

# Cinematic Representations of Madness

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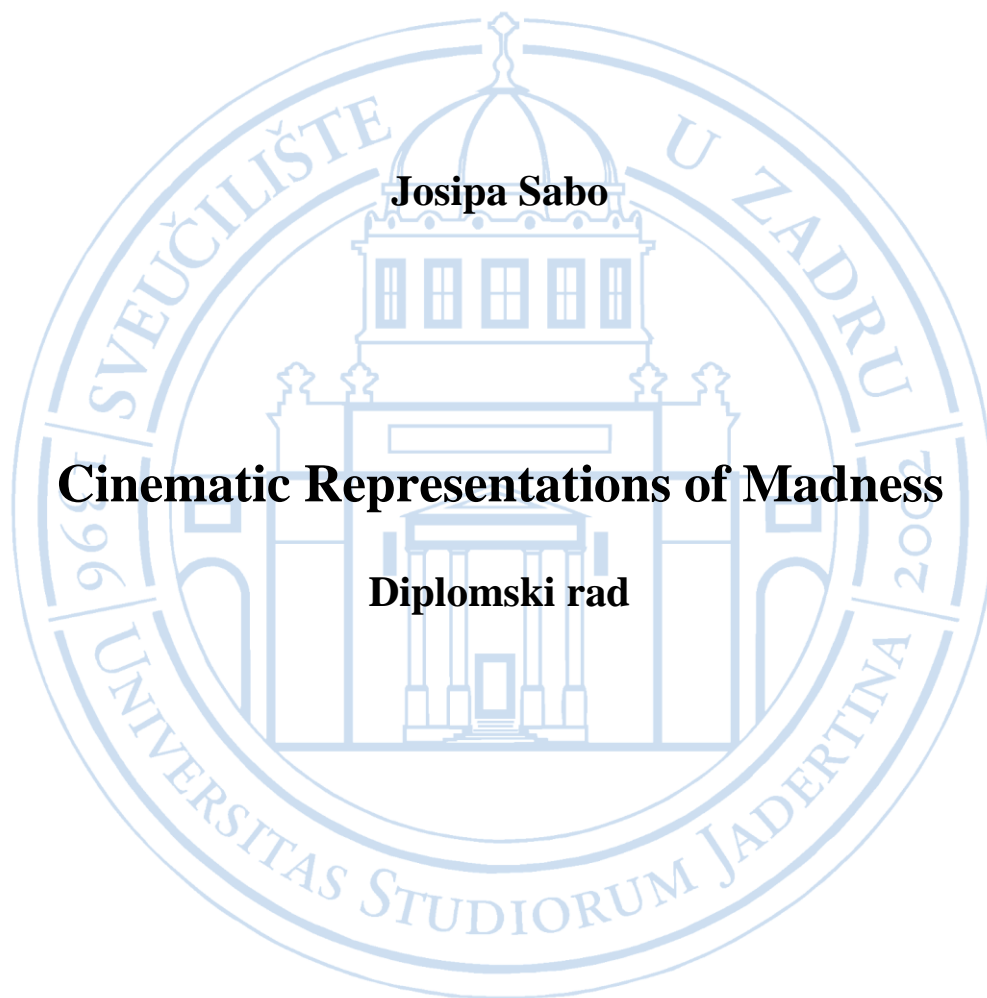
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Odjel za anglistiku

Diplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti; smjer: nastavnički  
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## Cinematic Representations of Madness

Diplomski rad

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Zadar, 2016.



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## 1. Introduction

“Whom God wishes to destroy He first makes mad.”

Euripides, 425 B. C.

The concept of madness<sup>1</sup> and the figure of a madman have intrigued the human race almost from the beginning of times as we can see from the introductory quote which also serves as a closing line to one of the most distinguishable cinematic representations of madness, *Shock Corridor* (1963). With the simultaneous development of cinema and psychiatry, madness started to be portrayed for the sake of spectacle in films, which is particularly evident in the horror or thriller genre where the main character exhibits some sort of pathological behavior, whether it's emotional instability or psychopathic tendencies. A large part of the film spectacle are the notions of suspense and identification which are brought about through the question of how can the viewers differentiate the pathology of a character from one's own idea of normality? Who tells us what normal looks like? And finally, if we weren't taught what madness is and what it looks like, would we even be mad?

When the focus of the camera in filmmaking shifted to characters' facial expressions, the viewer was able to gain an insight into the psychology of the character for the first time. With all of its technical possibilities such as the close-up, voiceover narration, imagery, virtuosity of the camera and the merging of the visual and the spoken, the film has become the medium with the greatest potential for leaving the deepest impact on mass audience. Considering that creative practices that tackle the portrayal of madness have powerful social value and relevance, and one

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<sup>1</sup> Madness is a widely recognizable term that encompasses a large group of various behaviors and ways of thinking that are considered abnormal in society; as such, its use will be favoured in this thesis over terms such as insanity or mental illness whose use will be occasional and interchangeable. Since this thesis offers primarily a cinematic approach to madness, and not a psychiatric one, the use of this term will signify various psychopathologies.

of these practices being filmmaking, the examination of popular films provides a powerful context for the analysis of the way we see madness and the madman himself.

Hence, the primary aim of this thesis is the investigation into cinematic representations of madness and their effect on viewers' emotions. After observing madness as a socially induced term which relates to the schizophrenic experience of film-watching, we will take a brief look at how madness as a theme developed and changed within cinematic discourse throughout the years. Since people who are considered mad are among the most stigmatized social groups, special attention will be given to recurring motifs in films which help reinforce the already existing stereotypes. However, the main focus of this thesis will be placed on the analysis of some of the most famous examples of madness in cinema: Alfred Hitchcock's Norman Bates in *Psycho* (1960), Roman Polanski's Carol Ledoux in *Repulsion* (1965) and Stanley Kubrick's Jack Torrance in *The Shining* (1980). We will attempt to read between the lines of their behaviour and try to determine what exactly makes them mad and what makes us so fascinated by their madness that we cannot forget their images long after we have seen the films.



## 2. Film as an Emotionally Charged Art Form

Before we go into the analysis of such a complex topic as madness, it is first necessary to understand what features make film so powerful that it is able to influence how we perceive the world. First of all, films are intentionally designed in such a way to have an emotional impact on the viewer and take him through the experiences driven by stories and characters created by the filmmakers. The stylistic and formal choices that filmmakers make all aim to create specific effects. On a basic level, making a major film involves cameras, lighting, various sounds, laboratories and computer technology, but on a business level it also includes manufacturing of the equipment, funding, distribution and presentation of films to the audience (Bordwell and Thompson 8; 10). However, on a deeper, unconscious level, every single one of those components functions as part of the overall pattern designed to engage the viewer (Smith 42; Tan 13). Films create this sense that there is a world “here” at the point in time and place when the viewer is viewing the film, and the other, the world “out there” that exist only in the film and requires a different kind of involvement on the part of the spectator who can now “perceive things anew” and experience “fresh ways of hearing, seeing, feeling, and thinking” (Bordwell and Thompson 57).

In order to equip the shot with emotional unity and add expressive qualities to it, filmmakers need the help of *mise-en-scène*. *Mise-en-scène* means “putting into the scene” and it refers to setting, lighting, staging, costumes and makeup (Middleton 186.) Lighting holds a lot of power over how the viewer perceives the scene because it allows the filmmaker to guide the viewers’ attention towards or away from some peculiarity. Along with the *mise-en-scène*, filmmakers also control the cinematography of the film – the way of photographing and framing the image, as well as its duration on the screen. Framing is important because it defines the limits

of the image presented to the viewer which includes imposition of distance, positioning and movement in relation to the *mise-en-scène* (Bordwell and Thompson 124; 140; 182; 214).

Furthermore, sound is a very powerful tool for creating various effects which affect the viewers emotionally which is why horror and mystery films often use the power of sound from an unseen source (Bordwell and Thompson 266). Sound effects rely deeply on conventions because they condition the viewer to expect something exciting to happen when they hear a certain sound, like a door creaking or even a certain type of an unknown sound, which in turn creates suspense. In that sense, the sound is information to the viewer to prepare himself for what might come next. Even the absence of sound can also create agonising suspense because it arouses suspicion as to why everything went quiet all of a sudden, like it does just before a detective is murdered in *Psycho*. To support the idea that sounds are intentionally used to engage the viewer, it is interesting to note that very few noises in films are actually recorded during filming - most of them are added in postproduction (Bordwell and Thompson 24).

Film combines visual images and sounds in order to create an affective exchange between cinema and the spectator (Laine 39). The camera acts as a medium which records happenings orchestrated by the director who creates a plot that is meant to construct an alternate reality that the viewer becomes a part of while watching the film. The more effective the editing technique and the *mise-en-scène*, the more the film is likely to engage the viewer emotionally (Damjanović et al. 230). Hence, emotions are a vital part of the film form because they interact with everything else that is going on in the film. Damjanović et al. (231) consider film to be the only art form that is so influential that can affect the viewer on a deep emotional level which is why Young (102) notes that films have become a key part in emotion research. Emotions that actors portray are meant to provoke emotional responses from the viewers. These responses may be completely different from what would be considered normal in everyday lives, such as feeling sympathy for

the villain or being amused by subjects one normally considers boring. Although the characters are the agents of a causal relationship<sup>2</sup> within the film, it is the viewer who is actively involved in the film by imagining what might have caused a certain event and what may happen later. Therefore, it can be concluded that the original, basic emotion related to film is interest of the viewer, the willingness of a person to watch a particular film (Tan 16). Bordwell and Thompson suggest that “films have meaning because we attribute meanings to them” (63) which connotes the idea that the meaning of a certain film cannot be regarded separately from the emotional experience of the viewers because it is precisely them who attribute meanings to films based on their personal interests and emotional responses. Hence, we can say that what makes a particular film successful is not merely its content, but the amount of audience that finds that content worthy of their emotional investment.

## 2.1. Schizophrenic and Unconscious Experience of Cinema

Films allow for people to get in touch with their darkest fantasies, their unconscious selves in a way that is socially acceptable. In that sense, films act as modern myths and escape outlets that involve the viewers by engaging their senses, feelings and minds so that the viewers experience the fictional elsewhere as their own physical environment (Hosley 2; Bordwell and Thompson 54; Tan 11). This sort of cinematic experience relates to the schizophrenic<sup>3</sup> notion of the conflict between one’s real self and the false, perceptual self that exists only in the mind of

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<sup>2</sup> Causal in the sense of the narrative structure of the film. Bordwell and Thompson define a narrative as a “chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space” (75). Characters are motivated by their desires to achieve some goal, and therefore, most classical narratives strive towards closure in order to complete their causal chains and allow the viewer to learn the fate of characters and answers to all ambiguities (Bordwell and Thompson 96).

<sup>3</sup> In this case, the word *schizophrenic* is not meant to relate to schizophrenia as a medical condition, but rather to the unfiltered origin of the word itself which was first coined in 1908 by professor Eugen Bleuler from the Greek words *schizein* which means splitting and *phren* which relates to soul, spirit and mind (Fusar-Poli and Politi). Therefore, when mentioned, the word *schizophrenia* will serve as an indication of the split in the mind between one’s conscious and unconscious self, the real and the perceptive.

the character, and therefore in the mind of the viewer who takes part in the schizophrenic experience of disconnection from reality and the immediate environment in order to be “emotionally involved in a surrogate reality without having to take part in it” (Horsley 2). Therefore, through the experience of watching a film, the viewer assumes a sort of a heterotopic<sup>4</sup> position that allows him to be in two places at once - he is both inside of his body and outside of it – “outside, looking in, and inside, looking around” and he has the ability to switch between the two realities; the film and the real world – society (Horsley 10; Morris 161). When looked at from this perspective, film watching is a schizophrenic experience in itself in the sense that it represents a split in perception between the cinematic fantasy and reality, with the lines between the two being intentionally very blurry.

Filmmaking is always a collective job,<sup>5</sup> which means that it is not based solely on one man’s idea of the conscious, but on the collective unconscious of the whole group of individuals who work together to produce a cinematic result that aims to fulfil the demands of the entire population. Hence, if films are made to satisfy yearnings of the collective unconscious, that means that they reflect the state of culture and society at the time of their making which is why we can tell a lot about the culture from the analysis of films (Horsley 3). Although films have a conscious side to them which relates to propaganda, profit and entertainment, their basic components derive from the unconscious which explains why the theme of madness is so widely

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<sup>4</sup> Heterotopia relates to the idea of two different realities existing at the same time. This concept was developed by Michael Foucault to describe the fictional elsewhere that exists in the real dimension of society as well (Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*). Although Foucault didn’t explicitly apply the concept of heterotopia to madness, madness can be viewed as a heterotopia within the cinematic discourse because it exists both in the fictional society and the real society that is observing the fictional one.

<sup>5</sup> In individual production, the author is one filmmaker, but in large-scale production, especially in the studio mode, there are so many individuals involved in the process that it is difficult to determine who has control over what. But usually, the director is considered to be the primary author because he has the most control over what a film will look like in the end and he directs the film into its unique form and style which essentially make up the art of film. However, the director isn’t the one who has the most power over a film - the distribution companies do because they provide films for theatres, schedule their releases and provide publicity campaigns (Bordwell and Thompson 34). Therefore, all these people work together to provide a unique experience for the viewer.

exploited in filmmaking. As we have already mentioned in the previous chapter, there is this sort of sensationalism related to films in the sense that they strive to provoke a strong emotional response from the viewer and in order to achieve that they have to deal with themes that will intrigue the collective unconsciousness. What intrigues people the most are certain aspects of themselves and society in general that are unpleasant to look at directly which is why it is only natural for the individual to want to experience that in the safety of his own home. In accordance with that, Manley (46) points out that the viewer can come face to face with madness, see its features and feel its containment, but still continue to live his life as if nothing happened, while Horsley claims that “it is a characteristic irony of the unconscious that the very media we use to avoid these unpleasant truths serve to bring them back to us in a disguised form” (34). It should come as no surprise then that the filmmakers would lean towards madness more than sanity when coming up with themes for their films.

### **3. Defining Madness as a Discourse**

According to Fuery, “madness is meaning and knowledge outside of themselves” (11) in the sense that madness produces a special type of knowledge, while at the same time being something that happens to knowledge itself. It is for these reasons that madness and cinema have a lot in common and share a certain position in terms of meaning – they both allow us to “take up a different position in order to work through issues of meaning and knowledge” (Fuery 12). To put it simply, cinema represents madness based on certain knowledge that already exists in history and society, but also adjusts the representation in order to appeal to the wider audience and in that sense it creates new knowledge about madness that seems to exist only within the cinema, but extends back into the society where it was initially taken from. Therefore, if madness

is not a fixed paradigm, but an accumulation of boundless discourses, how does one represent something that cannot be represented?

Fuery (13) argues that we have grown accustomed to two ways of representing madness – either as “the reconfigured madness (sexuality as mad, possession as mad, excess as mad, vapours and bile of madness, madness as it breaks the law or the ethical order)” or as “the othered madness” where everything different, such as different cultures, meaning, sensibilities and representational systems are considered mad. Therefore, what we know about madness is not an objective fact, but rather something that changes throughout history and culture. Consequently, this so called knowledge about madness is a product of discourse which is a fundamental incentive of power. It is through the discourse that the objects of power relations are established, because as Foucault puts it “discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (*Sexuality* 101). Therefore, the immensely popular film industry is a powerful discourse for transmitting seemingly objective knowledge about madness. Foucault (Sturken and Cartwright 94; Foucault *Madness* 217) defines discourse as a body of knowledge that both defines and limits what can be said about something. This definition is very applicable to the concept of madness in the sense that we are given certain statements and we cannot talk about it outside of those statements because that is all we know about it. Cinema thus provides the audience with a discourse for madness; it gives us ways to talk about it and it also limits us to see it as anything other than what has been shown to us.

Madness as a discourse also has an ideological dimension because it is closely connected with discourses of gender, class and race. For example, male madness differs greatly from female madness as madmen are usually portrayed as tough and aggressive, while madwomen mostly embody fragility and helplessness (Harper 190). Also, as we will see later, the majority of mental

health professionals in films are portrayed by male actors (Gharaibeh 316). Most killers in films tend to be men whose victims are usually women, damsels in distress, which is in accordance with the “archetypal image in storytelling” and a “core feature” in “film drama” (Wahl 67). This idea that men are powerful and women helpless has deep roots in the Western culture, as does the idea that madness is something that needs to be othered, displaced and diagnosed according to societal norms of normality.

## 4. Evolution of Cinematic Madness

### 4.1. Early Stages of Cinematic Madness: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*

The theme of madness began its film journey as early as 1904 when Edwin S. Porter made his short comedy film *The Escaped Lunatic* which features an asylum patient who believes he is Napoleon. Porter continued with the theme of madness in the 1905 film, *The Kleptomaniac*, which showed a woman with impulse control disorder that causes her to steal. In 1909, Thomas Edison made a film *Lunatics in Power* which is now considered lost, but it showed an asylum governed by patients. The first appearance of a psychiatrist happened in the 1914 French two-reeler, *The Lunatics*, in which a madman takes place of the head psychiatrist in an asylum. However, the first widely recognized representation of madness in film didn't happen in Hollywood, but in Germany. German film industry wasn't very successful until the creation of a large company UFS in 1917 whose studios would later attract foreign filmmakers, even Alfred Hitchcock (Schneider I. 614).

The first film of the German Expressionist movement was its most successful one – *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920). The film was a sensation all over Europe and the United States which caused a surge of stylistically similar films resulting in the expressionist movement that lasted from 1919 to 1926 (Bordwell and Thompson 448). In this film, director Robert Wiene

positioned the camera in unusual angles to attempt to present the viewer with the unique experience of seeing the world through the madman's eyes. Besides the camerawork, the unique atmosphere of the film is created with the graphical integration of all mise-en-scène elements into one, meaning that "characters do not simply exist within a setting but rather form visual elements that merge within the setting" (Bordwell and Thompson 448). For example, in the scene where Cesare is running through the woods-like scenery, the exaggerated performance of the actor makes Cesare's hands blend right in with the setting as his arms swivel around like branches of the trees. Angular performances, heavy makeup, jerky movement and distorted setting blended into unique mise-en-scène, convey a supernatural atmosphere (Scull 352; Bordwell and Thompson 113; 138; 331).

This expressive stylization is used to present a madman's fantasy, delusion and his distorted viewpoint. We do not realise how distorted that viewpoint is until the hero of the story, Francis, enters the asylum in search of Caligari. Up until then we believe that what the hero sees, and therefore what we see, is unquestionable reality. We expect to see the mad psychiatrist locked up, but instead we get a mad patient who is already locked up within a mental hospital run by the so-called Dr. Caligari, alongside all the other characters. The hero deluded both himself and the audience into believing in something that isn't real, but exists only in the mind of a madman. The film ends with the director looking very pleased with himself as he declares in the last intertitle: "At last I understand the nature of his madness. He thinks I am that mystic Caligari. Now I see how he can be brought back to sanity again." While Caligari sees how to end Francis' madness, we see what it is like to be Francis and to have everyone see you as mad when you see yourself as perfectly sane. Therefore, what we as an audience got in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* is not just pure shock at the turn of the events, but a unique cinematic experience of seeing the world through madman's eyes and finding out what the confusion of madness feels like.



Although the Expressionist movement had ended by 1927, its influence can be noted in many Hollywood films, especially in horror films such as *Son of Frankenstein* (1939) and in films noirs (Bordwell and Thompson 450). Similarly, elements of the French Impressionism of the 20s can also be found in these two genres<sup>6</sup> as it is a movement that popularised the focus on the psychological rather than the physical aspects of the characters. However, it was French Surrealism of the 20s that went further into the exploration of the human psyche. The 1920s were an experimental era for art in general where people pushed new ideas to see what will fascinate public the most. Surrealist cinema was influenced by Freudian psychology of unconsciousness and dreams which is why some of its major themes include “dreams, sexual ecstasy, madness and intoxication” (Crandal). Because this cinema had no regard for the conventional principles (such as continuity editing),<sup>7</sup> the results were often illogical, unusual, discomfoting, all in the hope that the “free form would arouse the deepest impulses of the viewer” (Bordwell and Thompson 453). Therefore, we can see that even the earliest films strived to leave an emotional impact on the viewer.

## 4.2. Cinema and Psychiatry

The history of cinema and the history of psychiatry have coincided in many things, especially in one’s interest in the other, but also in points of their development. For example, motion pictures made their public debut in 1895, the same year that Freud set the basis for his theoretical system in his book *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (Schneider I. 613). Worldwide madness started on July 28<sup>th</sup> 1914 with the beginning of the First World War in which millions

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<sup>6</sup> Although film noir is a transgeneric phenomenon which encompasses many different genres, we will regard it as a genre for the sake of the conciseness of the text.

<sup>7</sup> Continuity editing has been the dominant editing style throughout film history as it ensures “smooth flow over a series of shots” (Bordwell and Thompson 321).

lost their lives, millions perished and millions suffered horrific injuries. The generals who lead the war seemed to have been devoid of all conscience and governed by one rule only: “The madness must continue, lest civilization perish” (Scull 290). Although the physical consequences were to be expected, no one expected so many psychological ones – soldiers haunted by nightmares, soldiers who constantly screamed, who couldn’t calm down and ones who seemed to have lost all memory without a known physical cause. Scientists then came to the conclusion that madness and mental trauma had to be connected somehow and that it made sense for people faced with horrific events to escape into madness. This is when electric shock treatment first appeared in the hope that a great physical pain would get these soldiers to abandon their psychological pain. However, it wasn’t until the late 1930s that electroconvulsive therapy started to be an accepted form of treatment, alongside lobotomy and insulin coma treatment, mainly because there was a desperation to revert the madman to sanity both from their families and by psychiatry which was lagging behind the advances in the rest of medicine. Regardless of the ethical questionability of the treatment, patients had little say in the matter because they were considered unfit to make choices for themselves (Scull 308).

These treatments were first portrayed favourably in films. For example, in the highest grossing film of 1948, *The Snake Pit*, shock treatments help a schizophrenic inmate at an insane asylum regain psychological consciousness. While Tett (137) considers the film to be an appropriate social reflection of that time, Erb (51) presses that shock treatment was used in the film only for the sake of sensationalism. Whatever the case, in later films such as *Shock Corridor* (1963), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975) and *Frances* (1982), treatments such as lobotomy and shock therapy are inarguably used as a tool for control and punishment that ultimately lead into madness, rather than out of it and are seen as crimes against humanity (Tett 137; Schneider I. 619; Gharaibeh 318). These less favourable representations in films first

appeared as a reflection of anti-psychiatry that developed in the 1960s which condemned these sorts of treatment (Scull 518). Inarguably, films had a lot to do with the alteration of public perceptions of psychiatric treatments<sup>8</sup> and the profession itself.

Hollywood's infatuation with Freudian ideas and psychoanalysis began after the Second World War. A great deal of producers, directors, screen writers and actors underwent psychoanalysis themselves, such as David O. Selznick and Louis B. Mayer (Scull 354). It is no wonder then that psychoanalysis found itself within the cinematic discourse and from the 1940s to 1960s, the image of an analyst and his profession took over the favourable spot in films. In 1945, Hitchcock directed and Selznick produced a film titled *Spellbound* which aimed to show the success of psychoanalysis at treating madness, as it was announced in the opening titles which stated that once psychoanalysis is applied, "the devils of unreason are driven from the human soul". What is interesting is that Hitchcock worked with Salvador Dalí on film's imagery to break the usual pattern of portraying dreams with blurry images and to portray them with sharpness (Damjanović et al. 231). Although the film glorified psychoanalysis, Brill notes that psychoanalysis alone wasn't enough to finish what it started. It was necessary for the protagonists, John and Constance, to find true and selfless love in each other and that was what ultimately healed them.

The "romance with Freud" came to an abrupt end once not-so-positive films about institutional psychiatry came out and showed the darker, "shock'em and mutilate'em" side of institutional psychiatry (Scull 357). By the end of 1970s, with the inventions of drugs like Lithium and Valium, population of mental hospitals sank to an all-time low, and it continued dropping through the following century (Erb 49). After 1970s, the portrayal of the psychiatrist as a villain as hinted in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* became almost an archetype (Schneider I. 616).

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<sup>8</sup> See more about the depictions of treatment in various films in Hyler (204).

What is important to note when relating cinema with psychiatry is that the interest is two-fold – film industry is interested in portraying psychiatric and psychological themes, while psychiatry is interested in analysing the films that portray them.

### **4.3. From Late 70s Onwards: *A Beautiful Mind* (2001)**

The 1970s experienced a rise in the popularity of the horror film which coincided with the decline of the Western. The horror film first appeared during the silent era in German expressionist films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) and *Nosferatu* (1922). During the 1930s, horror films such as *Dracula* (1931) and *Frankenstein* (1931) helped the then secondary Hollywood studio Universal rise to the status of a major company. Many low-budget filmmakers were attracted to the genre as it required relatively low costs, which is why horror became a crucial part of the 1960s independent production. The 1970s brought a new respect for the horror genre with films such as *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and *The Exorcist* (1973) which allowed the big-budget horror film to increase in popularity and expand over major Hollywood directors (Bordwell and Thompson 331; 332). The late 70s and early 80s also brought with them an onward surge of a new genre known as slasher horror films which were usually filmed on a low budget and had multiple sequels (Wahl 57). Slasher films produced some of the most notorious madmen and murderers such as Michael Myers in the *Halloween* series, Jason Voorhees in *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* and Freddy Kruger in *Nightmare on Elm Street*. The trend continued throughout the 90s and the 2000s with sequels of the cult slasher films and some new franchises like *Scream* (1996) and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997).

Except for turning to making franchises based on psychotic killers who kill without a motive, 1970s and onward cinema also expressed more concern towards community care and mental health problems within the community that have started to show through the cracks

(Morris 149). In a 1977 film, *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*,<sup>9</sup> the viewer gets to experience madness in the form of psychosis from the viewpoint of the character who is displaying symptoms of schizophrenia and self-destructive behaviour. We get to hear the voice that the character hears in her head and we have a chance to understand her in a way that her therapist doesn't. Many films in the 90s started to represent madness with a serious tone, such as *Shine* (1996) and *Girl, Interrupted* (1999). Films that came out in 2001, *Iris* and *A Beautiful Mind*, allowed the viewer to form an emotional bond with the characters who struggled with the difficulties of living with a mental illness (Morris 149). However, by glorifying psychiatric medication as the primary step in treatment, all of these supposedly positive representations in contemporary film show that psychiatry and pharmaceutical companies still dominate the cinematic discourse of madness.

*A Beautiful Mind* (2001) tells the story of the struggle and eventual rise from mental illness of the mathematical genius, John Forbes Nash. This film shines a different light on madness where the madmen are not monsters, but intellectual geniuses (Zimmerman 92). In this way, they are saviours of the human race in the sense that they go through emotional distress in the pursuit of their dreams and passions in the name of discovery, science and knowledge that benefit the society as a whole. If their ultimate desire is to benefit the society then they can't be that different from the rest of us and they certainly can't be mad because from that perspective, we could be just as mad as them. The fact that the film has been criticized for its overly positive image of madness (Middleton 184) is evidence enough that the discourse that views madness as the other still prevails in our culture. The claim is that the film reinforces a negative stereotype where the mad are specially gifted and that madness can be cured with the love of a woman.

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<sup>9</sup> This film is based on a real-life story of Joanne Greenberg, the author of the book of the same name which tells the story of her remarkable recovery without medication. To hear her talk about her mental health experience firsthand, refer to the documentary film *Take These Broken Wings*.

Moreover, the film was judged for hiding the fact that the real John Nash is a homosexual, therefore revealing the recurrent gender-based stereotypes within this film subgenre, the biopic (Middleton 184). What is important to note is that although this film offers an alternative view of madness, the images it uses still date back to the asylum discourse. Nash is prescribed medicaments, insulin and electroshock therapy during his stay at a mental institution, therefore allowing the film to create an atmospheric image of mental institutions that is almost the exact replica of the ones we saw in earlier films, such as *Shock Corridor* (1963).

## **5. Visualising Madness: Recurring Motifs in Films**

We have seen in the previous chapter that the human psyche has been a favoured theme among many films ever since *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* came out in 1920. Depictions of mental illness are all around us and can be found in every type of media accessible to the general public; television, print, cartoons, music, theatre plays and films all contain at least some sort of representation of the human psyche. Therefore, people are exposed to a large variety of information regarding mental health even if they have never read a scientific article or attended a psychology course, which is why their opinions and attitudes towards mental health may well be influenced by the images they see in films and other mass media. There is a general belief that everyone's reality has to rely on the same principles, known as the common sense, and anything that differs from that norm is seen as bad, unnatural, sick and psychotic. Research done by Pirkis et al. (536) on articles dealing with mental illness and fictional media showed that although widely researched, mental illness is a topic frequently represented negatively in films which is why people with mental illness are often stigmatised and embarrassed to ask for help. While Wahl (2) is convinced that most of the public's knowledge about mental illness comes from the mass media, Hyler (195) believes that films significantly influence and shape viewers' perception

of the mentally ill and those who treat them. Representation of physical disabilities doesn't even come close to the number of depictions of mental disorders in films; Wahl (4) found over four hundred films that advertised involvement of mental illness alone, excluding mental retardation, addiction and plots revolving around psychotherapists.

### **5.1. Cinematic Vocabulary of Madness**

The accurate use of psychiatric terminology in films is of great importance for the public understanding of mental illness because if it is misused, it can lead to further stigmatization of mental illness:

“Slang and unflattering references to mental illness, exploitative use of psychiatric concepts, and comic depictions of mental disorder fail to recognize the painful seriousness of psychiatric disorders and to respect the sensitivities of those with mental illnesses who may be in their audience. Such references put forward a view of mental illness as a trivial matter, worthy of laughter rather than empathy”. (Wahl 35)

Terms such as psychotic and psychopathic are often used interchangeably in films, whereas in psychiatry, they denote two different conditions (Morris 65). While the term psychotic relates to impairments of thought, speech and behaviour that lead to distorted perceptions of reality and affect the person's ability to function normally, the term psychopathic is a descriptor of people who have an adequate understanding of reality and are prone to commit “antisocial acts mainly for emotional and physical gain” (Wahl 18). Unlike psychotic people who act out of passion, compulsion or confusion, psychopaths act deliberately and can appear as fully functional members of society. However, psychopaths are far rarer in the real world than they are in films. Fictional serial killers usually exhibit both psychopathic and psychotic behaviours which rarely

go hand in hand in the real world, but filmmakers combine them in a way that is both implausible and stigmatising (Harper 85). One other common misrepresentation is the equation of the terms mental retardation and mental illness. While mental retardation refers to the limitations in one's intellectual abilities, mental illness is a term that encompasses various psychiatric conditions that "interfere with the individual's usual or prior level of functioning" (Wahl 20). The two should be differed because a mentally challenged or disabled person is rarely also mentally ill and vice versa. This distinction was clearly blurred in *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* in the character of Jason who is born with a mental disability but later turns into a maniacal killer.

People with mental disorders tend to be described in films with terms such as *psycho*, *lunatic*, *wacko*, *weirdo*, *crazy*, *sick*, *mad*, *deranged*, *cuckoo* and so on, which are offensive because they denote a lack of sympathy and understanding (Wahl 21; Damjanović et al. 234; Harper 23). Some of these terms were used to describe mental illness in the past when mental patients were viewed as the lowest part of the society and therefore treated inhumanely and kept as chained objects in dungeons (Wahl 22). Many films exploit such terms to intrigue the viewer (such as Hitchcock's *Psycho*) and some even do it to sound witty (for example *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Crazy People*). Words such as *crazy* and *insane* have become so imbued in people's vocabularies that they are used deliberately and without much thought to denote everyday situations. The problem arises when such words are used to describe people with mental difficulties because it reduces their whole personality to one adjective which by itself cannot comprehend the seriousness of difficulties of those struggling with mental disorders. This is particularly evident in comedies which portray mental illness. For example, in the film *Crazy People* (1990), the viewer is seemingly introduced to various patients in the mental health institution, but what he is really introduced to is their peculiar disorders, not the patient as a whole person with the disorder as just one part of him. Furthermore, in *What About Bob?* (1991),



the severity of phobic and anxious behaviours of Bill Murray's character Bob is reduced to a laughing session in order to entertain the viewer. At one point, Murray's character jokes about his own condition with the mental health professionals by quoting his favourite poem: "Roses are red, violets are blue, I'm a schizophrenic... and so am I". Although humour can have a positive effect on the stigmatization of mental illness, Wahl (32) is rightfully concerned that these "one-dimensional comedy characterizations" reduce mental illness to laughing matter, therefore ignoring to provide it with the importance and accuracy that it deserves.

One of the most commonly misunderstood mental disorders is schizophrenia and it is also one of the most (mis)represented terms in films as it is often associated with what one normally considers as madness or insanity (Wahl 16; 88). It is also often equated with split personality, as seen in films such as *A Double Life* (1947) *Psycho* (1960) and *Dressed to Kill* (1980). Although the word itself signifies splitting, it refers to the splitting of the personality into many disorganised parts, and not into two alternate personalities (Wahl 15; Hyler 197). While it is characteristic for schizophrenic people to hear voices, they don't normally hallucinate and see people that are not there (Zimmerman 92). This has been wrongly interpreted in *A Beautiful Mind* where the schizophrenic character of John Nash constantly talks to people that exist only in his mind.

## **5.2. Physical and Psychological: Bestiality and Violence**

Madness in general is seen as something out of the ordinary, something different, and something that "constitutes a visual continuum of "otherness", which is why people who exhibit characteristics of madness are shown to be different from others in physical appearance, personality and even in basic humanity (Rohr 233; Wahl 36). In that sense, "madness had become a thing to look at: no longer a monster inside oneself, but an animal with strange mechanisms, a

bestiality from which man had long since been suppressed” (Foucault *Madness* 63). Therefore, the iconography of madness that was developed in medical and artistic context clearly drew a line between madness and normality and these recurring images. These images concern predominantly a person’s facial appearance, expression, body build and gestures as well as features like wild messy hair and inappropriate clothing (Rohr 233). Based on the fact that he heard people say that they can differentiate the insane from the sane just by their physical appearance or things such as their voice or their way of movement, Wahl (37) goes on to suggest that such opinions have been influenced by film characters and their actors who are often chosen based on their distinct appearances which are further exaggerated as the madness of the character becomes known to the viewer. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, real mental hospital patients were considered to be used as extras but the idea was abandoned because they didn’t look mad-like enough which only goes to show how misrepresented the images of “crazy people” really are (Wahl 38; Harper 60).

The extreme cases of depictions of madness in films are those when the mentally ill are so *othered* that they are rendered inhuman or even bestial. The attribution of animal-like qualities to humans in films, where they are visually represented as having “disheveled hair, ragged clothing, dirty, stooped, bestial gait, wild eyes that seem more animal than human”, while also being prone to “outbursts of grunts and screams instead of speech; their actions being unpredictable, explosive and rapid” became a standard in creating spectacle out of madness (Fuery 36). For example, in the film *Halloween II*, Michael Myers is considered by his own psychiatrist to be devoid of all human qualities, whereas Hannibal Lecter’s psychiatrist in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) calls him a “monster. Pure psychopath. So rare to capture one alive”, suggesting that Hannibal resembles a beast that needs to be in containment.

Moreover, Wahl's Media Watch study (42) revealed that not only are they visually exaggerated, but mentally ill characters tend to be identified solely by their mental illness. Most of them are shown to be jobless, single and without any real family connections. In reality, however, millions of people with mental difficulties happen to be just regular people who go to regular schools, have jobs and maintain successful relationships with others. In fact, some of the most brilliant and artistic minds are known to have suffered from some sort of a mental disorder. People like Ernest Hemingway, Vincent Van Gogh, Sylvia Plath,<sup>10</sup> Ludwig Van Beethoven, Sigmund Freud<sup>11</sup> all struggled with different disorders such as clinical depression, bipolar disorder and anxiety which means that mental illness can affect virtually anyone.

Films also have a tendency to represent mentally unstable people as violent and murderous but in reality, they are less violent than the people who are considered to be sane (Horsley 8). Wahl (78) observes that the vast majority of people with mental illnesses are neither violent nor dangerous and although a small amount of them can indeed be violent, their violence does not have to necessarily be a product of mental illness. Therefore, with regard to the physical and psychological characteristics of the madman, we can conclude that madness in cinema is seen as a failure to be human and often associated with people who are violent, retarded, dangerous, deviant, problematic and criminally insane.

#### **4.2.1 The Psychopathic Killer**

The image of a madman as a murderous psychopath is by far the most prevailing in films out of every other stereotype about mental illness (Wahl 56). The image of a mad scientist who commits murders was introduced as early as 1919 by the film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.

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<sup>10</sup> Sylvia Plath's descent into madness and eventual suicide was adapted into the film *Sylvia* in 2003.

<sup>11</sup> A compiled list of famous people who suffered from mental illness throughout history is available on the webpage of The National Alliance on Mental Illness in New Hampshire: <http://www.naminh.org/we-advocate/help-fight-stigma/famous-people> (Accessed: 25 Jul 2016) .

During the 1960s with Hitchcock's *Psycho* and his legendary shower murder scene, the image of a mad scientist started to be replaced by a psychotic killer who took over as the main villain in many more films to come such as *Peeping Tom* (1960), *Homicidal* (1961), *Maniac* (1963), *Paranoiac* (1963), *Twisted Nerve* (1968), *Frenzy* (1972) etc.<sup>12</sup> With the arrival of the slasher horror film such as *Halloween*, victims of the psychopathic killer increased in number and ferocity (Morris 149). The impact that the serial killer makes on the viewer is larger than the film itself, which is why some great film psychopaths have achieved the status of a cult hero, like Hannibal Lecter and Freddy Krueger. What haunts us years after watching any of the *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* films isn't their plot or sympathy for the victims, but the crazed character of Jason Voorhees and his trademark goalie mask.

The murderous psychopath comes in two types: one who knows the victim and slowly descends into madness in front of our eyes, and one who kills randomly. While the latter is more of a characteristic of slasher films, the first is what causes the biggest unsettlement for the viewer because it shows that no matter how rational someone may seem, they might be a "time ticking bomb" waiting to explode into madness (Morris 151). Therefore, the killer can be a friendly motel owner like in *Psycho*, a trusted family man like in *The Shining*, or even a beautiful love interest as in *Repulsion*.

Contrary to the evilness of the mad killers, the victims are almost always innocent people who have done nothing personal to the killer but have found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, just like Marion happened to stumble upon the killer's motel in *Psycho*. This is all a part of the appeal of the film – not only are the viewers fascinated by the psyche of the deranged killer, but they experience a thrill knowing that the "random violence of madmen can reach anyone, even people like themselves" (Wahl 69). Therefore, it is not only the madman who

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<sup>12</sup> See more in Byrne's (297) table of films featuring (violent) psychosis and psychokillers.

fascinates the viewer, but also his prey, the objects of his violence with whom the viewer consciously associates himself. The psychology of characters is a much more powerful tool than the violence itself.

### **5.3. Containment of Madness: The Asylum Discourse**

In his book *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault aimed to analyze theories of knowledge within collectives of power in order to reveal the way our culture constructs its systems of confinement and authority. In that sense, he was interested in the concepts of madness and criminality as forms of othering of individuals who do not fit into standard categories of health, sexuality and cultural norms. If the mad are perceived as “animal-like savages, ferocious, given to violence, or possessed by evil spirits” as we have hinted at in the previous chapter, then they have to be taken away from society in order for it to be protected from them (Rohr 233). What helped to exclude people considered mad from the collective social responsibility was the emergence of asylums (Foucault *Madness* 63). The image of an asylum is one that has been used often in the American cinema, which is not surprising considering that the images of old asylums offer some of the most memorable and shocking visual material related to madness. Due to the degrading cell conditions and the behaviour of the staff, the representation of an asylum greatly helped the downgrade of madness to the sense of the Other, something less than human.

Foucault (*Madness* 74) compares asylums to animal cages that are used to confine “the animality that rages in madness” and to “dispossess man of what is specifically human in him”. He described asylums as filled with straw where madmen slept, ate and deposited their excrement at the same time, either naked or almost entirely naked, and very often chained as well, either to the wall or in a straightjacket. The asylum became the primary location for the discourse of brutalization that basically turned the madman into a beast. The treatment applied in asylums that

was supposed to help the patients only served as the great divide between the man and the beast, whereas “the beast” was turned into a spectacle, an object of the gaze that helped the asylums to construct madness as humanity’s other and as sickness against which the real humanity needed to take action (Foucault *Madness* 72; 73).

In spite of the asylum being the main representation of the spatial confinement of madmen, the spaces of madness are impossible to pinpoint and therefore, madness seems to be everywhere. Throughout the centuries, madness evoked “reactions of awe, respect, fear, moments of seduction and intimidation, exclusion, religious mania”, and even scientific advances regarding the medicalisation of madness (Fuery 8). In this sense, everything has the possibility of madness, which is why madness is hard to represent. Regardless of that, images and discourses of madness have always been represented as a part of culture.

### **5.3.1. The Power of In(Sanity) Containment: *Shock Corridor* (1963) and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975)**

With all the visual material available, the asylum discourse basically destined madness to be subjected to the gaze of the viewer, to be observed as unreasonable, and it shaped the madman into a *thing* that is to be looked at and repressed (Manley 30). Madness is seen as the Other within our culture and its exclusion is even validated through systems which represent madmen as being responsible for social adversity. One of the most conspicuous features of our visual culture is visualizing things that are not in themselves visual (Mirzoeff 5). Consequently, we can now recognize madness as a certain look or behaviour that can be identified and connected to historical roots and coding installed within the asylum discourse. The introductory quote of this thesis aims to show that one is not simply mad, but made to be so by some higher power, which is particularly evident in the film that also starts with this quote, *Shock Corridor* (1963) by

Samuel Fuller. The film tells the story of a journalist, Johnny Barrett, who pretends to be mad in order to get into an asylum and solve a murder case that could potentially get him a Pulitzer Prize. The image of the psychiatric ward is a stereotypical representation of madness where everything is white and very minimalistic, with patients wandering around the corridors and rooms with either blank stares or some kind of characteristic outbursts of unacceptable behaviour. The film's main symbol is the asylum's main corridor that is called "The Street" and its appearance is just as what you would expect – there are no plants, no art, no decorations of any kind, only bleakness of the cold walls and wooden benches, all accompanied by lighting that is way too harsh in order to accentuate the difference between the black and the white, the sane and the insane.

The main character, Johnny, is hospitalized almost immediately and given a diagnosis of acute schizophrenia after he expresses his perverse interest in his supposed sister's braids. However, at this point in the film Johnny isn't schizophrenic at all; if anything, he is cunning and manipulative because all of his symptoms are just part of a story he came up with alongside an acclaimed psychoanalyst. In the scene where Johnny is talking to the psychiatrist who is supposed to evaluate him and give him a diagnosis, he is able to predict every single question and also offer a well prepared answer. According to Poseck, one of the resources often used by the cinema to reflect madness is the image of the sane person incarcerated in an asylum and the idea that psychiatrists are incapable of distinguishing between sanity and insanity and that they even "delve impossible depths in search of insanity" where it does not exist in order to expand their patient numbers (63). This is evident in the case of this particular film which allows us to see the power of discourse at play – madness was brought down to a predictable set of pathological and symptomatic behaviour that one could imitate and even use to fool the supposed higher power. However, who ends up fooled at the end isn't the higher power, but Johnny himself. Although

Johnny is warned by his girlfriend before entering the asylum that he might lose his mind if he surrounds himself with people who had already lost theirs (she tells him that their sickness is bound to rub off on him too), he is certain that that is impossible. However, not long after his admission, he starts having obsessive visions of his girlfriend scolding him for entering the asylum. In the ward, Johnny is succumbed to multiple rounds of hydrotherapy and electroshock treatment, and by the time he is released from the asylum, he is nothing more than an emotionless body that doesn't even recognize the woman he was so obsessed with. As his doctor says, Johnny becomes a "catatonic schizophrenic. An insane mute".

The shock treatment is used to bring back patients to sanity, but this film shows that it can also help bring about monstrosity and the incapability to function. The more electroshock treatments he receives, the more animal-like Johnny becomes which is in accordance with Foucault's theory of stereotypical animal-like characteristics assigned to madness.<sup>13</sup> In the end, Johnny manages to win the Pulitzer Prize, but at a very high cost – the cost of his own sanity. The closer he gets to discovering the murderer, the more he slips into insanity. What was once a healthy man is now turned into a madman by the society. This film makes it clear that everyone is vulnerable to insanity and that if we are constantly being told that we are mad, just like he was by the wardens and his doctors, we may start to believe that ourselves and behave accordingly.

Similarly, in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Jack Nicholson's character, McMurphy, pretends to be mad in an attempt to avoid prison. Instead, he is committed to a mental hospital where he constantly comes into conflict with authority who sees the other inmates as ill, while he sees them as captive spirits who are "no crazier than the average asshole out walking around on the streets". The image of an asylum in this film is reduced to a jail-like metaphor in which patients are deprived of basic human rights and demanded to conform to rules of what is

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<sup>13</sup> The theory he had developed in his book *Madness and Civilization*.



considered normal behaviour. There is a strong contrast of “us versus them” reflected in the split between madness and normality, real and fake madness and the patients and the staff (Zimmerman 14). Therefore the film raises a question of perception: who is actually crazy and who can judge what crazy looks like? To the viewers, McMurphy is never crazy, but his psychiatrists start to believe his feigned madness proclaiming that they don’t think “he’s overly psychotic, but he is quite sick. Dangerous”. And so the institution takes it upon itself to prove its power and to “cure” him by performing lobotomy and leaving him completely devoid of the person he used to be. Although both Jimmy and McMurphy are responsible for finding themselves in the mental institution, they are not responsible for what had been done to them there because, as Johnny’s psychiatrist says: “A man can’t tamper with a mind and live in a mental hospital and subject himself<sup>14</sup> to all kinds of test and expect to come out sane”.

#### **5.4. The Incompetent, Immoral and Evil Psychiatrist**

As it was made clear in the previous chapter, both Johnny and McMurphy feign madness for their own personal gain. Although their feigned madness ultimately costs them their sanity, they manage to completely fool the whole psychiatric system.<sup>15</sup> Throughout the first half of *Cuckoo’s Nest*, McMurphy bears a constant grim face because he is amused by the situation, but the institution sees it as a sign that he belongs there. But McMurphy isn’t the only one who fakes madness; there is also the Chief who pretends to be mute the entire time, leaving McMurphy to proclaim gloriously: “You fooled ‘em all!” Moreover, *Shock Corridor* goes so far as to suggest that it is possible that one psychiatrist can predict the thought process of another, therefore

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<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note the psychiatrist’s point of view and his choice of words which imply that Johnny willingly chose to “subject himself” to various tests and treatments, whereas it is clear that he tried to rebel against them throughout the entire film.

<sup>15</sup> Although that isn’t explicitly shown, McMurphy had to have fooled the legal system as well by pleading insanity in order to avoid prison and get to an asylum. Misconceptions about insanity pleas will be discussed in the following chapter.

reducing the psychiatric science to learned behaviour and hinting at the incompetence of the mental health professional.

On that note, Welch and Racine (219) compared the psychiatrist in the original *Psycho* with the 1989 remake by Gus Van Sant, and concluded that the original psychiatrist is confident, knowledgeable and reassuring, but the latter version is more hesitant, doubtful, untrustworthy and therefore - incompetent. Moreover, in 2005, Gharaibeh reviewed 106 films which featured around 120 characters that were psychiatrists and psychotherapists. He discovered that around 70% of them were male, while around 47% of them were shown to be incompetent. Although cases of ethical violations are rare in real life, almost 45% of therapists in films were shown to have violated sexual or other ethical boundaries (Gharaibeh 317). Many films also portray mental health professionals as foolish, inappropriate and even incapable to distinguish madness from sanity and creativity from pathology (Schneider I. 619). Some of them even depict mental health professionals as evil men who use their psychiatric knowledge to manipulate and harm patients (Young 47). The most notable example is probably Doctor Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* who, with his cannibalism, positioned the evil psychiatrist as a staple of horror and thriller genre. Although Nurse Ratched in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* doesn't seem to be evil, her methods of therapy include manipulation of vulnerable patients as she threatens and punishes them to prove her power and ultimately even drives one of them into killing himself. Taking all this information into account, the image of a psychiatrist or a therapist that motion pictures project is that he is most likely to be a middle-aged incompetent male who is inclined to commit some sort of an indiscretion with the patient and do him more harm than good. That sort of an image can definitely paint a negative picture of mental health professionals and influence one's decision on whether or not to seek psychotherapy.

## 6. The Grounds for Representation and its Consequences

What is problematic about cinematic representation of mental illness is not the representation itself, but this idea that if someone seems to exhibit signs of madness, they are always criminal, aggressive, unpredictable and dangerous. And not only that, but there is a suggestion that it is precisely mental illness that makes them exhibit criminal behaviour. Wahl observes that it is easier to suggest something like that to the general public, than to say that “it could be our society, our neglect of those at risk for criminal development, our attitudes and policies toward weapons, alcohol, punishment, and so forth which foster criminality” (71).

The way madness as a theme is represented in films may seem irrelevant if we think of films only as a form of entertainment. However, films are not just that – they are integral parts of people’s lives and carriers of knowledge which shape viewers’ understanding of the world and its members and that makes the film industry very powerful. A lot of public’s general knowledge about specific things, such as about the existence of *Miranda rights*, various health issues, addiction, sexual orientation, different cultures etc., comes from films and television and the knowledge about mental illness is no exception to that. In many films, it is customary for the killer who is caught to defend himself in court with the insanity plea and then soon be released into the community, but in reality, insanity defence is really rare and unsuccessful<sup>16</sup> because most disorders do not disable the person to understand and control their actions (Gay; Wahl 83). Most real-life serial killers such as Charles Manson, John Gacy, Richard Ramirez, Jeffrey Dahmer and Ted Bundy either did not plead insanity at all or were unsuccessful and still found guilty regardless of their supposed insanity (Wahl 84). In one of the most famous films about

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<sup>16</sup> Less than one percent of the accused plead insanity, and less than one percent of them are successful. See more in Gay.

institutionalized madness, *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), Jack Nicholson character wins his insanity plea by pretending to be insane in order to get away with his criminal actions.

The viewers expect that the information about psychiatric disorders is brought to the screen as a result of consultation with mental health professionals, but that is more of an exception,<sup>17</sup> rather than a rule (Byrne 287). To prove just how powerful films can be, Wahl and Lefkowitz conducted a study on two groups of people who were shown two different types of films – one group of undergraduate psychology students was shown a television film which depicts a man's stay in a mental hospital and the graphic and tragic results that follow upon his release, and the other group viewed another film which dealt with murder which didn't involve mentally ill individuals. The results showed that the first group of participants expressed less favourable views about the mentally ill and the institutions that are supposed to take care of them (Wahl and Lefkowitz 525). What has to be taken into consideration here is that the participants expressed concern over the dangerousness of mentally ill patients after watching one single film that suggests such a thing, but the average person is exposed to multiple portrayals of that sort during their lifetime and not only in films, but in the mass media in general. It comes as no surprise then that the general views on mental illness are mostly negative.

So if these inaccurate representations of madness lead towards confusion and stigma, then why do filmmakers keep using madness as a theme in their films? Wahl (110) is the only author who made a systematic list of several possible explanations which include profit, ignorance, culture and psychological reassurance. The profit reason is the most clear-cut; as long as madness continues being something that the public wants to see, films that feature it will continue to be made. This large interest in films that feature psychopaths and killers stems from the human

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<sup>17</sup> One of those exceptions is *Spellbound* which was based on psychoanalysis. The producer of the film, Selznick, consulted and credited his own analyst (Scull 355).

desire for excitement and suspense and such films tend to provide just that. The endless sequels of slasher films are the prime example of how filmmakers tend to play it safe and repeat what was profitable in the past – the easily recognizable madman who doesn't need any explanation for his killings, other than the madness itself. Part of the problem is that filmmakers often don't possess more knowledge about mental health than the average viewer which is why they automatically equate madness with danger and otherness.

Such equation is rooted in the past – the connection of madness with evil, violence and bestiality, the belief in the impossibility of successful recovery and the incarceration of the mentally ill in inhumane conditions have been around for centuries. Such ideas were represented in the Bible, first psychiatry findings, early paintings, mythology, legislative rulings and so on. Although some residuals of the earlier idea of madness still remain, “as beliefs about mental illness, its causes, and its treatments have changed, so has media depiction of mental illness” (Wahl 132). Therefore, culture and society have a lot to do with the way madness is presented in films because they provide the discourse for it. As we have seen in chapter three, it is impossible to talk about something without having an already established set of terms and ideas that we can use to start the conversation. If culture and society hadn't given us the body of knowledge about madness, we wouldn't be able to represent it films because we wouldn't even know of its existence.

Furthermore, film depictions of people with mental illnesses as distinguishably different, provide psychological reassurance for the viewers who see madness as something that happens to “other people”, people that are nothing like them (Welch and Racine 217). This psychological reassurance is also supported by the idea that it is not the society as a whole that is the problem, but the mentally-ill individual who can be eliminated in one way or the other, while the recognition of deep social issues requires more complex interventions. The same favoring of

shortcuts when it comes to mental health is evident in the medicalisation of madness which has had the upper hand over psychotherapy since the beginning of psychiatry; just like it is easier to take a pill than to deal with the underlying cause, it is easier to exclude the madman than to treat the society which generated his madness in the first place.

All of these reasons behind depicting different sorts of madness can be incorporated into one idea – films about madness bring in a lot of capital. After all, isn't Johnny in *Shock Corridor* ready to go through extreme measures in order to write about insanity precisely because "that is what people buy"? Hence, it's fairly easy to capitalize on such films because they attract large, paying audiences who continue to be mesmerized by the fear, suspense and excitement that such films provide which is why "psychotic killers are, have been, and likely will continue to be big business for Hollywood filmmakers" (Wahl 59). If we remember Bordwell and Thompson's claim from earlier chapters that films have meaning because we attribute meaning to them, then we can easily see that it is our interest in madness that spikes cinematic representations. Some people even go to extreme lengths in their obsession, such as people who are obsessed with real-life serial killers, send them fan mail and even fall in love with them. One example is Doreen Lioy who married serial killer Richard Ramirez and claimed that he was "as beautiful on the inside, as he was on the outside" and that she was "captivated" by him even though she couldn't pinpoint what exactly was so captivating about him.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, part of the fascination with cinematic madness is that films tend to give the impression that people with mental disorders are nothing like the viewers which is supported by the physical and psychological distinctiveness of the characters who are portrayed as if they were

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted from FL Brizzle. "Richard Ramirez: The Night Stalker." Online documentary film. YouTube. YouTube, 20 Jun. 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6U7JB3ZMsOw>, Accessed: 14 Aug. 2016). To find out more about people's obsession with serial killers, refer to Interesting Documentary. "Serial Killer Groupies." Online documentary. YouTube. YouTube, 27 Feb. 2015, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHw7nJwJK\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHw7nJwJK_k), Accessed: 14 Aug. 2016.

a “breed apart” from the human population (Wahl 55; Rohr 235). The audience wants to see what that other looks like and make sure that they are nothing like them. That is why the visual representation is so important and why the mad are represented the way they are – we want them to be so different from us that we can never fall into the same category.

All in all, it is obvious that most of the film portrayals of mental illness do not correspond with reality, namely because people who are considered mad in real life are not dangerous, inhuman, animal-like, evil or untreatable at all. Just as the Mad Hatter says to Alice in the 2010 film adaptation of the novel *Alice in Wonderland*, “you would have to be half-mad to dream me up”. Therefore, maybe madness is not so different from sanity after all.

## **7. Images of Madness in Three Popular Films**

### **7.1. Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960)**

Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980) is considered to be one of the best directors of all time, as well as a master of the thriller genre and a brilliant technician. From an early age, Hitchcock was obsessed with cinema, but unlike those of the Lucas-Spielberg generation, he didn’t go to university at all. Instead he spent his time going to plays and reading, before deciding to join a production company in 1920 and then become a director in 1925 (Barr 48). Hitchcock started out during the silent period and then gained his reputation in Britain with hits such as *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), *The 39 Steps* (1935) and *The Lady Vanishes* (1938). He debuted in America in 1940 with the film *Rebecca*, and then achieved success after success with some of the more important hits being *Notorious* (1946), *Rear Window* (1954), *Vertigo* (1958), *North by Northwest* (1959), *The Birds* (1963), and of course, *Psycho* (1960). His style was that of meticulous planning, which shows his value of suspense over shock and he was also a big believer in using the film art as a way of leaving an impact on viewers’ minds and feelings

(Bordwell and Thompson 5; Cohen 126). Over fifty of the films that he directed are of the suspense genre and he frequently<sup>19</sup> used the theme of madness to reflect his fascination<sup>20</sup> with the human psyche and to challenge viewers to question their own perceptions of sanity, madness and reality itself (Zimmerman 47).

*Psycho* seems to have two intertwined storylines. The first storyline follows the main protagonist, Marion Crane (Janet Leigh), as she drives to meet her lover Sam Loomis (John Gavin) with money she stole from her employer in order to be able to marry him. However, she gets caught in a storm and decides to spend the night at the Bates motel which is run by a seemingly quiet man called Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) who is soon revealed to be living with his controlling mother, Mrs. Bates. This is where the storyline takes a different path, as Marion's sister Lila Crane (Vera Miles) and Sam go looking for Marion for whom they believe to be missing. But Marion isn't missing; she was stabbed to death by Norman's mother who is later revealed to be the personality of Norman's split mind.

The story of *Psycho* is based on Robert Bloch's novel of the same name which showcased the story of a real serial killer, Ed Gein, who killed at least 10 women in the 1950s. None of Hitchcock's other films relied so much on a literary original as *Psycho* did (Young 199). Hitchcock's company, Shamley Productions, was in contract with Paramount which agreed to distribute the film on the condition that Hitchcock financed the production himself because they found the subject to be distasteful. Hitchcock insisted on devising the whole publicity campaign for the film himself because *Psycho* was a risky prospect due to how much it relied on the unexpected ending (Durgnat 14; 19). This is why Hitchcock had been very conscientious about

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<sup>19</sup> A psychotic and delusional antagonist in *Rebecca*, a psychotic and homicidal Uncle Charlie in *Shadow of a Doubt*, an acrophobic in *Vertigo*, a kleptomaniac in *Marnie* and so on (Zimmerman 48).

<sup>20</sup> Apparently, Hitchcock's personal anxieties were reflected in his films, like his anxiety about mothers and intense and sometimes even perversely controlling relationships with his icy blonde actresses (Young 67).



keeping the ending a secret as one of his taglines for the film read “Please don't tell the ending: it's the only one we have”. Although Hitchcock directed *Psycho* with a teenage audience in mind, he also managed to reach wider audiences based on the successes of his previous films, on the backlash he received within the Old Hollywood and also because of the popular stars he cast (Durgnat 9; 18). By 1990, *Psycho* arrived second to *The Birth of a Nation* as the most profitable American film ever made.

Hitchcock teases us throughout the entire film beginning with the sexually-charged scene with Sam and Marion in bed where the spectator wonders what had happened between them, have they gone all the way or just explored each other. The story we are shown first about the Marion-Sam affair and her eventual theft is a false trail that only serves to establish Marion as our heroine and to position us in a relaxed state that will intensify the eventual shock of her sudden death. Although a false trail, Hitchcock never misses an opportunity to make us nervous; he believed that policemen make even the innocent nervous and paranoid, so he had to throw one into the plot in order to make both Marion and the viewers uneasy.<sup>21</sup> Our anxieties are intensified as we see him trail Marion in her rear window, but they shouldn't be. We focus on him trailing her and forget his remark about her not finding a safe motel. That is what we are supposed to be afraid of – her arrival at a supposedly safe motel and meeting of the real antagonist of the story.

Many things that Marion does can be interpreted as her slipping into madness. For example, when we see her packing in her home, she appears slightly possessed or later on when she absentmindedly almost forgets her purse with the money in it. In the scene where she drives towards the Bates motel, there is a certain look on her face with her unblinking eyes and a half-

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<sup>21</sup> And to tease us again, of course, because at that point it seems like the police officer will be very important for the film, but he ends up being completely irrelevant for the narrative. Hence, the film doesn't put the chain of causality at the front, but rather a web of uncertainty with the first half of the film being a sort of a “mood painting” for what will come next (Durgnat 78). The policeman and the dealer who sells Marion the car have no narrative value; they could be omitted without much difference.

smile that could almost be described as a psycho look. We finally get a confirmation of her dabbling into madness as she says to Norman that one time is more than enough to slip into madness, implying that she in fact has gone mad at least once.<sup>22</sup>

However, the narrative of a mother-obsessed and schizophrenic homicidal young man surpasses the initial narrative of romance, marriage and sexuality<sup>23</sup> and interrupts the storyline that could have potentially led into Marion's madness. Sexuality in the second part of *Psycho* can be seen through the lens of madness; Hitchcock (in Durgnat 80) once said that "a beautiful woman is a force of evil" and in that sense, Marion is the not-so-innocent cause of evil in Norman as she attracts his male sexual desire which, in turn, releases his madness. While Marion can be seen as the one who sets the second narrative in motion, Durgnat (65) observes Sam as someone who foreshadows Norman's character because in one of the first scenes, Sam is seen folding bed-linen just like Norman does in his daily routine. Moreover, Greven (67) notes that both of them have similar black eyes, dark hair and tall physique and even exhibit similar hand movements when talking to Marion.

What is most important for our analysis of madness are neither behavioral nor physical similarities, but psychological ones; both of these characters are unstable in their own ways and haunted by women of their past (Sam by his first wife and Norman by his mother). This sort of an interpretation of characters is in accordance with Durgnat (44) who claims that "sanity in our society is just another form of madness and that Sam, Norman and the normative spectator are three of a kind", all three mad and sane, depending on the perspective. What that means is that the film conditions us to perceive Norman as mad and everyone else as sane, but if we examine

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<sup>22</sup> Fuery (78), Zimmerman (55) and Durgnat (54) also interpreted Marion's words in this manner.

<sup>23</sup> Since this paper is concerned with madness in films, we are only interested in observing sexuality as something that triggers Norman's switch to the persona of his mother. For an extensive look at *Psycho* through sexuality alone, see chapters two and three in Greven.

closely the behavior of other characters such as Marion and Sam, we can see that they are not so sane after all. It is Hitchcock who ultimately diagnoses Norman with schizophrenia, but if this film was about Marion or Sam or the spectator for that matter, who knows what kind of diagnoses could surface in the end.

### **7.1.1. The Shock of the Shower Murder**

The filming of the entire film took forty two days altogether, but the shower scene alone took seven days to film which makes it the most complex, and also the most famous scene in the entire film. The scene itself is extremely shot dissected as it is comprised out of 70 shots combined in a “montage flurry of actions and reactions conveyed by close-ups and marginal parts of the body” (Durgnat 8; 126; Kolker 242). The narrative of the scene could be summarized in one line: “Mrs. Bates stabs Marion to death in the shower” if the narrative structure was what motivated the film, but it isn’t - it is shock and suspense. In order to make room for the shock of the shower scene, Hitchcock had to make the first part of the film somewhat uneventful and minimalistic; Hitchcock himself declared that he made *Psycho* only for the sake of the surprise of the shower scene. He usually valued suspense over surprise, but in this film he made an exception by using minimalistic suspense to magnify the effect of the surprise (Durgnat 84). If Marion’s journey to the Bates motel establishes the possibility of unhappiness, then the surprise of the shower scene destroys any possibility of optimism. We are faced with the killer for the first time but we get to see only glimpses of Mrs. Bates, just enough of her hair and her broad shoulders to fool us into thinking it is her insanity that killed Marion. We don’t see enough of her to be scared of the killer and we also never get to see the knife strike the flesh like we do in most horror films. This is what is unique about *Psycho* - our terror lies solely in the spectacle of victim’s suffering.

The shower scene is the perfect example of how certain sounds can trigger an emotional response in the viewer. Instead of hearing a woman scream, we hear screaming violins which, when matched with the descending knife, pierce our ears and provoke a sense of danger and suspense much more effectively than if they were just regular screams of a woman. It is exactly because of this scene that *Psycho* became a common cultural discourse known by many people who may have not even seen the film (Welch and Racine 216). Although the scene is famous for taking place in the shower, it really begins and ends in the bedroom which is related to the Freudian concept of violence and sexuality as the bedroom represents a psychotic space<sup>24</sup> for Norman.

### 7.1.2. The Splitting Mind of Norman Bates

The first thing that changes the mood of the film from an everyday setting to an eerie atmosphere is the Bates house and the figure of Mrs. Bates behind the window. When we first see Norman, he appears to be a bright young man, pleasant to look at and although slightly tense, essentially unthreatening and even frightened of the world. The voice of Mrs. Bates is introduced soon after Norman and we hear her through Marion's ears as she listens from fifty yards away which is actually too far for her to hear anything. It could be an error on part of Hitchcock as Durgnat (102) claims to be, but Erb (56) sees it as an intentional move to spread the psychotic effect from one character to another and mother's voice is never properly stabilized in space which is why it is consistently psychotic. Erb might be going in a better direction here if we remember that other characters exhibit some form of madness as well; Norman is the one who is supposed to be psychotic, but Marion is the one hearing things.

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<sup>24</sup> The first scene of the film happens in a bedroom so the bedroom is already established as a space of sexuality, infidelity and immorality and since those are the triggers to Norman's madness, bedroom becomes a trigger itself (Fuery 77). It is no accident that Norman keeps his mother's corpse in her bedroom because that becomes the psychotic space for Norman/Mother in the sense that the bedroom triggers the switch between the two personalities.

One of the first things we learn about Norman is that he is a detailed and scrupulous taxidermist who seems to be able to do anything with his hands. While Durgnat (106) doesn't see taxidermy as an omen, Smith (43) and Kolker (232) agree that the comparison between the stuffed birds and Norman's commentary that Marion eats like a bird is suggestive of the crime that will take place later. Since Hitchcock seems to have left nothing to accident, the latter may be more plausible. Moreover, the way Norman reacts to Marion's suggestion of a madhouse<sup>25</sup> for his mother, his subtle stuttering and menacing look all seem to be placed together to trigger viewers' anxiety; this is the first time we really get to see that something is off with Norman as he breaks his façade of politeness. Nonetheless, there is no aggression in this scene, but merely a suggestion of a threat whose purpose is to get our anxieties growing. Our anxieties are soon confirmed as Norman kills Marion in the personality of his mother. He switches to his mother's persona when he kills because he himself is too sensitive and timid. Although it may seem that the Norman personality doesn't really want to kill her, it is revealed to us later that Norman agrees with his mother when he says "She might have fooled me, but she didn't fool my mother".

The drawn-out scene where Norman gets rid of the evidence of Marion's murder changes everything. As the money sinks with Marion's car, we stop seeing her theft as the centre of action, while Norman stops being the distressed victim of his mother and turns into a morally disturbing murder accomplice. The camera follows him as he moves in and out of the hotel room and becomes our new focus of identification; a replacement for Marion. Norman shows shock at the sight of Marion's body, but no pity.<sup>26</sup> He gets over it fairly quickly and starts looking at her as

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<sup>25</sup> Norman's response, "You mean an institution? A madhouse? People always call a madhouse someplace, don't they?... Have you seen the inside of one of those places?", has a direct connection with the anti-psychiatry that was just starting to take off, as does Marion's comment in the beginning of the film that "you can't buy off unhappiness with a pill".

<sup>26</sup> Durgnat (36) considers Marion's murder to have been a poetic punishment for her sexual endeavors with Sam. If we assume Durgnat's claim to be correct, then the question is – do we feel pity for Marion or do we identify ourselves with Norman?

an object that needs to be wrapped up. In that sense, he buries Marion four times – in a curtain, in a boot, in a car and in the swamp (Durgnat 155). Hitchcock played with the schizophrenic idea of morality; we are not innocent in this crime because we feel sorry about the wasted money and, as Hitchcock himself observed, we must feel at least a little bit of relief<sup>27</sup> as Marion's car sinks into the swamp. After her car sinks, the film makes yet another shift, that of a crime story to a detective mystery as Lila, Sam and private investigator Arbogast (Martin Balsam) work to make sense of Marion's disappearance and Norman Bates takes over as our new protagonist.

The second murder is not as unpredictable as it is built up by the suspense of Arbogast looking around the office and then going up to the house, but the viewer is still as surprised by Mrs. Bates' lunging attack. The scene was shot with an overhead swivel crane and Hitchcock used an aerial POV intentionally to distract us from the fact that we are seeing a mummified corpse concealed in clothes (Erb 56). However, this scene is also quite a cue because Mrs. Bates seems so small and flabby in Norman's arms compared to what she looked like in murder scenes. Like with the shower scene, there is no actual stabbing because the violence is not measured by intensity, but by our inability to avoid the unexpected; although we expected the murder, we couldn't predict the mad old lady's attack and victim's terror-filled eyes as he falls down the stairs. If one suspected Norman at all, that suspicion is cast away as Norman carries his mother down the stairs and hides her in the fruit cellar.

When Sam eventually arrives at the motel, he questions Norman about Marion and we are even more tense that Norman will be found out than we were when Marion was questioned by the police officer. Norman obviously doesn't like confrontation because he doesn't know what to do; he becomes shaky and nervous, like he does when Sam interrogates him about the money, so he

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<sup>27</sup> Even if we do feel relief, it is not to be treated as a unique or shameful experience as Durgnat (144), Smith (80) and Ebert ("Psycho") all note feeling the same way.

has to become someone who isn't afraid, someone who made him feel guilt and shame<sup>28</sup> in the first place. This reasoning behind Norman's split between personalities in accordance with Welch and Racine (218) who see Norman's madness as "suppressed by social norms, but which could suddenly explode with volcanic force" (Welch and Racine 218). Norman is the weak link suppressed by social norms, but Mother is the one who has the strength to fight against them in her own twisted way.

Once again the screaming violins pierce the air as Norman, now revealed as Mrs. Bates, pierces the air with his knife directed towards Lila. We are shocked by the sight of the mummified corpse, but what frightens us the most is seeing this nice young man reduced to a maddened frenzy. This is where the real danger lies; is that what madness can do to a person who appears to be so normal? Although it is Norman's psyche that is split into two distinct identities in order to escape the horrifying realities and losses of life (Zimmerman 49), Durgnat (95) views everyone in *Psycho* as schizophrenic to a minor or a serious extent because the text of *Psycho* is schizo in itself with "weird ellipses and contrary retrospections." Consequently, us, the viewers, are mostly schizophrenic because we operate on contradictions; we know it's only a film, but we are still emotionally affected by it.

This film is swarming with forward movements of the frame right from the beginning when two forward movements carry us into the darkness of a hotel room and then later when the camera serves as a subjective point of view that shows us movement of characters deeper and deeper into the Bates house. The ultimate forward movement is the one that we have been waiting for – the one that takes us into a close-up of Norman's face and allows us to finally see

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<sup>28</sup> He is obviously very ashamed of his sexuality (because that is what his mother taught him) and that shame is most apparent in the scene where he watches Marion through a peephole. He isn't sure, excited or steady like the antagonist in *Peeping Tom* (1960). Welch and Racine (218) rightfully speculate that if someone happened to catch him, he would surely run away like a little schoolboy.

into his mind. Like in *Citizen Kane*, this penetrating movement of the camera ultimately leads us into the revelation of a character's secret (Bordwell and Thompson 202). This scene resorts back to minimalism, but this time in *mise-en-scène*. Norman confined within bare walls, barred windows and wrapped in a blanket that symbolizes a straitjacket<sup>29</sup> invokes the same idea of confinement that Foucault described – if you can't cure social adversity then the best thing you can do is to put it away.

One would argue that what is missing in that scheme is character's bestiality, but that is present throughout the film in the form of stuffed birds that always seem to conveniently find their way into the shot in proximity to Norman. Also, in the end shot, Mrs. Bates exclaims that she felt as though Norman saw her as one of those stuffed birds. And since Mrs. Bates is Norman, then he is like a stuffed bird. As mother's voice echoes from Norman's mind that she "wouldn't even harm a fly", the look on Norman's face shows the absolute opposite. He looks up into the camera while his smile shows nothing but absolute madness. His face is briefly superimposed over his mother's skull which removes any traces of distinction between the two personalities showing us that the overly-confident psychiatrist was right when he said that "Norman Bates no longer exists. He only half-existed to begin with. And now the other half has taken over. Probably for all time".

### 7.1.3. "We All Go a Little Mad Sometimes"

All in all, *Psycho* definitely reinforced the confusion between schizophrenia and multiple personality disorder as it is discovered in the end that Norman taking over the persona of his mother is a consequence of schizophrenia. Byrne (293) notes that the film strengthened the stereotype of equating violence with mental illness and confusing schizophrenia with multiple

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<sup>29</sup> This comparison was noted by Erb (52).



personality disorder, while Young (199) even goes so far as to credit *Psycho* with at least half of the responsibility for the confusion of schizophrenia and the very rare dissociative identity disorder. It would be very difficult to determine whether that is true, but it is quite clear to anyone who is somewhat informed about mental illness that not much thought has gone into basing Norman's pathology on scientific facts.

What Hitchcock himself said about *Psycho* is that it is a film with an interesting construction, but what really makes it interesting is that he was directing the viewers and not the film itself (Ebert "Psycho"). Although *Psycho* and psychoanalysis share some common interests that are most obvious in the madness of Norman Bates, Hitchcock didn't want this film to bear a serious psychological tone (which might explain the confusion of schizophrenia with split personality), but to be a roller-coaster thriller<sup>30</sup> with a high impact on the viewer's emotions. He wanted for *Psycho* to have a documentary quality in the sense that we are shown everyday realism and ordinary people, so we can say that *Psycho* is a combination of melodrama, drama, suspense thriller<sup>31</sup> and everyday experience interpreted by our irrational fears.

Although suspense evaporates when you know how the film ends, the viewers came back to see *Psycho* nevertheless; the second viewing<sup>32</sup> can produce a more profound suspense that lies within our frantic search for what we might have missed, to find sanity and madness behind phrases, hesitations and silences. Hence, the suspense of the film is created largely by our knowledge which is superior to the knowledge of the characters. For example, when Lila Crane explores the Bates house, we must be more tense than her because we have knowledge of Mrs. Bates being in the house. Moreover, our emotional responses are not just those of terror, but also

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<sup>30</sup> According to Durgnat (7).

<sup>31</sup> Durgnat (27;39) sees the film as a thriller, but Bordwell and Thompson also observe the film as a horror because it features iconography characteristic of the horror film as Hitchcock "juxtaposed a mundane hotel with a sinister, decaying mansion" where one might expect for a monster to lurk (330).

<sup>32</sup> Durgnat (115), Cohen (127) and Kolker (206) also find the second viewing important for a more detailed examination of madness in this film.

of sympathy; part of the fright that we feel when watching *Psycho* derives from the sympathy and the connection we feel with Norman after we see how hard it is for him to live with his mother. Durgnat (52) notes that the viewers are prone to sympathizing with characters that embark on risky tasks even though those tasks go against their own moral principles. If that is true, then we can explain why we sympathize with Marion when she selfishly steals the money to be with Sam even though we don't get to see her thought process as she does it to understand whether she really wants to steal it or not. Hitchcock leaves it unexplained intentionally because he expects the average viewer who is also not without sins to understand how sometimes desires can overcome one's mind and lead them into a schizoid split of becoming a different person in a different world.

In *Psycho*, everything is realistic, but nothing is real. If nothing is real, then we have neither power nor responsibility and we can allow ourselves to “freely split between incompatible identifications” and identify either with the not-so-moral Marion or with the madman himself (Durgnat 146). As Ebert (“Psycho”) points out, what makes *Psycho* immortal are our fears; we are afraid of committing a crime, of the police, of falling victim to a madman, of disappointing our mothers and of going crazy ourselves. When Norman says to Marion “We all go a little crazy sometimes”, he might as well be saying it to us. If we keep in mind that what matters the most in a mystery thriller scene is the spectator's experience, then the biggest fear is the one that is left after watching the film – like Norman, anyone can be driven to madness when faced with difficulties of life. What if it happens to us?<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the overall message of the film ends up being that the chaos in the world can overcome our psyche and that madness can really happen to anyone.

## 7.2. Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965)

Roman Polanski was born in 1933 in Paris to Polish parents who soon moved back to Krakow in Poland where he was influenced by the atrocities of war. He first joined the film industry as an actor, but soon proceeded to directing films. After his Oscar-nominated *Knife in the Water* (1962), Polanski made his first English speaking feature film *Repulsion*. After a really bad hallucinatory experience while taking LSD, Polanski started to be terrified of going mad which is why fear of madness is at the centre of all his films (Kroh 71). He was also always drawn to existential horror as an expression of the nature of human vulnerability, displacement and isolation within the framework of film art which is evident in some of his most famous films such as *Repulsion*, *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *The Tenant* (1976) and *The Pianist* (2002) which earned him an Academy Award for Best Director (Sragow). Today Polanski is among the greatest directors of foreign origin who have helped shape the American cinema.

*Repulsion* tells the story of a shy, fragile-looking French girl, Carol (Catherine Deneuve), whose repulsion towards men and sexuality escalates into madness after her sister Helen (Yvonne Furneaux) and her lover Michael (Ian Hendry) leave her alone in the London apartment that the two sisters share together. Carol loses touch with reality and eventually murders her suitor Colin (John Fraser) and her landlord (Patrick Wymark) as a result of her paralysing psychosis. *Repulsion* was supposed to be just another low budget B film and even Polanski wasn't completely happy with it because of the budget constraints, but the film turned into a major critical and commercial success which won the Silver Bear award at the Berlin Film Festival (Khron 70).

### 7.2.1. Slipping Through the Cracks of Madness

The Criterion Collection's DVD main selection features an ominous build up of all the sound effects that mark the passing of time and, at the same time, Carol's descent into madness: the ticking clock, the church bells, her eerie half singing/half mumbling, her maniacal laugh and even the buzzing flies. From the moment the camera emerges from one of Carol's eyeballs, we are sucked into her schizophrenic world. The beginning of the film feels more like the middle and when Carol's client interrupts her daydreaming to ask "Have you fallen asleep?", we feel as though she might as well be asking us. Polanski wanted for Carol to daydream so that he could establish her as a girl who has a problem right from the beginning ("Audio Commentary"). We don't know what Carol is daydreaming about, but we already feel a connection with this fragile-looking girl that we barely know. Carol's job as a manicurist is as bleak as the rest of her world, but it also allows her to daydream and be quiet most of the time so that other people don't see her madness.

*Repulsion* leads us into a world that becomes more fragmented and disturbing by the second (Morris 161). The world is disturbing because that is the way it is for Carol because everything that has been shot was shot from her point of view<sup>34</sup>. Although we first see Carol as other characters see her, soon we start to experience her world directly through her eyes. That way we get to experience Carol's hallucinations with her and see the horror that is in her head, which is why we can empathize with her to a certain extent because her mind seems an absolutely terrifying place to be.

"It's not as if she were a maniac... she just goes a little mad sometimes" are words that Norman has for his mother, but they may well be Helen's thoughts after her boyfriend suggests

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<sup>34</sup> To hear Polanski talk about the importance of filming through Carol's point of view, refer to the Audio Commentary of the Criterion DVD.

that Carol is “a bit strung up” and that “she should see a doctor”. But having seen the opening titles with the close up of Carol’s eye, we as viewers begin to wonder whether there might be something more disturbing to her than pure daydreams. Polanski “plays with the collective head of his audience” as he establishes Carol’s visions early on in the narrative and has her pass a gazing construction worker in the street that will later embody her rapist (Schneider S. J. 127). The camera follows Carol very closely as she walks through the streets, suggesting an “obtrusive nearness” of her anxieties (Laine 40; Ain-Krupa 43). Later, as her madness starts to unravel, the camera gets even closer to her in a way that can even be classified as annoying at times because we feel like we are literally breathing down her neck and even like her figure is blocking our view. However, our view isn’t blocked because Carol is “the view” of this entire film. Hence, this must be exactly what Polanski wanted to create with this sort of camerawork – for us to be so close to her that her anxieties rub off on us.

We don’t have to look for madness in this film, its presence is constantly felt throughout the entire atmosphere of the film. Instead, we optimistically look for sanity in Carol’s behaviour and feel hope after she lets her admirer Colin (John Fraser) kiss her. However, the whole kiss is as awkward to watch as it was for them to experience. Carol’s stiffness during the kiss leads us into the events of the next scene where she wipes her mouth compulsively and brushes her teeth, showing her complete repulsion towards any physical reproach. Probably the most optimistic scene in the film is the one where Carol’s co-worker Bridget (Helen Fraser) manages to make her laugh (half of the film has passed and that is the first time we see her laugh); but much like in Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, the scene is there to lull us into relaxation in order to intensify the shock of the following scene where Bridget finds a rabbit’s head in Carol’s purse and Carol falls creepily silent after the very mention of a man. We are brought back to reality; no matter how beautiful and attractive Carol may appear, she is completely disconnected from the world.

According to Polanski and Deneuve, crazy people act like little kids and Carol is the best at being a little girl who is unaware of her body and attractiveness to men (“Grand Ecran”). Men who are offering themselves to her and the rape hallucinations completely overwhelm her. She can’t keep the repulsiveness from violating her spatial, emotional and physical boundaries which is why she eventually lashes out (Schneider S.J. 122). Even though they are in black and white, Carol’s murders are brutal. She appears to have no remorse after she brutally beats Colin to death or when she slashes her landlord with a razor many times, hunched over him like an animal, with blood flying everywhere. Regardless of the murders, Deneuve found Carol to be a very normal person with whom it is easy to identify which is what makes the film disturbing; “She’s very human, but she has no reason to laugh. Her own life is a disaster” (“Audio Commentary”). Therefore, Carol is not someone you see when you imagine a crazy person, but rather someone you are emotionally attracted to because we have all felt unhappy at some point in our lives. Carol’s vulnerability ultimately turns into aggression as she attempts to protect herself from the things she perceives as threatening so one wonders if her acts of violence liberate her in some way.

However, the terror of the film doesn’t lie in the scenes of violence, rape and entrapment, but rather in Polanski’s expert use of actors’ performances, sound and *mise-en-scène*; it is his “tough mindedness” that “escalates the terror” (Sragow; Ain-Krupa 41). Atmosphere was very important for Polanski which is why he surrounded Carol with completely normal people who make her stand out as “the other”. He claimed that it made no sense to surround her with “weirdoes” which is why he tried to make the world around her as realistic as possible (“Audio Commentary”). Sounds are also a crucial part of the creation of the atmosphere of the film. Although Carol tries very hard to keep the exterior world outside, she can’t do it because the world is already in her head and that’s why Polanski tried to use every possible sound to create

atmosphere and show her feelings of loneliness, separation and alienation (“Audio Commentary”). The sounds of her sister having sexual intercourse, the steady drumbeats of the opening theme, the ringing of the church bells, the telephone and the doorbell are all signs of the outside world trying to penetrate Carol’s personal space which basically triggers her madness. For example, as the camera moves further away from Carol when she is lying in her bed at night, it allows her sister’s moans to overfill the entire room which makes Carol visibly annoyed with this obtrusive intrusion of her personal space. Later in the film when she hallucinates rape acts, Carol’s rapist is always announced with the ticking sound or with the bells of the monastery which even muffle up Carol’s screams. Even the music changes as her madness progresses from a cheerful jazz music to chaotic drumming that overwhelms every other sound.

Most of the film happens inside of Carol’s apartment where the camera invades the dark and cramped spaces. Carol’s flat becomes a place of her solitary withdrawal and cold-blooded death (Schneider S. J. 124). Polanski manages to build up so much out of the slightest detail that the details stop being just details and take on meaning; we know that time is passing not by the sunlight and darkness, but by the ticking clock, the rotting rabbit and the sprouting potatoes which grow more grotesque by the minute. To make Carol’s hallucinations as believable as possible, Polanski felt that the audience should feel spatial changes. He could have just used a wide-angle lens, but he actually also had movable walls built on the set so that the apartment could become bigger as Carol’s madness progressed (Ain-Krupa 41; “Audio Commentary”). Polanski himself said that he wanted to have the feeling of distance increasing throughout the picture as the madness was overwhelming Carol, which is why he wanted the set to transform into a wider space with furniture at the centre (“British Horror Film”).

Consequently, we can say that Carol’s apartment is a character itself in the film because it seems to be alive and have a mind of its own. But if we remember that we are seeing the film

from Carol's perspective, then it becomes obvious that she is the one who makes it come alive. The walls start to expand only after Colin's murder, meaning that the apartment accompanies her mental deterioration. First it is a bright and tidy place, but then it starts showing signs of neglect and decay to the point that the landlord calls it "a flaming nuthouse". As the rabbit rots inside the apartment, so does Carol's mind; her hallucinations get progressively worse from cracks in the walls over scenes of rape to hands emerging from the walls. These are all visual signs of her gradual mental disintegration especially because Carol doesn't even seem to notice the rabbit, neither by sight nor smell. Just as she doesn't notice the rabbit, she passes right by a crowd gathered around a car crash without even noticing them or the crash which shows us the extent of her dissociation<sup>35</sup> from the world around her.

The only rational explanation for Carol's delusions and repulsion towards men is only hinted at the end when the camera moves across the apartment's mantel to show a framed family picture with a young Carol in it. She is easy to recognize because she is standing isolated behind everyone else and staring madly into the man in the front who may well be her father. The camera zooms into her eye again, connecting the ending with the beginning and insinuating that her troubles began way back in the beginning of her life which is in accordance with the last line of the script which refers to "her beautiful and proud, implacably vague child's eye, where madness had already gained the day" (Sragow). Therefore, the only possible explanation for her disgust towards men and sexuality that is hinted at in the film is that Carol was sexually abused by the man in the picture. This conclusion is in accordance with Schneider S. J. (125) who is convinced that her madness must have come from her home because at one point we see her

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<sup>35</sup> Ain Krupa (49) claims that this scene is Polanski's way of contrasting the absurdity of one's own breakdown with the even more absurd and deteriorating world, but maybe it would be more appropriate to specify her claim and say that this scene reveals the juxtaposition of physical and psychological injuries, that is how the gravity of psychological injury can sometimes surpass the physical.



“playing house” and attempting to iron Michael’s shirt that has previously made her vomit. We can see this clue as very powerful because the iron isn’t plugged in, and neither is Carol; she is so disconnected from reality by that point in the film that she never makes it back to sanity.

### **7.2.3. “We Must Get This Crack Mended”**

*Repulsion* is an emotional event that seeks to overwhelm, “to undermine the spectator’s share in the affective interplay of the aesthetic system and the affective experience of the film” (Laine 43). Polanski is showing us that you can live with a mentally ill person and not know that there is a problem which has a frightening effect on the viewer; all the more because Carol’s violence is portrayed as a natural response to the repulsion and fear she feels towards men and so what is truly frightening for the viewer is the feeling of helplessness and lack of control. Every woman experiences things like catcalling and name-calling with regard to her own sexuality at least once in her life which makes Carol’s initial reluctance towards men a very relatable image and one can sympathize with her and almost feel the same disgust towards men she feels.

However, Polanski goes a step further and shows us what the effects of being driven mad by disgust look like. He invites us to participate in Carol’s insanity from her point of view, therefore confronting our own fear of being taken over by insanity. The viewer may think that he can handle the disgust and horror based on his knowledge of genre conventions, but Polanski’s unique way of combining sound and mise-en-scène makes us forget that film is just a film (Laine 42). Even Deneuve herself started acting more and more like Carol and adopting some of her nervous ticks, which made it clear that portraying a mad person takes a great toll on an actor. Polanski calls it “mental limping which may be difficult to shake off once it’s no more required” (“Audio Commentary”).

Some saw *Repulsion* as Polanski's retort to Hitchcock's *Psycho*, and Kenneth Tynan (Horrigan) even claimed that *Repulsion* was *Psycho* turned inside out in the sense that in *Psycho* we see a double murder through the viewpoint of the victim, but in *Repulsion* through the eyes of the killer (Sragow; Spada). Both blondes of the two films are in mental distress; while Carol's distress escalates to the point of madness, Marion becomes a victim before she can become anything else. However, *Repulsion* holds much less narrative detail than *Psycho* and it ends with Polanski never giving us an explanation for Carol's behaviour like Hitchcock does for Norman. One thing is certain; what the shower scene is for *Psycho*, for *Repulsion* it is the hallway scene when hands come through the walls to grab Carol; it is a horrifying image that will stay in the viewer's mind forever; just like the stabbing of Marion.

What is interesting is that Roman Polanski and Gerard Branch wrote the film in seventeen days without looking at any psychiatric textbooks. Polanski was clearly in on the anti-psychiatry trend as he refused to "embrace psychiatric dictates to explain human behaviour" and to discuss Carol in Freudian terms. Because he was an observer, more than an analyst, the entire film is not an explanation, but rather a character study of Carol (Spada; Horrigan). Nevertheless, most film analyses self-diagnose Carol as schizophrenic; Sragow sees the film as "centered on a beautiful schizophrenic, Kroh (70) views the film as Carol's descent into adult-onset schizophrenia, while Ain-Krupa describes Carol's behaviour as an "exact portrait of schizophrenia" (53). It was also made known to Polanski that the film was "medically correct" which was very surprising to him as he based Carol's character off of instinct and observation, and not research ("Audio Commentary"). This confirms what Foucault was talking about in terms of discourse; we can only talk about something if we have the words for it, and schizophrenia is so widely equated with madness that people can now recognize its apparent symptoms without looking too much into verified information and feel confident enough to self-diagnose someone as schizophrenic.

What foreshadows Carol's madness is Carol herself; she frantically begs her sister not to leave, almost as if she herself senses how deep into madness she will descend (Zimmerman 135). When the wall crack appears for the first time, we are not sure whether it is real or not, especially because Carol says to her sister that they must get that crack mended which tells us that it is real for her and, therefore, should be treated as a warning. Carol's mental crack drives her into isolation which enables her to reach the absolute psychological bottom, much like it does to Jack in *The Shining* and Norman in *Psycho*. But unlike in *Psycho*, we are not comforted in the end because we don't fully understand what drove Carol to madness. At the end of the film, Helen and Michael discover Carol in a catatonic state under the bed and the film ends without much explanation except for the last ambiguous shot of Carol's childhood photograph. We are not sure anymore that we can tell the difference between the objective and the subjective, the real and the imaginary, and so we have nothing else but to feel sympathy for the madwoman who is at the centre of that confusion (Schneider S. J. 129). As Michael cradles Carol into his arms to take her away from the looks of invading neighbours, there is only one thing we can say with absolute certainty and that is that Carol would be utterly repulsed by his touch. But now she doesn't even bulge as her unblinking eye stares emptily into the distance, showing us that the cracks of her madness have finally managed to swallow up her sanity.

### **7.3. Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980)**

Stanley Kubrick (1928 -1999) was one of the greatest directors of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With his skilful use of the tracking shot, the reverse zoom and the painting techniques, Kubrick produced many films that are now imbued in the pop-cultural unconscious. His interest in the diverse aspects of the human nature such as love, sex, history, war, crime, madness, social conditioning and technology is reflected in his most famous films, such as *Lolita*

(1962), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *The Shining* (1980), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) and *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) (Abrams 1). *The Shining* is Kubrick's most ambiguous film because it is essentially inconclusive, enigmatic and open to interpretation (Luckhurst 27).

The film begins with Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson), a former schoolteacher, now a writer, taking a job as the winter caretaker of a secluded hotel named The Overlook which is closed over the winter. Wendy (Shelley Duvall) is Jack's submissive wife who is eager to please her husband who is also a recovering alcoholic. She joins him in isolation with their son Danny (Danny Lloyd) who is revealed to possess the psychic ability of "shining".<sup>36</sup> Once they arrive at the hotel, Danny meets its departing cook, Dick Hallorann (Scatman Crothers), who also possesses the ability of "shining". He tells him that "the Overlook Hotel has something almost like shining" as well and warns him not to go into Room 237. The conversation between Danny and Dick Hallorann is the last scene where the Overlook is populated by anyone else but the Torrances. As the plot skips ahead one month, we are immersed into Jack's already maddened mind.

In *The Shining*, Kubrick exposes the hidden madness of the nuclear family of the 1970s (Luckhurst 50). Luckhurst (39) and Nolan (184) make a connection between Freud and *The Shining* by pointing out that Kubrick read Freud's essay "The Uncanny" about "how the homely can harbour the strangely unhomely" and how fathers can drive their sons mad, which made Kubrick more interested in exploring the family dynamic. That Kubrick was influenced by this essay is evident when Jack describes their rooms at the Overlook as "homey", and also by the fact that Freud's essay had been published in 1919, the same year that is on Jack's photograph at

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<sup>36</sup> Luckhurst (30) notes that Danny's shining powers are a reflection of the horror boom of the 1970s which were a high point of representation of psychic children and domestic space violence in cinema.

the end of the film. But the Overlook rooms are more than “homey” – they are also a reflection of Kubrick’s obsession with details. His mastery of architectural space is at its peak in the design of the Colorado Lounge whose walls are filled with photographs that Kubrick selected mainly from the 1920s (Luckhurst 43). Kubrick is thought by some to have been a perfectionist when it came to detail but also a bit of a madman because he would repeat shots hundreds of times until he got every detail right. For example, there is footage<sup>37</sup> of him being quite unpleasant towards Shelley Duvall on the set of *The Shining* and treating her the way Jack treats Wendy because he believed it would help her get into the role. But Duvall wasn’t of the same opinion as she was seriously stressed out, her hair was falling out and she commented that it was unbearable and excruciating working with Kubrick which is why she retreated to producing films instead of acting (Luckhurst 84; Ebert “The Shining”; Ager).

*The Shining* was based on Stephen King’s 1977 novel of the same name, but King was really displeased with Kubrick’s adaptation and he even believed that Kubrick had the intention of hurting people with this film (Luckhurst 8; Nolan 180). Others believed that Kubrick was only using King’s story as a cover for various other themes (*Room 237*). After the initial negative reactions of the critics subsided,<sup>38</sup> *The Shining* became one of the most admired horror films in cinema history. Thanks to the odd ellipses and continuity errors, the film also spiked a great deal of conspiracy theories both about the film and Kubrick himself. Rodney Ascher’s documentary *Room 237* (2012) offers five of the most obsessive readings of *The Shining*. Some of them almost borderline with insanity, such as that Kubrick made the film to apologise for faking the footage of moon landing (the biggest “proof” for this is Danny’s Apollo XI sweatshirt) or that the film is

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<sup>37</sup> *Making “The Shining”*. Dir. Vivian Kubrick. Warner Bros. Home Video. 1980. Documentary film.

<sup>38</sup> Luckhurst (22) considers the negative reactions to be a consequence of the sudden boom of the horror genre in the 1970s. Because of the already existing haunted houses films, such as *Burnt Offerings* (1976) and *The Amityville Horror: A True Story* (1979), *The Shining* may have seemed just like another one in the line of the same narratives. On the other hand, Nolan (184) thinks that Kubrick lost a lot of viewers precisely because he strayed from the conventional horror formula and made a “thinking person’s horror film” instead of a mindless slasher.

actually about the Holocaust genocide (Jack uses a German typewriter, suitcases that dissolve into people). Geoffrey Cocks keeps seeing multiples of number 7 everywhere, like in the recurrence of number 42 on T-shirts, or the date of the ball being in the summer of 1921. The film is also overcrowded with Indian motifs in the form of interior design but also in the tracking shot along the exterior of the hotel when Ullman explains that The Overlook was built between 1907 and 1909 on the site of Indian burial ground. Moreover, the critics in *Room 237* consider the blood of the elevator to be the blood of the Indians coming through the elevator shafts from the ground. Leibowitz and Jeffress (46) seem to agree with these sort of interpretations as they consider that there are too many symbols for them to be accidental so they see the film as a haunting remembrance of the American ideological past.

However, it is possible (to say the least) that all these clues weren't a conscious intention of the director, but an unconscious association that Kubrick wasn't necessarily aware of. All in all, what this documentary shows is the effect that *The Shining* has on the viewers; the paranoia of seeing things that aren't there or that are there but blown way out of proportion. In that sense, the pursuit for different meanings of the film becomes madness itself. Even one of the interviewees of *Room 237* said that he started going crazy himself as he was looking for clues and watching the film over and over again. Since there is no way to know now whether Kubrick was just playing with the viewer's subconsciousness or if they were just continuity errors, we will leave those aside and take a look at *The Shining* solely from the perspective of madness.

### **7.3.1. Inside the Overlook's Unraveling Madness**

*The Shining* begins with an aerial shot of Jack driving towards the Overlook for his interview with the manager of the hotel, Stuart Ullman (Barry Nelson). Once in Ullman's office, we see a big bright window right behind Ullman which, if you look at the floor plan of the

Overlook, could not have been there<sup>39</sup>. It's quite unlikely that Kubrick overlooked such an important detail, so it must have been there on purpose. There could be several explanations to the "impossible window", but instead of looking at it in the light of conspiracy theories, let us look at it in terms of madness. The camera could be showing us Jack's point of view, therefore making the window a hallucination of Jack's already disturbed mind which is imagining things that are not there. The interview scene established an ominous background<sup>40</sup> for the terror that is bound to take place later in the film. Ullman tells Jack about the tragedy that took place in the hotel in the winter of 1970 when a "completely normal individual" by the name of Charles Grady had a mental breakdown and murdered his wife and two daughters with an axe. Ullman calls it "cabin fever", a claustrophobic reaction that can occur when people are closed in for a longer period of time. The most alarming thing in this entire scene is not the story itself, but Jack's reaction. He doesn't seem shocked or disturbed; if anything, he seems to lack empathy as he remarks sarcastically that "it's quite a story" and that Ullman (and the viewer) can rest assured that that is not going to happen to him and that isolation happens to be exactly what he is looking for.

In the meantime, Wendy and Danny are at home waiting for Jack to let them know whether he got the job, but Danny already knows the answer because when we are introduced to Danny, we are introduced to his imaginary friend who lives in his mouth - Tony. This is the first time we see Danny shine as Tony shows him a bloody vision of what is waiting for them at the Overlook. Tony speaks in a croaky voice through a bent finger which Luckhurst (29) considers to be a sign of a child whose personality is split as a consequence of traumatic dissociation. It's not

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<sup>39</sup> This is actually one of the most valid remarks made in *Room 237* and further examined in Luckhurst (28).

<sup>40</sup> Luckhurst (36) must have come to the same conclusion as he notes that Jack looks like he is suppressing something in the polite and seemingly reassuring responses he gives to Ullman, and that Bill Watson, the summer caretaker, looks at him as if his responses aren't fooling anyone.

long before we learn what that trauma is as a conversation with the psychologist in the following scene establishes Jack's history of alcoholism and violence towards Danny that dislocated his shoulder. Consequently, we also learn that that is when Danny first started hanging out with Tony.

The Requiem Mass music that accompanies a yellow bug as it drives on the mountain road once again already establishes a warning of death. After a God's eye view shot done with a helicopter, we are allowed inside the car where we see the family together for the first time. Again, something is off about Jack; his responses seem to be aggressive and he looks as if he is about to snap at any second. He almost does after Wendy reproaches him for telling Danny about cannibalism, but he contains himself and says sarcastically: "See, it's okay, he saw it on the television". Jack's wolf-like grin, snappy behaviour and annoyed replies make the entire journey as anxious as Marion's drive towards the Bates motel.

In the scene where Danny is talking to Halloran in the kitchen, we can see knives in the background which aren't particularly interesting at that point in the story because they are a natural part of their surroundings. Only later we learn that they are some sort of an omen – they are there to prepare us for the action which will follow next and that is Wendy grabbing one of those knives in self-defence. This proves that Kubrick left nothing to accident – he planted well planned patterns all throughout the film (Bordwell and Thompson 9; Ager).

Jack's descent into madness is managed rapidly through the succession of time as we skip one month ahead. Jack's first month at the Overlook renders him almost immobile as he sleeps through most of the day or types hyperactively but motionlessly at his typewriter. At one point, Wendy interrupts his typing and he goes completely crazy on her, releasing all of the built up rage. Once you have seen the film and know that Jack has been writing nothing but "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy", you look at the scene where we see him writing for the first



time with a completely different mindset; it is only then that it becomes clear why he snatches away the paper so vigorously from his wife. This is also the first time we see him really irritable. Viewing the scene for the second time makes it humorous in a way because he is so mad at Wendy for having interrupted his concentration and his writing when, in reality, that writing wasn't anything that couldn't have easily been continued after that interruption.

The scene of Wendy and Danny playing in the snow is contrasted with Jack completely frozen, staring creepily into the distance with his mouth half open, his hair messy, his complexion pale and his forehead slightly wrinkled from the raised eyebrows.<sup>41</sup> The next time we see Jack, he is sitting on his bed as Danny enters the room to get his toy. Wendy warns Danny not to wake his father, but he looks as if he hadn't slept at all for quite some time. Once again, he is staring into the distance with messy hair and unshaved beard. Kubrick proves to be a master of space once again as he manages to position Danny right in between his father and the reflection of him in the mirror.

Mirrors are often used in films to represent new personalities being born or changed (Damjanović 232). They are noticeably important in *The Shining* as they are always there when Jack is talking to other people indicating that he may be talking to himself. Hence, the two Jacks represent two splitting personalities: the sane and the insane, the one who loves Danny and the one who wants to harm him. "I love you more than anything in the whole world. I would never do anything to hurt you", says Jack, but Danny doesn't believe him and neither do we because the look on his face is absolutely demented. He echoes the words of the twins that Danny saw earlier in the hallway as he says that he wishes they could stay there "forever and ever and ever". Moreover, after Jack's first attack, Wendy and Danny are locked up in their room when Danny wakes Wendy up by repeating the word "Redrum" and even writing it on the bathroom door. It is

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<sup>41</sup> Luckhurst (54) describes him as immobile, hollowed out and catatonic.

only after Wendy sees the reflection of the word in the mirror that she realises it spells “Murder”. Therefore, the mirror<sup>42</sup> can be seen as both the eye-opener and the source of confusion for the characters; it opens Jack’s eyes to see that he is not really embracing a beautiful woman but a dead corpse but it also feeds his illusions making him see projections of other people that are actually projections of himself.

The Gold Room scene where Jack is talking to the bartender, Lloyd (Joe Turkel), is significant for several reasons. Firstly, Jack has a lot of nicknames for his wife throughout the film such as “hon” and “darling”, but now we finally get to openly hear Jack say how much he despises Wendy as he first calls her “old sperm bank” and then “bitch”. He contradicts himself by saying that he would “not touch one little hair on (Danny’s) head” and then confessing that he “did hurt him once”. He tries to ease his guilt by saying that “It was an accident. Could have happened to anybody. A momentary loss of muscular coordination”. At the beginning Wendy also makes excuses for Jack saying that he stopped drinking right after that happened, but Jack says that the accident happened three years ago and he’s been sober for only five months. We can see from this scene that we can’t trust anything as a reliable fact in this film as everyone seems to be wrapped up in their own delusions. Ager considers this to be the proof that Jack was and still is a violent and abusive father. Moreover, there is a mirror behind Lloyd the entire time, which signifies that Jack is basically talking to himself. Lloyd even looks like a projection of Jack as they both have similar smirks and similarly coloured jackets (Ager). Once Jack starts making excuses for himself, the camera is on him the entire time and we see nothing more of the barman which supports the theory of the schizophrenic mirror.

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<sup>42</sup> More on the interpretation of mirrors in the film can be found in Ebert “The Shining”, Nolan 196 and Ager.

Room 237 is the navel<sup>43</sup> of *The Shining* because all paths lead right to that room which intertwines the psychic lives of Wendy, Danny, Halloran, Jack and the hotel itself which seems to have a mind of its own much like Carol's apartment. Before Danny goes into the room which was previously locked and now is mysteriously unlocked, the pattern on the carpet changes direction trapping Danny in it. Something terrible had to have happened to Danny in that room because he walks out of there in a dissociated state and with bruises on his neck. Room 237 also becomes a place where we completely lose our grip of the film and sink deeper into confusion. We have no idea from whose point of view we are seeing the room because it seems to tie many viewpoints together – Danny and Halloran's telepathic communication, Danny's traumatic experience which leaves him with bruises, Jack's hallucination or the actual haunting of the hotel. We actually believe Jack for once when he says he did not see "a goddamn thing" in the room because he seems to have no recollection of that experience which means that he is either completely dissociating from what he saw in there or that the whole scene was someone else's vision.

After what happened in Room 237, Wendy suggests leaving the Overlook and Jack goes from actually looking concerned for Danny, to absolutely ballistic. He is unable to face himself and the possibility of being an unsuccessful writer, so he blames Wendy for ruining his life, saying that it is typical of her to suggest leaving when he is trying to accomplish something. He leaves the room abruptly and goes into a manic state of throwing things around the kitchen. What follows is the scene of Jack and Grady in the blood-red bathroom which continues the logic of shifting identities. We know that Jack thinks he is talking to the Grady that killed his children because he admits it, but his name is no more Charles, but Delbert. At first Grady has no recollection of "correcting" his wife and children, but then all of a sudden he remembers it. Our

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<sup>43</sup> Expression assigned to the room by Luckhurst (58).

confusion is amplified by the fact that Grady tells Jack that he has always been the caretaker of the hotel.

Just as we thought that things couldn't get more confusing, the final shot shows us a wall photograph of Jack at the 4<sup>th</sup> of July party in 1921 which explains the overwhelming déjà vu Jack had when they first arrived at the Overlook and Grady's insistence that Jack had always been the caretaker. But like the impossible window, this becomes an impossible photograph because Jack has no recollection of "always being the caretaker". This last shot leaves the film completely ambiguous and shatters everything we thought we knew was going on up until that point. One thing is clear - Jack will never leave the Overlook, and neither will we. This last shot is our invitation to watch the film again and again to look for clues. We have no other option but to agree with Luckhurst who points out that "We have been stuck in the loop of Kubrick's mesmerizing maze of a movie ever since" (91).

### **7.3.2. "All Work and No Play Makes Jack a Dull Boy"**

Although the film can be viewed as a story of ghosts and possessions, there are too many details that would not be present in an ordinary ghost film. Jack Nicholson's character had already dabbled into madness prior to the Overlook with his abusive behaviour and alcoholism. Therefore, the cause of his madness couldn't have been the ghosts of the Overlook because Jack was already discontent, dissatisfied and violent to begin with (Palmer 208). He is supposed to be a recovering alcoholic, but a single imaginary drink triggers old violent behaviours that escalate beyond any sanity. Luckhurst diagnoses Jack with depression which manifests in "excessive sleep, turning into tormenting insomnia, withdrawal, blockage, devitalisation and eventually near catatonia" (56). His distress about writing is too much for him to handle so he starts wandering aimlessly around the hotel and throwing a ball against the walls. As he alienates himself from his

family completely, he starts having nightmares. His dreams are a premonition of what is going to happen as he dreams of murdering his family and chopping Wendy into little pieces. He seems sincerely shaken up by the dream as he wakes up screaming and exclaims “I must be losing my mind”. However, his depression escalates very quickly to abusive language and threatening gestures, and then finally to utter violence as he attacks Wendy and Danny.

Merced considers Jack to be a “grandiose narcissist with unstable self-esteem who experiences his inability to write as a massive narcissistic injury” (8). He accepts the job at the Overlook purely because of his own personal needs while disregarding the needs of his family in the process. His narcissistic personality assumes that his family has the same preferences as he does which is why he is able to claim that “They’ll love it!” at the Overlook as much as he will. At one point we do hear Wendy say she’s really enjoying her time there, but it seems as if she’s saying that only because that’s what her husband wants to hear. In a way, Wendy is Jack’s enabler; she supports him in whatever he does as she is in denial about who her husband really is. First she accepts Jack’s alcoholism to play down his level of violence, and then she even goes to believe the absurdity of a crazy woman attacking her son rather than to blame her dissociated husband. It isn’t until Jack actually attacks her that she finally sees his madness; he has to vocalize it for her to actually hear and see him for who he really is. He moves aggressively towards her with jittery, exaggerated gestures and mocking imitations as he says “Wendy! Darling! Light of my life. I’m not gonna hurt ya. I’m just going to bash your brains in!” The gravity of the situation finally settles in for both Wendy and the viewer as Jack exhibits nothing but madness from that point on until the end of the film.

Jack’s inability to write isn’t just a case of a writer’s block, but a concrete evidence of his failure to be human which leaves irreparable damage on his psyche; he starts hallucinating, seeing ghosts, develops paranoid delusions and becomes increasingly violent. Jack discovers the

“depthlessness of his existence” and becomes the perfect image of a failed artist who has nothing worth saying (Palmer 216). He is under tremendous pressure to write something during the entire film but it is likely that his ambition surpasses his talent. All we know about Jack is that he used to be a school teacher and that now he’s a writer, but we have to take his word for it because we have absolutely no evidence that Jack has ever written or published anything. Jack is used to using alcohol to cope with his failures so it is not unusual for him to imagine drinking it again. However, alcohol isn’t enough this time so Jack has to come up with something else to help him cope with the situation which is why he imagines Lloyd and Grady who help him justify his behaviours.

Therefore, we can say that what attributes to Jack’s insanity is his feeling of inadequacy both in professional and personal aspects of his life. He doesn’t feel like he is man enough which is reflected in Grady showing up when Jack is locked in the storeroom to reprimand him for not having what it takes to be a man. This could be viewed as a social commentary on the pressures that society puts on men to be authoritarian breadwinners (Leibowitz and Jeffress 48). His masculinity is not unquestionable anymore and his disturbed mind resorts to violence to prove himself. Hence, Jack’s inability to face his failures as a father, husband, teacher and writer makes his mind vulnerable to the past of the Overlook which, when combined, make a footing for his transformation into a “grunting, murderous beast” (Nolan 186).

At the end, there is no evidence of Jack from the beginning of the film. The film empties him out completely so that we have no access to his interior state anymore (Luckhurst 55). We can see that he is completely manic as he chases his family with an axe and eventually corners Danny into the maze. The final shots of him show him exhibiting completely animal-like characteristics. He is baring his lower teeth all the time like a growling animal and although he is first seen yelling after Danny, at the end he is reduced to nothing more but a disoriented,

screaming ape who eventually freezes to death. The look on his frozen face is the same one he had when he took a sip of alcohol with his eyes rolled slightly into his upper eyelids which shows us that Jack was never possessed by anything other than his alcoholic fantasies.

Therefore, everything points towards *The Shining* being a story about madness<sup>44</sup> that is triggered by isolation just like in the previous two films that we analysed. Even Kubrick once said that *The Shining* is “just the story of one man’s family quietly going insane together” (Ager). Hence, although there are ghosts present, Kubrick isn’t telling a story about ghosts because these ghosts may well be present only in the maddened mind of Jack and the traumatised mind of Danny. Kubrick is telling a story of the effects isolation can have on an already troubled mind and he points us in that direction right in the beginning through Ullman when he says that “the only thing that can get a bit trying during the winter is a tremendous sense of isolation”. Later even Wendy starts seeing things that aren’t there, the “Quite a party!” ghost and the skeletons of the dead Gold Room, showing that madness got to her too. Danny’s trauma and his shining talent can be viewed as a consequence of Jack’s resentment and Wendy’s weakness (Luckhurst 51). In that sense, Danny’s talent isn’t talent at all; it is more of a madness that eventually leaves him so traumatised that Tony takes his entire body exclaiming that “Danny isn’t here, Mrs. Torrance”. It’s his way of dissociating from reality which is too difficult for him to handle. Danny only returns once he escapes his father; the source of his trauma is removed and there is no need for him to hide behind Tony anymore.

One thing is undeniable - all of the Torrances exhibited some sort of pathological behaviour right from the beginning of the film. Had they been more stable, maybe the Overlook wouldn’t have had the same effect on them. “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy” is

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<sup>44</sup> Out of all other reviews examined for this thesis, Ebert (“The Shining”) provides the most convincing and concise review of *The Shining* in terms of madness.

Jack's insane echo that has a variable form, but no content. It is also a warning to us viewers as to what can happen when one relies too much on work and alienates himself from his family. All in all, *The Shining* reinforced the stereotypical image of a madman who is not only violent, but also unpredictable and even demonical to a certain extent. Jack Nicholson's portrayal of a madman became one of the most memorable in American films with his most famous line "Heeeeere's Johnny" still echoing in our heads.



## 8. Conclusion

Cinema serves as a visual portrayal of the desire to contain, confine and repress the less acceptable aspects of humanity, which is essentially what madness is. Therefore, madness constitutes an ideal subject for film due to the drama and mystery that surrounds it, which allows the cinema to turn it into a spectacle, seemingly in the name of sympathy and destigmatization, but in reality, it has the power to show us the boundary between what is sane and what is considered to be deviance, criminality and unacceptable behavior.

The study of *Psycho*, *Repulsion* and *The Shining* confirmed Fuery's claim that madness is usually represented as either reconfigured or othered. Madness of the analysed characters falls under both categories; Norman and Carol's sexual madness and Jack's excessive irritability render them impossible to function within the so-called rational world. In that sense, they become the other, the excluded parts of the society whose madness flourishes in the midst of their isolation. In relation to the asylum discourse, The Bates motel with its pertaining mansion, Carol's apartment and the Overlook hotel become private madhouses for their inhabitants and prove that isolation and solitude can really "get a bit trying", to say the least. They are all places which apparently exhibit lives of their own, with the mobile corpses, hands coming out of walls and ghosts wandering in the hallways, but they would be just empty objects without the madness of characters which sets them in motion.

This sort of spatial iconography is part of the horror and thriller genre that transcends into real life and teaches us to fear a certain type of space, but it is evident from these films that human psyche holds the power to create things that are not necessarily there. Hence, it is our psyche we should be afraid of and this is where the emotional appeal of such films lies in; all of these characters were once at least seemingly functional parts of society before their madness

kicked in. We can only speculate what triggered their madness, whether it was trauma in the form of emotional or sexual abuse, alienation or professional and marital failure, but the fact is that we can never know for sure; if we're not sure, then how do we know it won't happen to us? Therefore, what we are really interested in seeing is not the other, the madly different, but ourselves and the extent of psychological damage that can potentially happen to us. This emotional engagement on part of the viewer is what rose some of the scenes from this film to cult status; the shower murder, the wall hands and "Here's Johnny" will probably stay in our minds forever.

The image that Norman, Carol and Jack project is the one of violence and bestiality which, as we have seen, is typical for representations of madness in films. Their violence is the result of their madness; Norman's schizophrenic switch to the persona of his mother, Carol's disgust which wasn't meant to be rooted in schizophrenia but was interpreted in that way and Jack's failure-generated delusions all cause them to commit inexcusable acts of violence and eventually reduce them to animalistic and irreversible traces of the people they used to be. We can then say that the animal symbols used in these films can be rightfully observed as omens; the taxidermy birds, the rotting rabbit and the bear costume all hinted at what was coming for these characters. Norman becomes silent like one of his birds while the personality of his mother takes over, Carol's mind rots away into catatonia, while the savage fellatio of the man in a bear costume predicts Jack's decline into a growling and disoriented animal.

Finally, what is visible from this thesis is that madness transcends the medical context and remains a source of fascination for filmmakers and their audiences; the ideological figure of a madman as something less than human, as something incurably violent and in need of containment is so ingrained in the Western culture that no matter how different the interpretation of madness may be, the imagery surrounding it always stays nearly the same.

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## Abstract

### Cinematic Representations of Madness

Film is an emotionally charged art form which has the power to influence viewers' emotions. Since madness is a product of the human psyche, the interest of the audience in this particular topic spiked a great deal of cinematic representations of madness. Ever since *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), the film industry has grown accustomed to representing madness as something less than human and the madman as someone who is violent, murderous and bestial. The images of madness analysed in this thesis derive from films by some of the most influential directors of all times; Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965) and Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) revealed that although those characters are meant to be viewed as the other, they are different from the average viewer only by their stereotypical representation, and not by nature.

Key words: madness, cinema, violence, stereotypes, Hitchcock, Polanski, Kubrick

## Sažetak

### Filmski prikazi ludila

Film je emocionalno obojena umjetnost koja ima moć utjecati na emocije gledatelja. Budući da je ludilo produkt ljudske psihe, interes publike za temu ludila potaknuo je snimanje niza filmova koji se bave baš tom tematikom. Otkako je snimljen *Kabinet doktora Caligarija* (1919), postao je običaj za filmsku industriju da prikazuje ludilo kao nešto što nije posve ljudsko, a luđaka kao nekoga tko je nasilan, ubilački nastrojen i bestijalan. Prikazi ludila analizirani u ovom radu potječu iz filmova čiji su autori neki od najpoznatijih redatelja svih vremena; *Psiho* (1960) Alfreda Hitchcocka, *Odvratnost* (1965) Romana Polanskog i *Isijavanje* (1980) Stanleya

Kubricka otkrili su da, iako bi se likovi unutar njih trebali promatrati kroz prizmu drugosti, oni se od prosječnog gledatelja ne razlikuju po prirodi, već samo po stereotipičnom načinu njihovog prikazivanja.

Ključne riječi: ludilo, film, nasilje, stereotipi, Hitchcock, Polanski, Kubrick