain, and the audience's horror. The pinnacle of dissonance and violence is reflected viscerally in Herrmann's music. After Norman leaves the bathroom, the music once again returns to Marion for her death. The attacking gestural nature of the music subsides and the rhythm slows. The harmonic density relaxes from the tight semitonal set class of previous to sonorities that tend toward the tritone. And so, the music marks her end by fading into the background of the running water.

Herrmann constructed references to the mental states of the characters through a battery of musical elements. His extensive working relationship with Hitchcock granted him an intimate understanding of the director's artistic style, and allowed his musical craft to complement the complex, dark nature of his characters. While one revealed idiosyncrasies through camera framing and *mise-en-scène*, the other painted soundscapes that bridge the gap between the characters' minds and the audience's experience. The musical language, built on small cells, was flexible and expressive. Each factor of the cues' compositional characteristics – harmony, melody, rhythm, form, instrumentation, for a few examples – enhanced the portrayal of the characters.

This thesis only examines the music up through Marion's murder, but much remains to be written about the rest of the film. How does the musical language continue to change after the

focus has changed to Norman? Does it change? Brown refers to later appearances of the Hitchcock chord, and Steiner and Husarik discuss the development of the Psycho theme over the course of the movie, but stronger cases can be made for the relationship of these progressing themes to the character's emotional and mental states. Film music's relative youth in academia and the diversity of movies afford room for many analytical lenses, inspiring us to reconsider how we watch movies and the role of the soundtrack.

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