

# KITCHEN SINK CREEPS

## WEEK 2.

### France and Attitudes to Horror

*“...France, disdainful of the vulgar lure of exploitation, held stubbornly aloof. This despite the fact that French filmmakers had produced two of the most brutally effective horror pictures of the 1950s...”*

**Jonathan Rigby**

### The Influence of Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac

The crime writing duo had attracted the attention of Alfred Hitchcock, who expressed an interest in adapting their novel *Celle Qui N'était Plus...* (*She Who Was Not There*), however, before he could secure the rights Henri George Clouzot stepped in. However, Hitchcock would eventually adapt *D'entre les morts* (*The Living and the Dead*) which became *Vertigo* (1957)

#### *Les Diaboliques* (1955)

#### Henri Georges Clouzot

It's ostensibly a thriller but also functions as –

- a horror film – a prolonged murder scene/a central conceit that a murdered victim has returned from the grave/a ghost story/ police procedural/ film noir

*“Clouzot fixes you, not with a glittering eye but with the eye of a mackerel two days' dead; you cannot escape the dreadful hypnosis”*

**Dilys Powell**

### Les Diaboliques and Water

Water is used in many scenes to ramp up the tension, and to perhaps remind the audience that the protagonist is metaphorically drowning in her own guilt. Water is constantly referred to or shown and used to build intrigue.

- Watered down wine
- Dodgy plumbing
- Rain dripping school gates
- An anonymous body pulled out of the Seine
- A pool of urine left by a drunken service man

### The Final Twist

- Though watching the final twist is satisfying to the first-time viewer, the movie is just as gratifying with repeated viewings
- When can 'suffer' or observe the story from different character viewpoints
- Knowing what we know, the story takes on a different meaning when viewed through the eyes of the two secret plotters

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## *Psycho* (1960)

Hitchcock's *Psycho*, much influenced by Clouzot's *Les Diaboliques* (1955), provided a new kind of horror. It did away with clichéd imagery, offering a black and white dark thriller laced with black humour and iconic scenes. Based on Robert Bloch's novel of the same name, the story wove in elements snatched from the headlines – real life serial killer Ed Gein providing the basis for Norman Bates and his 'unusual' hobby.

Though much has been said about *Psycho* in the past, particularly the infamous 'shower scene' it's worth examining the way in which Hitchcock uses imagery, mise-en-scene and camera placement to establish character intension.

### **The Parlour Scenes**

In these famous scenes, note how Hitchcock creates intrigue and tension by visual means alone.

#### **Marion**

- Next to a visible light source
- Eye level camera angles – we feel safe with this character
- Surrounded by softer furnishings, rounded edges etc.
- The milk jug is placed in prominent position – white – symbolizing Marion's change of heart/redemption

#### **Norman**

- Camera angles much lower – indicating something more sinister at hand
- Stark lighting/shadows
- Framed by hard edges/angles
- Surrounded by corpses – birds of prey
- Suggesting he is about to strike

### **Other Key Motifs**

- Bird references – alluding to Norman's predatory behaviour and the helplessness of his prey
- Eyes – alluding to the inability of characters to 'see' what's happening
- The gradual decline – visually we start in the sky and wind up in the swamp
- Round objects – eyes, holes, records, plugholes etc. all help to remind us that we are on some sort of insane carousel, going around and around, reflecting Norman's fragile mind

### **Back to Horror in the UK**

- After *Dracula* (1958) – the censors had taken on and lost a battle with Hammer
- Hammer had effectively called their bluff
- The kind of films Hammer were producing were proving themselves to be a 'shot in the arm' for the British film industry
- Other studios were wanting to get in on the act

## Anglo Amalgamated and the Sadian Horrors

Spurred on by the likes of Hammer Anglo Amalgamated produced three horror films

- *Circus of Horrors*
- *Horrors and the Black Museum*
- *Peeping Tom*

*“The masterpiece of Anglo’s Sadian trilogy is undoubtedly Powell’s Peeping Tom, which fully deserves its present reputation as one of the most complex and mature films ever made in England.”*

**David Pirie**

### *Peeping Tom* (1960)

**Directed by Michael Powell**

*“I have always felt that Peeping Tom and [Fellini’s] 8½ say everything that can be said about filmmaking, about the process of dealing with film, the objectivity and subjectivity of it and the confusion between the two. Peeping Tom shows the aggression of it, how the camera violates.”*

**Martin Scorsese**

- Voyeuristic
- Disturbing
- An intelligent psychological thriller
- The opening scenes to *Horrors of the Black Museum/Circus of Horrors* and *Peeping Tom* examine some of the same issues/themes within their opening scenes.
- The subject of voyeurism/watching is pushed
- *Horrors of the Black Museum* – spikes through the eyes
- *Circus of Horrors* – the removal of bandages
- *Peeping Tom* amplifies this ‘feeling’
- The voyeurism is pushed further
- In the opening scene, we see *through* the scene via Mark’s camera
- The female victim is a prostitute – this is made absolutely clear – not hinted at as in *Horrors of the Black Museum*
- The film, this scene in particular, is Brechtian in style
- We are never allowed to forget that this is a film
- The camera shots
- The clicking of the camera
- These shots are 16mm
- The film is not just a horror film, the film is a film about the ‘experience’ of watching a horror film

### The Plot

- Mark Lewis – a camera man and part time film maker
- He is the ultimate ‘voyeuristic’ killer
- His mission is to make the world’s best film – the fact that it’s a snuff movie, is irrelevant to him
- Looks at the ‘results’ of an abusive childhood upbringing

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### *Peeping Tom* (CONT...)

- It's a psychological thriller
- It makes us 'feel' empathy for the murderer – this adds a disturbing layer
- Now considered a classic
- Originally many critics had been appalled by the film's dark themes and shock ending
- Critics hated the subject matter

*"It's a long time since a film disgusted me as much as Peeping Tom."*

**Caroline Lejeune**

### **Peeping Tom and Critical Response**

- Even though the film contained 'challenging and shocking material' – Trevelyan (BBFC secretary) trusted in Powell's reputation
- Many of the 'cuts' went through unseen – based on this trust

*"Here was a moral panic of a kind that far exceeded even the response to Hammer. The denunciations were hysterical and pretty well across the board while, unlike Hammer, Powell's film did not even have the benefit of an audience to protect and champion it."*

**David Pirie**

*"Powell was asking his audience direct questions: you may be horrified by what you see (the shocks, the grisly murders), but to what extent are you complicit in agreeing to sit and watch? Is there a part of you that secretly enjoys the carnage being served up for your entertainment? And, if so, who exactly is the voyeur here?"*

**David Gritten**

- The critical savagery went on
- Only received a limited release
- No one leaped to Powell's defence
- It effectively ended his career
- He spoke very little about the film in later years