



KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY
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**THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED THROUGH SOCIAL
DISRUPTION IN HORROR FILMS: ANALYSES OF
DON'T BREATHE (2016) AND *IT FOLLOWS* (2014)**

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A thesis submitted to
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APPROVAL

This thesis titled THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED THROUGH SOCIAL DISRUPTION IN HORROR FILMS: ANALYSES OF *DON'T BREATHE* (2016) AND *IT FOLLOWS* (2014) submitted by ALİ KAVAS, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Cinema and Television is approved by

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In addition, I acknowledge that any claim of irregularity that may rise in relation to this work will result in a disciplinary action in accordance with the university legislations.

Ali Kavas

20/06/2022



In Dedication to My Sisters Who Helped Me Find the Light in Darkness...

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THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED THROUGH SOCIAL DISRUPTION IN
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(2014)

ABSTRACT

The independent American horror cinema has shown some major advancement in terms of artistic approaches to the genre and critical acclaim during the last ten years. In this new era of the horror genre in which horror films are appreciated not only by the audience but also by the critics, the manifestation of places and spaces has become more significant with the ongoing impacts of globalization. Moreover, the characters started to be portrayed as struggling modern individuals who are threatened by the disrupted society, and the objects of horror have turned into more ambiguous and dialectical figures with psychological implications. Within this context, psychoanalytic film theory becomes useful to explore what the society represses beneath the surface and how these repressed thoughts are portrayed in horror films which the audience continues to enjoy despite the worrisome effects. Hence, this study focuses on the formal analyses of two contemporary horror films, *Don't Breathe* (Alvarez 2016) and *It Follows* (Mitchell 2014), and it is argued that the pleasure of horror films takes root in the fulfilment of the unconscious thoughts whose emergence through social disruption represents the return of the repressed.

Keywords: pleasure of horror, return of the repressed, social disruption, uncanny, unconscious

KORKU FİLMLERİNDE BASTIRILANIN PARÇALANMIŞ SOSYAL DÜZENLE
GERİ DÖNÜŞÜ: *DON'T BREATHE* (2016) VE *IT FOLLOWS* (2014) FİLMLERİNİN
ANALİZİ

ÖZET

Bağımsız Amerikan korku sineması, türe sanatsal yaklaşımları ve kazandığı eleştirel başarıları açısından son on yıl içerisinde oldukça önemli ilerlemeler göstermiştir. Korku filmlerinin sadece izleyiciler tarafından değil, eleştirmenler tarafından da beğenildiği türün bu yeni döneminde, küreselleşmenin süregelen etkileriyle birlikte yer ve mekânların filmlerdeki tezahürleri daha da önem kazanmıştır. Ayrıca korku filmlerindeki karakterler parçalanmakta olan toplumun oluşturduğu tehditlere karşı mücadele içerisindeki modern bireyler olarak tasvir edilmeye başlanırken filmlerdeki korku objeleri de psikolojik imgelemelere sahip daha belirsiz ve daha diyalektik figürlere dönüşmüştür. Bu bağlamda; toplumun kendi yüzeyinin altında neleri bastırıldığını ve bu bastırılmış düşüncelerin, tedirgin edici etkilerine rağmen izleyicinin haz alarak izlemeye devam ettiği korku filmlerinde nasıl tasvir edildiğini araştırmak için psikanalitik film teorisi oldukça kullanışlı bir yöntemdir. Tüm bunların ışığında, iki çağdaş korku filmi *Don't Breathe* (Alvarez 2016) ve *It Follows'un* (Mitchell 2014) biçimsel analizlerine odaklanan bu çalışmada, korku filmlerinin haz uyandıran deneyiminin bilinçdışı düşüncelerin tatmin edilmesiyle sağlandığı ve bu bilinçdışı düşüncelerin sosyal parçalanmayla ortaya çıkışının bastırılanın geri dönüşünü temsil ettiği savunulmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: bastırılanın dönüşü, bilinçdışı, korkunun hazzı, sosyal parçalanma, tekinsiz

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of horror films, the question of “what is the pleasure of watching something so terrifying?” has always been at the center of the discussions by the common audience. Personally, I have always enjoyed horror films since my childhood years, and I vividly remember having felt intrigued by the idea of trying to survive against a deadly threat. Throughout the years, I have not lost this enthusiasm for horror films; in contrast, I have grown a special interest in American horror cinema in which lustful teenagers are slaughtered by a serial killer or a group of people are trapped in a haunted house. However, I have never been able to give a rational explanation when people ask me why I enjoy watching such things that would horrify me in real life. This contradiction of fear and pleasure in witnessing disturbing events and images was the starting point of my thesis, and I wanted to explore the cinematic works of the horror genre to better understand what lies beneath the pleasure of horror.

I started my exploration by revisiting some of my favorite horror films from the 70s and 80s which have greatly influenced the genre’s future trajectory. During this period, there was a clear blast in the number of slashers and suburban nightmares such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper 1974), *Carrie* (De Palma 1976), *Halloween* (Carpenter 1978), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven 1984), and *Pet Sematary* (Lambert 1989). Regarding these films that coincided with the patriarchy’s concussion during the Reagan era, the genre’s focus seemingly shifted from external threats to internal threats through the narratives of child murderers, serial killers, haunted houses, demonic children, and dysfunctional family structures, all embodying the societal fears and anxieties that threaten the safety of home and family. Accordingly, despite their otherworldly and inhumane designations, the objects of horror became more familiar on a deeper level to the audience like *Pet Sematary*’s resurrected cat as the trauma of losing a loved one and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*’s monstrous Leatherface as an indicator of savage instincts within the civilization. While these illustrations promote fear and terror in diverse ways, the distinction among such interconnected terms is essential to expand within the context of the notion of horror.

Horror is one of the oldest and the most profound emotions of humankind, and it can be evoked through anything that “frightens us or promotes fear or terror” (Jones 2005, X). From primitive people who fought against wild animals and survived natural disasters to modern-day people who are in danger of wars and technology, various perceptions and descriptions of horror can be attributed to human experiences. However, James B. Twitchell points out a clear distinction between horror and terror as follows: “the etiology of horror is always in dreams while the basis of terror is in actuality” (Twitchell 1985, 19). In the light of Twitchell’s description, horror becomes a notion that takes root in imaginary and unreal situations in the same fashion as dreams which are directly linked to mental processes. In this regard, Sigmund Freud, who explains the characteristic of dreams as a mental stimulus that can bring back a frightening thought, underlines a distinction between the expressions of fear, fright, and anxiety. According to Freud, fear is promoted through “a definite object of which to be afraid” while fright is the state when one faces a danger “without being prepared for it”, and anxiety is aroused with the expectation of such danger “even though it may be an unknown one” (Freud [1920] 1955, 6). Therefore, it is possible to claim that the description of horror in fictional works of art, especially literature and cinema, may adopt all these mental expressions because there is an impending sense of threat which causes anxiety, a figure of threat which promotes fear, and the state of fright which shocks the audience or the reader.

Within the context of fictive and actual horror, Noel Carroll reinterprets the notion of horror by breaking it down into two distinct forms: one is called natural horror which is expressed in terrifying situations such as ecological disasters or terrorist acts, and the other is named art-horror which is not dependent on actuality and evoked through reading, seeing, or listening works of art (Carroll 1987, 51). Carroll further explains that “art-horror, by stipulation, is supposed to refer to the product of a genre” and underlines its formation around the time of *Frankenstein* (Shelley 1818) and its ongoing persistence through the works of literature and cinema (Carroll 1987, 51). Throughout the 19th century, horror had become one of the commonly utilized elements in literature from *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (Irving 1819) and *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (Poe 1841) to *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Stevenson 1886) and *Dracula* (Stoker

1897), in which the reader was connected to the fictive events through an emotional state of horror. On the other hand, such works of literature that embodied the notion of art-horror started to be appropriated by filmmakers “to ensure a guaranteed audience” at the turn of the 20th century, and the works of writers like Conan Doyle and Gaston Leroux were utilized as the source materials for the cinematic adaptations (Jones 2005, 9). However, alongside the generic production of horror, S.S. Prawer argues that the cinematic experience is already frightening because the image on the screen is a spectral double that is consisted of “human beings that seem to live, to breath, to talk, and yet are present only through their absence” (Prawer 1980, 50). Therefore, because of the frightening nature of the cinematic experience, it is possible to state that horror cinema is as old as the art of cinema itself.

The birth of the cinema dates back to *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (Lumière, and Lumière 1895). Although this fifty-second of the short film had promoted fear and shock upon the audience through a moving image that is present yet absent, *The House of the Devil* (Méliès 1896) is considered to be the first generic horror film with its depiction of the vampire myth as a product of art-horror. On the other hand, Alan Jones goes back even further to talk about the cinematic roots of horror and creates a resemblance between listening to ghost stories and watching horror films: “Safe inside the four walls of a darkened cinema, we are begging to be frightened in the same way that we were in previous centuries, when sitting by campfires listening to stories about mythical creatures and demonic villains “(Jones 2005, X). On that note, the inevitable question of why one desires to be an audience to imaginary stories or images that are inherently frightening is essential to discuss, which led me back to the pleasure of watching horror films.

According to Jones, there are masochistic urges of being intentionally exposed to fear, but “exploring the notion of fear is revealing” because one can be open to being frightened if it is certain that there will be no harm: “it's the wave of relief once the fright is over that makes being scared so much fun” (Jones 2005, X). The pleasure of the relief that one gains through the realization of what is menacing does not exist in the real world is reminiscent of a dream experience. To illustrate, a person who wakes up from a dream with horrific events achieves a sense of relief when they find out those events do not take

place in actuality. Although watching horror films differs from dreaming because it is a conscious act of witnessing unpleasant events, the enjoyment at the end is dependent on the unreal status of such events. Therefore, the parallelism between having nightmarish dreams and watching horror films is mainly based on their simulated realities.

In *Simulation and Simulacra*, Jean Baudrillard argues that the lives of humans rest on the exiguity of profound realities and everything is reproduced through something else because “everything is already dead and resurrected in advance” and “the real is no longer what it was” (Baudrillard 1994, 6). In the same fashion, horror films often challenge the notion of reality through ambiguous and mostly irrational designations that leave the audience with imaginary and unreal situations. These elements can be mostly observed in the figures of threat such as ghosts, inhumane killers, or supernatural phenomena that repeatedly come back from the dead, and the boundaries between fiction and reality are questioned. Baudrillard further discusses the concept of profound realities as a “panic-stricken production of the real and of the referential” in which humans decide on a shared reality to be able to live collectively (Baudrillard 1994, 6). This shared reality that is established and sustained by authority figures is necessary to maintain order; however, it is a duplication of another reality which never existed. In this regard, Jody Keisner reinterprets Baudrillard’s theory of profound realities within the reality of the horror film which “challenges this notion of a fabricated reality by offering the alternative” (Keisner 2008, 417). In this fabricated reality, while exploring an understanding of the real through complex predicaments, the audience gets a chance to witness intimidating concepts as Keisner exemplifies: “horror movies, while one step removed from the experience, allow viewers a vicarious opportunity to experience the moment of death without actually dying – a safe way to play with death” (Keisner 2008, 419). Therefore, what is truly frightening in real life becomes a source of entertainment in horror films because the audience is allowed to obtain access to something that is forbidden by the shared reality which is essential to construct a social order.

In a similar fashion, Cristina Isabel Pinedo creates a link between pornography and horror films, and she claims that “if pornography is the genre of the wet dream, then horror is the genre of the wet death” (Pinedo 1997, 61). Therefore, the horror film can function as

an outlet in which taboo acts or thoughts can be manifested with the removal of figures of authority, and what is forbidden by the shared reality is challenged through an alternative experience of pleasure. Similarly, Steven Schneider emphasizes the pleasure of the horror film through an alternative reality which allows different experiences by pointing out the resemblances among the genres: “like tragedy, horror promotes emotional catharsis in audiences; like fantasy, it offers viewers an escape from the tedium of everyday life; like comedy, it provides a relatively safe (because relatively disguised/distorted) forum for the expression of socio-cultural fears” (Schneider 1999, 168). According to Schneider, all these experiences and their underlying pleasures are open to interpretation through psychoanalysis which has presumably generated the most common and influential analyses of horror films (Schneider 1999, 168). In this regard, the coincidence of the horror cinema’s emergence with the public acceptance of the psychoanalytical theory is not surprising because horror is directly linked to unconscious fears, love, loss, and pain (Jones 2005, X). The link between horror cinema and the psychoanalytical theory is often interpreted through the ambivalence of these unconscious feelings that refer to what is unspeakable and disquieting yet pleasurable at the same time.

In *Why Horror: The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre*, Andrew Tudor discusses the pleasure of horror within the context of psychoanalytical theory as follows:

Various attempts have been made to answer this question, generally combining arguments about the nature of horror texts with arguments about the distinctive character of horror consumers. The most common attempts at general explanation are grounded in concepts drawn from psychoanalytic theory, some depending quite directly on Freud’s ‘return of the repressed’ argument in his discussion of ‘the uncanny’, others utilizing the framework of ‘structural psychoanalysis’ to explore the ways in which the unconscious structures forms of representation. (Tudor 1997, 443)

As Tudor points out, there is no agreement on why horror is appealing by psychoanalytic theorists, which ultimately offers a diverse yet correlated range of approaches to the pleasure of watching horror films. To illustrate, Robin Wood discusses that the audience gains pleasure through the horror film whose defining feature is the “normality is threatened by the Monster” because they fulfil the audience’s wish to destruct the norms which are oppressive to them (Wood 1979, 14). Malcolm Turvey interprets Wood’s argument as the satisfaction of “the unconscious wish to return to a pleasurable period in

infancy free of those norms” (Turvey 2004, 71). Furthermore, Barbara Creed claims that the horror film’s images of “bodily waste” such as blood, saliva, and vomit may evoke a feeling of disgust in the audience; however, she underlines that such presentations may also arouse pleasure by satisfying an unconscious wish to return to a pleasurable time when the mother-child relationship “was marked by an untrammelled pleasure in playing with the body and its wastes” (Creed 1993, 13). Considering the discussions presented so far, the infantile period where the child is enjoying a sense of freedom without the authorities’ expectations stands out as determining factor for pleasure which the horror films may recall on deeper levels.

On the other hand, Glen Gabbard and Krin Gabbard argue that the unpleasurable experience of the horror film which recalls repressed infantile anxieties eventually becomes pleasurable since it fulfils the unconscious wishes of the audience as a way of relief from these anxieties (Gabbard, and Gabbard 1987). In other words, the disturbance that is experienced through watching a horror film becomes a path to the victorious pleasure in the end where the monster/threat is defeated and the fear it causes is exhausted. Cosimo Urbano disagrees with this argument and gives the examples of *The Haunting* (Wise 1963) and *The Omen* (Donner 1976) in which “a final victory is not achieved” (Urbano 2004, 30). However, even though the defeat of the monster/threat or the dissolution of the frightening event does not exist in all horror films, there is a strong sense of relief, and consequently, a fulfilment of pleasure when the experience comes to an end. This interpretation of an alternative experience of disturbing and torturing acts corresponds to Baudrillard’s term models of deterrence which becomes more complicated with the potential pleasure with the relief of not getting the same punishment as the horror film’s victims (Keisner 2008, 419).

According to Michael Levine, these psychoanalytic interpretations of spectatorship in relation to the attractions of horror films include categories like “perversion, voyeurism, fetishism, masochism, and sadism”; however, he underlines other psychoanalytic concepts like “repression” and “uncanny” as primarily relevant to horror films (Levine 2004, 40). The concepts of repression and uncanny that Levine puts forward, in the same fashion as the other arguments, are closely related to the unconscious desires and fears

that are long-repressed. Therefore, Turvey underlines a main form of explanation by the theorists despite the diverse interpretations: “They all attempt to explain the viewer’s enjoyment of horror films by postulating the existence of an unconscious wish, and arguing that horror films are pleasurable because they satisfy this unconscious wish” (Turvey 2004, 72). In this respect, if the paradoxical pleasure of watching horror films rests on the fulfilment of unconscious wishes, it is crucial to elaborate on the unconscious as a term within the psychoanalytical context.

Sigmund Freud interprets the unconscious within two models of the human mind, which has become the prominent concept of the psychoanalysis: the structural model that contains three different “agencies” which are the id, the ego, and the superego; and the topographical model that is consisted of three “psychical localities” which are the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious (Freud [1915a] 1957, 122). Within the topographical model of the mind, a person’s desires, fears, emotions, or instincts are not accessible on the conscious level but remain hidden in the unconscious. However, these feelings and desires that are hidden in the unconscious are never completely separated from the conscious mind; in contrast, they are submerged into the unconscious since they become too unpleasurable or unacceptable, which is what Freud calls “the repression” (Freud [1915b] 1957). According to Freud, repression is not a defensive mechanism which exists from the beginning; however, “it cannot arise until a sharp cleavage has occurred between conscious and unconscious mental activity” (Freud [1915b] 1957, 147). Accordingly, repression lies within keeping something away from the conscious level because its fundamental motive and purpose “was nothing else than the avoidance of unpleasure” (Freud [1915b] 1957, 153). Freud further discusses the effects of the repression and claims that substitutive formations are created through repression which leaves behind certain symptoms, and these forms are the indicators of what he theorizes as “the return of the repressed” (Freud [1915b] 1957, 154). Therefore, the return of the repressed indicates the liberation of the repressed content whose manifestations on the conscious level provoke the unconscious desires and fears. Considering the pleasure of horror rests on the fulfilment of these unconscious desires and fears, in accordance with the aforementioned arguments by psychoanalytic theorists, the return of the repressed becomes the primary source of pleasure and discomfort in watching horror films in a

paradoxical way. In that manner, if the return of the repressed in horror films is able to create a paradoxical pleasure for the spectator, the question of what returns from the repression is essential to elaborate on.

In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud discusses the theory of repression within a cultural scope and claims that there is a similar pattern between the cultural development and libidinal development:

Other instincts have to be induced to change the conditions of their gratification, to find it along other paths, a process which is usually identical with what we know so well as sublimation (of the aim of an instinct), but which can sometimes be differentiated from this. Sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural evolution; this it is that makes it possible for the higher mental operations, scientific, artistic, ideological activities, to play such an important part in civilized life. (Freud [1927] 1961, 44)

In this regard, the cultural evolution of humankind is built upon what the civilization has suppressed in the same fashion as the libidinal repression which is developed during the infantile period. Within this context, Freud states that “civilization is based on the repression effected by former generations, and that each fresh generation is required to maintain this civilization by effecting the same repressions” (Freud [1914] 1957, 57). However, the inquiry of the repressed content within the culture allows different discussions which mainly focus on sexual tendencies and desires. It is a culturally known fact that modern-day civilization gives permission to those heterosexual sexual intimacies between men and women, and it becomes only acceptable on a level of reproduction rather than the plain pleasure of sexual relations. According to Freud, the culture’s tendency to set constraints on sexual life is as evident as the culture’s aim of widening its scope of operations, and he further emphasizes that even in the earliest phases of the totems: “...the way in which the material of sexual ideas belonging to the family complex and incestuous object-choice is made use of in representing the highest ethical and religious interests of man” (Freud [1914] 1957, 61). Within this context, numerous psychoanalytic theorists reinterpret Freud’s theory of repression through the civilization’s suppression of sexual impulses, and they mostly claim that the products of the horror genre represent the emergence of these impulses as horror narratives.

According to Wood, “the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses or oppresses, its re-emergence dramatized, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror” (Wood 1979, 10). Through his interpretation of the repression within a sociological context, Wood provides a modern point of view toward the objects of horror. In the same fashion, Tony Williams states that civilization relies on repression which often moulds individuals in detrimental ways, and he further points out that “repressed factors return in distorted forms, often violently reacting against agents of repression” (Williams 1996, 15). Furthermore, Levine argues that the return of the repressed may be pleasurable for a variety of different reasons depending on “the nature of the repressed element being returned and also on the particular spectator involved” (Levine 2004, 47), imbricating the unconscious wishes of individuals with societal oppression. Therefore, it is possible to interpret the objects of horror that represent the return of the repressed in horror films as the embodiments of unconscious ideas or beliefs in two factors: “in a society built on monogamy and family there will always be an enormous surplus of sexual energy that will have to be repressed” (Wood 1979, 15) or “the anxiety of castration and the fantasies woven around the mother’s phallus produce horror forms” (Dadoun 1989, 52).

Within the scope of the unconscious beliefs that are centralized on the monogamous and heterosexual society, Žižek discusses the social order as “a fragile and symbolic cobweb” that can be disrupted at any moment and argues that “the reality of the social universe in which we assume our usual roles of kind-hearted, decent people, turns out to be an illusion that rests on a certain ‘repression,’ on overlooking the real of our desire” (Žižek 1991, 13). In this structure of repression that hides the hidden truth our social roles, Wood discusses the concept of surplus repression in which “the ideal..., is as close as possible to an automaton in whom both sexual and intellectual energy has been reduced to minimum” (Wood 1979, 8). While the surplus repression is distinguished from Freud’s repression model due to its particular projection of cultural and societal context which oppresses sexuality, this analysis becomes “an ideological function for horror in sustaining surplus repression and the bourgeois social order upon which it depends” (Tudor 2004, 57). On the other hand, Twitchell also approaches the repression within a social contextualization through myths and claims that myths suggest “specific behavior

that maintains both the social order and bolsters the individual's sense of worth" (Twitchell 1985, 85). According to Tudor, these discussions underline the repression as a fundamental feature of the development of humans and the system in which humans are "constrained to overcome the (anti-social) desires of infancy" (Tudor 2004, 57). Within the context of the unconscious beliefs that take root in the infantile wishes, it is crucial to elaborate on Freud's discussions on the Oedipus complex which is the central focus of the infantile period.

Freud points out that the male child who sees his mother as his love object and wishes to "put himself in his father's place in a masculine fashion and have intercourse with his mother" turns away from this complex due to the fear of castration (Freud [1924] 1961, 176). The fear of castration originates when the little boy notices disapproval from his parents when his interests turn to his penis and "a threat is pronounced that this part of him which he values so highly will be taken away from him" (Freud [1924] 1961, 174). Later, when he sees the genitals of the female child who looks so much like him, "the loss of his own penis becomes imaginable, and the threat of castration takes its deterred effect" (Freud [1924] 1961, 176). On the other hand, the female child who "likes to regard herself as what her father loves above all else" does not comprehend her lack of a penis, but "she explains it by assuming that at some earlier date she had possessed an equally large organ and had then lost it by castration" (Freud [1924] 1961, 178). While the boy's fear of castration results in destructive repression that leads to the abandonment of the Oedipus complex, the girl's acceptance of castration establishes the complex in which a child from her father is taken place (Freud [1925] 1961, 256). Therefore, there is no motive for the girl to give up on the complex "which may be slowly abandoned or dealt with repression" (Freud [1925] 1961, 257).

Considering these fears and desires that remain repressed in the unconscious mind to avoid the anxiety they promote, "then perhaps the activities of monsters or the traumatic events that are played out in cinematic horror are a representation of all that which is contained within the unconscious" (Cherry 2009, 100). This interpretation coincides with Wood's argument of the return of the repressed in the monster figure as common horror trope: "The monster is an embodiment of that which is repressed, and further its

appearance in the horror film narrative is symbolic of the return of the repressed” (Wood 2004, XV). In this context, Wood exemplifies the monsters of the German Expressionist horror films such as *Nosferatu* (Murnau 1922) and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Wiene 1920), whose styles provided the filmmakers with an opportunity to explore “the twisted realm of the repressed desires, unconscious fear, and deranged fixations” (Perry 2006, 57). Similarly, Creed interprets Freud’s concept of the repressed through a connection with the horror film monster and claims that both concepts “explore beneath the surface, to look into the self, to determine the extent to which the modern subject was able to embrace or recognize the dark, non-human, animal self” (Creed 2004, 192). Michael Myers in *Halloween* and Leatherface from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* can be plausible cases where an inhumane representation of the monster returns to create horror, implicating the animal self of the modern individual.

On the other hand, Schneider articulates a different type of monster figure in horror films including Norman Bates in *Psycho* (Hitchcock 1960) and Dr. Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Demme 1991), in which the monster figure is human rather than a supernatural phenomenon: “they exhibit a high degree of thought, creativity, and skill; they are not mere slashers, which is precisely what distinguishes them from the indiscriminate stalkers” (Schneider 2004b, 113). In this regard, by creating “uncomfortable affinities” between the threats and their victims, the abovementioned films underline “the links between normality and monstrosity” and uncover the “dialectical tensions between binary oppositions” (Simpson 2000, 98). Furthermore, Carroll claims that “monsters are not only physically threatening; they are cognitively threatening. They are threats to common knowledge. ...monsters are in a certain sense challenges to the foundations of a culture's way of thinking” (Carroll 1990, 34). Carroll’s appeal to cognitive threat as the source of simultaneous fascination and disgust is “reminiscent of Jentsch's appeal to ‘intellectual uncertainty’ as the source of our feelings of uncanniness” (Schneider 1999, 11). In this context, Jentsch discusses that “the traditional, the usual and the hereditary is dear and familiar to most people, and that they incorporate the new and the unusual with mistrust, unease and even hostility” (Jentsch [1906] 1997, 3). While this description of uncanny through misoneism corresponds to the horror genre’s shifting interpretations of the figure of monster/threat and the

unrecognizable environments, Simpson's discussion about the ambivalence between the monstrosity and the normality is a better illustration of Jentsch's argument of the intellectual uncertainty.

Jentsch claims that one of the best ways to create an uncanny sense in storytelling is "to leave the reader in uncertainty as to whether he has a human person or rather an automaton before him in the case of a particular character" (Jentsch [1906] 1997, 11). However, Freud finds Jentsch's argument of the uncanny incomplete and interprets the uncanny as a notion that stems from the repressed infantile complexes, which is a more plausible concept to discuss within the return of the repressed. In *The Uncanny*, Freud describes the notion of uncanny as "that class of the frightening which lead back to what is known of old and long familiar" (Freud [1919] 1955, 219). In his exploration of how something can be familiar yet frightening, Freud discusses the etymological roots of the concepts as follows:

[...] among its different shades of meaning the word 'heimlich' exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, 'unheimlich'. What is heimlich thus comes to be unheimlich. [...] In general, we are reminded that the word 'heimlich' is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed - and kept out of sight. (Freud [1919] 1955, 224)

Within this context, "heimlich is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it coincides with its opposite, unheimlich" (Freud [1919] 1955, 225). Through his reviews of the things, events, and humans that evoke a sense of uncanny, Freud reaches a point where he describes the uncanny as "something which secretly familiar [heimlich-heimisch], which has undergone repression and then returned from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition" (Freud [1919] 1955, 244). Therefore, the return of the repressed becomes one of the foremost sources of uncanny because the unconscious fears, desires, and thoughts that are "constantly threatening to return to the conscious level of the mind" are paradoxically familiar and unfamiliar as Cherry explains: "When they do return they seem frighteningly strange, but since they are repressed thoughts returning to consciousness, we recognize them too as disturbing moments from the past" (Cherry 2009, 104).

The primary sources of uncanny can be integrated into the horror genre through a diverse range of illustrations which are reminiscent of Freud's conceptual depictions including dismembered limbs, a cut-off hand at the wrist, the idea of being buried alive, unintended recurrences, and losing the ability of sight, which are all connected to womb phantasies, the castration complex, and compulsion to repeat (Freud [1919] 1955). In this context, Creed separates the uncanny imageries into three main categories of the notion of double, the castration anxieties, and the familiar/unfamiliar, and she further discusses that all these fears and anxieties are often demonstrated in horror films:

The horror presented within each category can be defined in relation to a loss of clear boundaries. The double disturbs the boundary which establishes each human being as a discrete entity; castration fear plays on a collapse of gender boundaries and the uncanny feeling associated with a familiar/unfamiliar place disturbs the boundary which marks out the known and the knowable. (Creed 1993, 53-54)

In the context of the unfamiliar spaces as uncanny sources, Dario Marcucci takes a different approach and argues that “the space of horror is always perceived as an ‘elsewhere’, a space far from everyday life, and an unlimited source of the uncanny” (Marcucci 2020, 253), which is directly linked to the concept of “the terrible place” (Clover 1992, 30). Marcucci further points out the movies that focus on the home invasion narrative in which “‘the terrible place’ acquires the eerie qualities that distinguish it as the plot unfolds, reassessing—according to the narrative pattern—the balance of power between villains and victims” (Marcucci 2020, 253). On the other hand, Dylan Trigg mentions the feeling of getting lost in a place as a strong uncanny source (Trigg 2012, 215) while Mladen Dolar argues that an unknown object can evoke uncanniness through an unfamiliar aspect: “It is the same, yet it is the other” (Dolar 1992, 153).

With the uncanny imageries and sources that can be found in the real life and the works of fiction which often imitate the former, Freud emphasizes a profound modification in such imageries of uncanny during their transposition to the imaginative productions and concludes as follows: “The somewhat paradoxical result is that in the first place a great deal that is not uncanny in fiction would be so if it happened in real life; and in the second place that there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life (Freud [1919] 1955, 248). In this respect, Schneider supports the idea that the paradigmatic narratives of the horror genre work through a reconfirmation of the

audience's infantile beliefs, which are often utilized through the figures of the monster/threat that "are best understood as metaphorical embodiments of such narratives" (Schneider 2004a, 4). Therefore, the uncanny imageries in horror films signal the return of the repressed desires and fears which are unpleasurable and distressing on the conscious level; however, they can evoke "some sort of perverse pleasure when revisited through characters, images, and events in horror films" (Cherry 2009, 101).

In the light of these theoretical discussions and analyses which primarily benefit from the psychoanalytical theory, it is possible to conclude that the paradoxical pleasures of watching horror films take root in the fulfilment of the repressed thoughts which "must always strive to return" (Wood 2003, 222). These unconscious thoughts often include phantasies, fears, and impulses which date back to the infantile period where they are subject to repression; or they comprise perverse, criminal, and sexual desires which are repressed by social norms and attributed to taboo status. In this regard, psychoanalytic film theorists approach such unconscious thoughts as the sources of horror objects and discuss the theme of the return of the repressed as a metaphorical narrative in the genre, mostly referencing the classic horror films such as *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero 1968), *Friday the 13th* (Cunningham 1980), *The Evil Dead* (Raimi 1981), *Poltergeist* (Hooper 1982), *The Thing* (Carpenter 1982), and *The People Under the Stairs* (Craven 1991). Although these discussions were enlightening for me to find a starting point, I came to the realization that there were already plenty of academic studies on such classics. Therefore, I wanted to concentrate on more contemporary works to better understand the modern day fears and anxieties and thoroughly explore how the return of the repressed is utilized as a narrative in horror films which are paradoxically pleasurable.

It is the public acceptance that the independent American horror films have been on trend with their more artistic approaches and intricate designations of horror during the last decade. *The VVitch: A New England Folktale* (Eggers 2015) which designates the demonization of women in society and family, *Get Out* (Peele 2017) as a portrayal of the systematic racism in the nation, and *Hereditary* (Aster 2018) with its metaphorical depiction of familial traumas can be named as some of the plausible examples within this context. Alongside their critical acclaim and awards-season success, I had soon become

a fan of this new era of the genre in which the horror flourished in different forms and dimensions while I also observed the fear and anxiety that these films evoked in the audience and myself were in immense degrees. However, two particular films stood out among others with their narration strategies and underlying themes: *Don't Breathe* (Alvarez 2016) and *It Follows* (Mitchell 2014). What drew my attention to these two films was their common points of the setting that illustrates a disrupted social order and the characterization of a female protagonist whose father figure is absent, which signaled a parallel theme to be explored.

Don't Breathe and *It Follows* both take place in the city of Detroit and its deserted suburbs where there is an ongoing decay and decline in population due to a drastic economic crisis. In the case of *Don't Breathe*, the decaying surroundings of Detroit are presented through extreme long shots, tracking shots, and drone shots of the abandoned buildings and desolate neighborhoods to illustrate a world where criminal acts are on the loose. The ultimate motive of the protagonist, Rocky, is to save enough money to move to California and start a new life with her little sister, and Detroit becomes a hopeless place where everyone is trying to escape. In a similar fashion, *It Follows* utilizes the corruption of Detroit through circular pan movements, extreme long-shots, and canted framings of the abandoned neighborhoods and ruined buildings as a way to create a nightmarish world where the meaning collapses. The teenagers are haunted by an unidentified deadly phenomenon that originates from the very same environment, and Detroit becomes a place of horrors where prohibited thoughts and acts are poised to emerge. Therefore, in both cases, the deindustrialized and shattered depiction of the city of Detroit serves as a terrible place where terrible things happen, and the dreadful ambience of the setting reinforces the fragility of everyday life.

On the other hand, both films share a similar pattern in the characterization of their protagonists. In *Don't Breathe*, Rocky is forced to live with her little sister and abusive and alcoholic single mother since her father abandoned them when she was a little girl. She talks about how she mooned over his father's leaving and how she was punished by her mother for her crying. Throughout the film, a ladybug figure which is a memory from those unhappy times repeatedly occurs as a sign of her unresolved trauma of being

abandoned, and this daughter-father complex is metaphorically recalled by the confrontation with the blind man who lost his daughter. In a similar way, Jay in *It Follows* lives with her little sister and alcoholic single mother while there is no sign or utterance of her father. In the film's course, her father is only portrayed through photographs in her bedroom while the reason for his absence is never addressed, implicating a traumatic event that should not be talked about. While her mother is portrayed through fragmented images that evoke a threatening presence, the father-daughter relationship is metaphorically signified by way of the haunting follower that appears as her father during the climax.

The common points in the narrative and narration of *Don't Breathe* and *It Follows* offered an interesting area, and therefore, I narrowed down my study into these two films which both portray a corrupted social order and a dysfunctional family with an absent father figure. Whereas the disruption of the social order signals an out-of-kilter world that is free of norms and prohibitions that are set by the society, the emergence of the father-daughter relationship as a threat underlines the perverse and incestuous phantasies within the family which are repressed back in the infantile period. Therefore, the interconnection between the societal anxieties and the unconscious desires in the respective films guided my study to be centralized on how these fears and impulses are utilized as sources of horror, and how the return of the repressed becomes a metaphorical narrative for such horror elements, which eventually provides a revelation for the pleasure of horror films. In this regard, I needed to establish a solid and consistent approach in methodology which would provide me with a chance to explore these metaphorical narratives within the narration to be able to conduct a reliable and grounded study.

The prominent methodology of my thesis is an eclectic execution of different approaches including the structural formal analysis with additional inputs of narrative-based analysis, which both conjunctly provide an overall understanding of the context of the film. In this manner, I follow the analytical strategy that David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson discuss in *Film Art: An Introduction* through a holistic approach which aims to “show how the separate techniques of the film medium functioned in the film's larger context” (Bordwell, and Thompson 2008, XVII). According to Bordwell and Thompson, some of

the fundamental elements of structuralist formal analysis are the form of the film, the formal system of narrative and narration, and the conventions of the genre. Although “each artwork tends to set up its own specific formal principles”, they underline five main principles in a film’s formal system which are “function, similarity and repetition, difference and variation, development, and unity/disunity” (Bordwell, and Thompson 2008, 65). Therefore, I try to highlight the function of repetitions, similarities, and other variations within the diegeses of the respective films to reach a broadscale analysis.

From another standpoint, the formal system of narrative through time, space, and patterns of development creates a chance to explore “the categories of cause-effect, story-plot differences, motivations, parallelism, progression from opening to closing, and narrational range and depth” (Bordwell, and Thompson 2008, 107). Accordingly, I aim to point out resemblances and parallel patterns within the narrative’s formal structure with references to other cinematic works of horror to enhance my interpretations that will provide more insight into the narration wise strategies, which are indispensable elements of formal analysis. In this regard, Bordwell and Thompson state that “to understand form in any art, we must be familiar with the medium that art utilizes” and “our understanding of a film must also include features of the film medium” (Bordwell, and Thompson 2008, 111). These features of the film medium consist of the *mis-én-scène*, cinematography, editing, mobile framing, lighting, and sound, which all work interconnectedly in favor of the whole context of the film’s formal system of narrative and narration. Therefore, with a very detailed analysis of specific scenes and shots, I thoroughly explore how the *mis-én-scène* is established, what the repetitive editing techniques are, and how the mobile framing affects the spectator’s experience in *Don’t Breathe* and *It Follows*. Throughout this structural formal analysis with a holistic approach that I follow in this study, my main goal is to discover the function and motivation behind these narration wise strategies and how the concepts of social disruption and return of the repressed are utilized within the respective films.

In the context of the return of the repressed and its provocation through social disruption, I mainly benefit from the psychoanalytic film theory in my study because the themes of uncanny, traumas, and repression, as stated above, are closely related to unconscious

thoughts and impulses that can be explored through the horror genre. In this regard, the psychological writings of Freud constitute the main theoretical concepts that are discussed in the analyses. Within the scope of psychoanalytical perspectives, I aim to explore the underlying meanings of visual and dialogic demonstrations and to analyze such depictions through the diegeses of *Don't Breathe* and *It Follows* with necessary references to other cinematic works of the horror genre. Within these analyses, in reference to numerous theorists which include Slavoj Žižek, Cathy Caruth, Steven Schneider, and Robin Wood, I integrate a great deal of theoretical information into my interpretations to be able to contextualize and reinforce my arguments regarding the return of the repressed as a tool for horror narrative.

Within this context, in the second and third chapters, I focus on the narration wise strategies in *Don't Breathe* and *It Follows* through formal analysis techniques and discuss how these strategies are utilized to represent the return of the repressed as a metaphorical device through psychoanalytic concepts. I analyze the distinguishing elements such as recurring shots, the pace of the editing, mobile framing, the utilization of the off-screen space, and the extra-diegetic sounds. In the case of *Don't Breathe*, the return of the repressed is portrayed through the character of the blind man who represents the emergence of incestuous desires which are long repressed in the unconscious, and the home invasion narrative is utilized to illustrate the intrusion of the real that provokes such phantasies to emerge. On the other hand, *It Follows* designates the return of the repressed through the uncanny followers that represent the revelation of the familial perversity, and the off-screen space is utilized to underline that such desires cannot be symbolized.

Hence, in this thesis, I support the argument that horror films utilize the return of the repressed as a metaphorical narrative device to signify the emergence of the unconscious desires and fears which are disturbing and yet pleasurable in a paradoxical way. In this regard, it is crucial to underline that the emergence of these unconscious thoughts coincides with the disruption of the social order in *Don't Breathe* and *It Follows* because of two reasons: First, it simultaneously represents the societal fears and anxieties that linger around the American nation; second, it implicates the perverse and bestial self of humankind which the society represses beneath the surface. On the other hand, both films

apply innovational narration wise strategies to designate the incomprehensible and inexhaustible nature of the repression as a horror object. Therefore, I believe that this thesis will contribute to the academic field and the studies of the horror genre by providing an interpretation of the fallacy of our social roles and by offering an understanding of the return of the repressed that allows a paradoxically pleasurable experience in watching horror films.



2. ANALYSIS OF *DON'T BREATHE* (2016)

In the opening credits, the names of the production companies are presented in their respective order, and the screen turns black. Then, a close-up shot of an open door's handle is shown (**Figure 2.1**). The camera quickly zooms into the keyhole while the door is being shut, and an image of a skeleton appears inside the keyhole. The name of the company, Ghost House Pictures, shows up as the camera zooms out (**Figure 2.2**). This illustration creates a self-reflexive moment as it refers to the film's own storyline, which takes place inside a house in a ghost town where three teenagers break into a house and face a deadly threat. By demonstrating a skeleton image through a door's keyhole, the film signals the consequences of invading a private space. It is also noteworthy that one of the production companies, even though it is not credited in the opening, is called Blind Man Productions, which is another self-reflexive element to address the antagonist of the film.

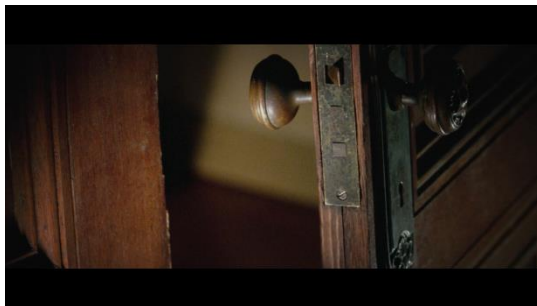


Figure 2.1



Figure 2.2

The film opens with an extreme long shot from a bird's-eye view that shows a quiet suburban street (**Figure 2.3**). The extreme long shot framing makes huge spaces manifest and is conventionally used to explore vistas or discover certain patterns and details (Bordwell, and Thompson 2008, 193). Accordingly, this opening shot invites the audience to focus on the desolateness of the place where no one seems to be around, and the only distinguishing element is the heavily shredded road in the center. The dark and lifeless portrayal of this neighborhood directly points out that this is not a happy and

peaceful living space. Then, the camera slowly zooms in, and it becomes visible that an old man is dragging a young woman while her blood is dripping all around. The next scene cuts to a medium close-up of the man from his back, but his face is not revealed (**Figure 2.4**). This opening can be called “in medias res”, meaning in the middle of things, and it is a plot device that seeks to “arouse curiosity by bringing us into a series of actions that have already started” (Bordwell, and Thompson 2008, 112). The audience is left with questions about these people and the events they have been through, which all are answered through a retroactive analysis later in the film. Then, the title of the film appears on the black screen for a split second, and the way it disappears is reminiscent of how one breathes in and out, creating another self-reflexive moment with the title itself: *Don't Breathe* (Alvarez 2016).



Figure 2.3



Figure 2.4

Don't Breathe is the second feature film by the director Fede Alvarez, whose debut feature is *Evil Dead* (Alvarez 2013), which is a remake of *The Evil Dead* (Raimi 1981). *The Evil Dead* was originally planned to be shot in Raimi's hometown Detroit but couldn't be done due to production conditions. However, the main characters of *The Evil Dead* are portrayed as the students from Michigan State University, and the film premiered in Detroit's Redford Theater with its shooting title. Similar to *Evil Dead*, whose original's roots go back to Detroit, Alvarez's *Don't Breathe* also takes place in Detroit, Michigan. Apart from this extra-diegetic information that creates a parallelism between the two films, an intertextual bond can be articulated by means of their storylines.

Julia Kristeva explains intertextuality as a mosaic of quotations where any text is absorbed or transformed by another (Kristeva 1980, 66). In this regard, it is possible to claim that

postmodern horror films share permutations of texts or visuals with their precursors that have been a great influence on the genre. Accordingly, despite their divergent filmic structures and narration wise strategies, *Don't Breathe* follows a similar pattern to *Evil Dead* in the plot where a group of friends gets trapped in a house against a deadly that is unleashed through a forbidden act. To illustrate, the youngsters in *Evil Dead* find themselves fighting with an evil force after they open a cursed book they found in the cellar while the teenagers in *Don't Breathe* face the unbeatable power of the blind man (the character is proclaimed as “the blind man” in the closing credits) once they unlock the cellar’s door. Therefore, the common point between the two films stands out as the transgression of spaces that destructs privacy and unleashes what should be concealed from the outsiders, a theme that is further utilized in the sequels.

In her analysis of *Evil Dead II* (Raimi 1987), the sequel to the original, Marcia England explains the intrusion of spaces within the horror genre as a horrific blur of the public and private domains that evokes feelings of terror (England 2006, 360). Therefore, the themes of home invasion, trespassing the unknown, and haunted houses have been some of the prominent elements within the genre. In this context, Katherine A. Wagner argues that American cinema creates horror through the depictions of threats against home while it also threatens the illusions of home and what it represents (Wagner 2017, 77). To illustrate, films like *The Last House on the Left* (Craven 1972) and *The Strangers* (Bertino 2008) utilize the home invasion narrative as a way to manifest underlying anxieties and fears towards outsiders and intruders that threaten the notion of home. On the other hand, films like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper 1974) and *House of Wax* (Collet-Serra 2005) signal the consequences of intruding the borders of a private homeland that hides dark familial secrets. In a similar fashion, *Don't Breathe* utilizes such reciprocal illustrations of transgressing the borders of home and unmasking its fallacious image at the same time to evoke horror.

According to Wagner, this frequent horror trope of invasions, corruptions, and destructions of home – meaning the solitary house or the larger community – reveals this place both as a source and a consequence of placelessness: “The home is no longer a recognizable, identifiable, or understandable place; instead, it has been transformed into

a placeless site where horror can and does take root and manifest” (Wagner 2017, 36). Therefore, home continues to become a less familiar space where horror and fear emerge, and it also transforms into a symbol of disruption of boundaries. Wagner further discusses that the placelessness the destruction of home effectuates is “a perfect metaphor for representing the larger cultural fears of America's place and identity within a globalized world” (Wagner 2017, 37). These cultural fears are often portrayed through threatening figures of malefactors who are living “in the former mines, ghost towns, and other spaces abandoned by modern Americans” (Ballard 2008, 15). Accordingly, the antagonist of *Don't Breathe* lives in an abandoned house that is located in the decaying suburbs of Detroit, Michigan. It is already a ghost town and still is home to a traumatic past in which the population has declined due to a drastic economic crisis.

To emphasize the current fears and anxieties that globalization has brought about, *Don't Breathe* manifests the desolate and decaying images of Detroit and its suburbs through repetitive long shots. For instance, in the scene where Money tries to make a deal with a smuggler, the film uses an extreme long shot of an abandoned building that is in ruins (**Figure 2.5**). The shot that demonstrates Alex's family house is overpowered by the figure of a huge and seemingly abandoned building in the rear panel of the image (**Figure 2.6**). Before entering Rocky's house, the camera focuses on some broken bicycles in the dumpster outside and then tilts up to screen the gray neighborhood (**Figure 2.7**). When they discuss a robbery plan in the diner, the camera cuts to another long shot to show that there is no one else in the place (**Figure 2.8**).



Figure 2.5



Figure 2.6



Figure 2.7



Figure 2.8

These images of desolate environments are further accentuated when they are headed to the blind man's neighborhood. Firstly, the camera moves above the suburban houses from a bird's-eye view, which is followed by a tracking shot from a canted high angle (**Figure 2.9**). Because of its unbalanced structure, the canted frame implies that “the world is out of kilter” (Bordwell, and Thompson 2008, 192). The camera slowly pans right while the car is moving forward on the shredded street. Then, a series of medium-long shots of the neighborhood is presented (**Figure 2.10-11-12**). It becomes more noticeable that all the houses are abandoned, and there is no one living around this place. Although this deserted portrayal of the setting advances the plot, it also illustrates a placeless world that deconstructs the suburbia which “has been often considered synonymous with the American dream” (Wagner 2017, 69).



Figure 2.9



Figure 2.10



Figure 2.11



Figure 2.12

Bernice M. Murphy argues that suburbia has been one of the prominent places that is used in American horror to systematically deconstruct “the privacy and safety of the home, the sanctity and inherent moral worth of the nuclear family, and the superiority of the capitalist, consumption-driven way of life” (Murphy 2009, 136). In this regard, the prologue scene of *Blue Velvet* (Lynch 1986) is a plausible case to look at how the suburban dream is deconstructed through narration wise strategies. Lynch’s classic film starts with an image of the blue sky, and then the camera tilts down to show beautiful roses by the fence (**Figure 2.13**). Then, it dissolves into a medium-long shot where a fireman joyfully waves at the camera. This radiantly colored montage sequence continues with peaceful and yet typical images of a suburban neighborhood until an old man who is watering the grass has a stroke and collapses. The uneasy sounds surpass the serene atmosphere while the camera slowly zooms in under the grass, in which there is nothing but nasty and big insects that are greedily eating each other (**Figure 2.14**). The converse designation of the surface and the underneath is a reminiscence of the Lacanian concept, the symbolic order, which is “nothing but a deceptive surface beneath which swarms an undergrowth of perverse and obscene implications, the domain of what is prohibited” (Žižek 1991, 57). Through this prologue, Lynch reinterprets the suburban dream as a

fallacious notion where obscene and perverse thoughts and fears are repressed, and correspondently, an illusion that masks the real threat which comes from the very same society.



Figure 2.13



Figure 2.14

Within this context, horror classics such as *Carrie* (De Palma 1976), *Halloween* (Carpenter 1978), and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven 1984) can be articulated because they all manifest the threat within the society through a nightmarish portrayal of the suburbia. *Carrie* is about the terror that has been caused by a young girl who has been bullied by her schoolmates and psychologically abused by her conservative mother. In *Halloween*, a lunatic serial killer returns to his childhood neighborhood, where he killed his sister in the past, to create a massacre without any motive. Similarly, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* tells the story of a child murderer (and molester though it is only implicated) who haunts the town's teenagers in their dreams. It is possible to say that none of the threats that terrorize the characters is from the outside world; instead, they originate within the very same society. In the same fashion as its precursors, Rocky in *Don't Breathe* has been abandoned by her father, struggles with her alcoholic mother, and her ultimate plan to leave this untrustworthy world is threatened by a perverse retired soldier, a prominent authority figure, all implicating that the symbolic social order does not function properly.

According to Slavoj Žižek, the reality of our social universe which is based on repression is a fragile symbolic cobweb that can be dismantled by an intrusion of the real (Žižek 1991, 13). Within this context, regarding the corruption of the symbolic social order in the film, what remains repressed beneath the surface is poised to emerge through an

intrusion of the real. In *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan...and Beyond*, Robin Wood interprets the intrusion of the real as “the return of the repressed” in which what has gone under repression returns “as an object of horror, a matter for terror” (Wood 2003, 68). In the case of *Don't Breathe*, the dysfunctional family structure in which the authority figures are absent or abusive and the notion of home that has turned into a placeless site signal that the object of horror is directly linked to the underbelly of the society: the family. At this point, to better understand what returns from repression to promote horror and terror, it is crucial to first underline the familial parallelism between Rocky, who suffers from the abandonment of her father, and the blind man, who mourns for his lost daughter.

In the first scene where the audience meets Rocky's family, she is trying to take care of her little sister while her mother is drinking and smoking with a man who is clearly not welcome. The portrayal of her family dynamics in this scene implicitly indicates that her father is not there with them. The absence of the father figure is further underlined as a traumatic effect on Rocky's life in the scene where she talks about her ladybug tattoo. In the context of the functioning of traumas, Cathy Caruth states that the response to the traumatic event often occurs in the delayed, uncontrolled, and repetitive appearances of hallucinations and other intrusions (Caruth 1996, 11). To illustrate, when Rocky talks about how her father abandoned them when she was a little girl, she mentions the ladybug that accompanied her when her mother punished her by locking her in the car because she couldn't stop crying over her father's leaving. Accordingly, the film utilizes the ladybug as a recurring motif that is often presented in a hallucinatory way (**Figure 2.15-16**), and it becomes a remainder of the trauma that still evokes a lingering sense of dread over Rocky's life. On the other hand, the blind man mourns for his daughter who died in a tragic accident. His house is decorated with his daughter's photographs while there is a videotape of her that constantly plays on television in his bedroom. It is possible to interpret the objects of photography and video from a traumatic perspective because what is photographed or recorded is absent, yet its remainders are present. Such paradoxical effect evokes a sense of uncanny since it blurs the boundaries between animate and inanimate (Jentsch [1906] 1997), and it also resemblances the functioning of traumas as it obscures the past and present time (LaCapra 1999). In this regard, the film creates a

bond between Rocky and the blind man through a father-daughter relationship that becomes the underlying source of horror within its diegesis.



Figure 2.15



Figure 2.16

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History*, Caruth encapsulates the Freudian models of trauma which are often placed side by side in his writings: While one of the models is related to the traumatic neurosis which is associated with accident victims, the other is the castration trauma that is linked to the theory of repression and return of the repressed with a system of unconscious symbolic meanings (Caruth 1996, 135). Hereof, although both of the characters are portrayed as sufferers from the loss of a loved one, the horror in the film is promoted through the emergence of what is repressed. Therefore, the haunting presence of trauma that lingers around is deeply related to the unconscious territories where the castration trauma is repressed. In this context, it is possible to interpret the character of Rocky's portrayal through the origination, development, and repression of the Oedipus complex. The character is given the name Rocky. While it is traditionally accepted as a masculine name, it is mostly known in the cinematic history for the protagonist of *Rocky* (Avildsen 1976) which features a male boxer. This extra-diegetic information can be claimed as a seemingly deliberate decision that corresponds to Freud's masculinity complex which can persist in the female child's character (Laplanche, and Pontalis 1988, 303). Also, the father who is the female child's love object during the Oedipal period goes in parallel with the portrayal of Rocky's longing after her father's abandonment when she was a little girl. On the other hand, the mother supplements the complex as an "object of rivalry" (Laplanche, and Pontalis 1988, 207), which is implicated in the scene where Rocky's mother utters nasty comments about her: "Your lips look sore. That's how you're making cash out there?". This obscene

implication through the dialogue pictures the mother as a figure of a rival, like an interdictor of sexual wishes, and the film further underlines this when Rocky mentions how she was punished by her mother for crying over her father. Therefore, the father's abandonment leaves a traumatic effect on Rocky's development, which is an indicator of the severe disappointment that little girl faces during the Oedipal period, resulting in the repression of such phantasies in the unconscious.

In *Horror*, Brigid Cherry interprets Freud's unconscious as a model of the mind in which early childhood experiences, fears, and desires are pushed down to avoid anxiety; yet they are never wholly annihilated and remained repressed in the unconscious (Cherry 2009, 100). Therefore, as the film metaphorically indicates through the recurrent motif of the ladybug that is a residual memory from her childhood, Rocky's infantile phantasies toward her opposite-sex parent are not deterred but repressed on an unconscious level. In this context, Cherry further argues that "if the unconscious contains things that were repressed in order to avoid anxiety, then perhaps the activities of monsters or the traumatic events that are played out in cinematic horror are a representation of all that which is contained within the unconscious" (Cherry 2009, 100). This interpretation also corresponds to Frank Cawson's argument in which he states that "the monster is the reification, the embodiment in a symbol, of an unconscious content in the mind" (Cawson 1995, 1). Therefore, considering the blind man as the agent of horror and terror in the film's diegesis, he becomes a metaphorical monster figure that represents the incestuous phantasies that are repressed in the unconscious of Rocky. Furthermore, Steven Schneider discusses that the metaphorical nature of the monsters is psychologically necessary while their surface is invested with cultural relevance, and the surmounted beliefs they embody are related to societal fears and anxieties (Schneider 1999, 3-4). Therefore, while the monsters represent the unconscious fears, thoughts, and desires of the characters they threaten, they may also adopt the societal anxieties within a cultural scope and become the embodiments of "the underbelly of the society, the uncivilized, the unethical" (Keisner 2008, 416).

According to Cherry, the genre's representation of the societal anxieties as monstrous and threatening figures that violate the social order further imbues them with a taboo status

(Cherry 2009, 12). In the case of *Don't Breathe*, through the deconstruction of the notions of suburbia, family, and home, as discussed above, these societal anxieties are deeply related to family perversity and incestuous phantasies, which are some of the oldest and long-established taboos in most cultural and social understandings. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud goes long way back to the primordial families and argues that everybody from the same totem is consanguineous, and the most distant grades of relationship are a definite obstacle to sexual union (Freud [1913] 1955, 13). Within this context, he further explains the theory of the primal father who is the oldest and strongest prohibitor of sexual promiscuity and incestuous acts within the small hordes (Freud [1913] 1955, 148). In this mythical hypothesis, the primal father is murdered by his children who desire to gain access to the forbidden sexual acts within the totem; however, the dead father turns out to be stronger than the living one and “the former reigns as the Name-of-the-Father, the agent of symbolic law that irrevocably precludes to the forbidden fruit of enjoyment” (Žižek 1991, 17). However, Žižek underlines that this transformation always leaves a remainder that returns as the obscene, perverse, and revengeful figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment (Žižek 1991, 17). Therefore, while the primal father’s death constitutes the symbolic law that precludes incestuous phantasies, it also causes the return of the dead father as the obscene Father-of-Enjoyment, establishing a paradoxical agency of the father which corresponds to the monstrous figure of the blind man in *Don't Breathe*.

To better understand how the blind man is utilized as a monstrous figure that metaphorically represents the Father-of-Enjoyment, it is crucial to elaborate on his designation as a character in the film. He is a retired soldier who lives in an abandoned neighborhood in the decayed suburbs of Detroit. While his place of home corresponds to Ballard’s description of malefactors who live in ghost towns and pose a threat to the symbolic social order, his characterization of being a soldier pictures him as a patriarchal authority figure which is a recurrent theme in horror and is often attributed to the Father and his symbolic law (Wood 2003, 122). In the same fashion, he takes vengeance on those who trespass on his home where he hides a young woman whom he kidnapped, impregnated, and imprisoned because she caused his daughter’s death, illustrating him as a perverse and revengeful figure. This illustration is further emphasized when he accidentally kills the young the woman and imprisons Rocky as a replacement as he utters

these words: “Only a parent could know the bond between a father and his child”, which can be interpreted as a reference to incestuous phantasies that are prohibited and thus not articulated. In this regard, Žižek argues that there was at least one subject who enjoyed the prohibition fully (the primal father possessing all women), and the Oedipal father’s redoubling as the perverse figure of Father-of-Enjoyment explains that “the father is the most radical perversion of all” (Žižek 1991, 17). From this point of view, the blind man’s attempt to impregnate Rocky portrays him as the perverse and revengeful figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment, and this portrayal supplements the Oedipus complex that claims the little girl’s desire to bear a child from her father.

In the context of the myth of the dead father who returns as the perverse figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment, the primary question of why the dead return is essential within the analysis of the blind man’s portrayal. According to Žižek, who restates Lacan’s terms, the dead return as collectors of some unpaid symbolic debt because something went wrong with their obsequies (Žižek 1991, 17). In this regard, it is possible to interpret this failure on a larger scale and claim that the female child’s inefficacy in the dissolution of the Oedipus complex corresponds to what goes wrong with the symbolic rite of the dead that returns to cause a disturbance, accordingly. In *Don’t Breathe*, Rocky’s failure to detach from her incestuous phantasies results in the repression, and consequently, what remains repressed returns from the unconscious. Within the context of the return of the repressed, Freud speaks of the notion of the uncanny as follows: “the uncanny [unheimlich] is something which is secretly familiar [heimlich-heimisch], which has undergone repression and then returned from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition” (Freud [1919] 1955, 245). Therefore, the blind man as a metaphorical representation of the monstrous figure also evokes an uncanny sense and fulfils the functioning of the return of the repressed.

While some of the most prominent uncanny themes include being buried alive or the sight of a severed limb, Freud underlines the idea of being robbed of one’s eyes as one of the strongest sources of uncanny (Freud [1919] 1955, 230), which he thoroughly discusses in his analysis of the short story “The Sandman” (Hoffman 1817). Briefly, the story is about a young student, Nathaniel, who goes into madness when he finds out the woman he is in

love with, Olympia, turns out to be a robot. In contrast to Ernst Jentsch, who argues the uncertainty of Olympia's being animate or inanimate evokes uncanniness, Freud points out the real uncanny kernel of the story is Nathaniel's childhood fear of the boogeyman who tears off the children's eyes (Freud [1919] 1955, 227). Losing the ability of sight or damaging the eyes is a theme that Freud associates with the castration as follows: "A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated" (Freud [1919] 1955, 231). In *Don't Breathe*, although the blind man's being visually impaired advances the plot to create suspense, it is the most distinguishing characteristic that is attributed to him as the proclaimed name suggests. Therefore, taking Freud's discussion on losing one's eyes as an uncanny kernel into consideration, it is possible to articulate that the blind man embodies an uncanny role to promote fear and anxiety through the return of the repressed phantasies that root in the castration trauma.

Within the context of eyes being sources of uncanny, Nicholas Royle emphasizes the darkness which conceal things is a central theme because "the uncanny is what comes out of darkness" (Royle 2003, 108). In this manner, Cherry further draws the attention to the vision and the loss of vision as common horror tropes in the genre and discusses that "it is no coincidence that horror cinema returns again and again to images or tropes of the dark, the night, blindness, being buried alive, and losing one's way" (Cherry 2009, 127). One of the plausible films that Cherry exemplifies is *The Descent* (Marshall 2005) in which a group of women get trapped in the depths of the caves where they are attacked by the creatures with no ability to see. While their vision is obscured, being lost becomes to be figuratively blind as they cannot see their way out, regardless of the literal darkness that the film designates (Cherry 2009, 128).

In the same fashion, despite the fact that the majority of *Don't Breathe* takes place inside the dim-lit house (**Figure 2.17**), the film utilizes the trope of darkness by blocking the characters' vision in one of the most terrifying scenes of the film. To elaborate, when Rocky and Alex are trapped in the cellar, the blind man turns off the switch, and the whole place is plunged into total darkness. Until the film applies the night vision camera, the screen turns black for a few seconds (**Figure 2.18**), which evokes an uncanny sense in

the audience who lost their vision in the same way as the characters. The film follows Rocky and Alex, who are trying to find each other, and the blind man, who is trying to locate them, through fast camera movements and medium and extreme close-up shots (**Figure 2.19**). The fastened pace of the scene allows the audience to identify with the characters' feeling of being trapped in a maze, and the close-up shots obscure the borders of the location, which ultimately promotes fear because it is not certain where the blind man is. The feeling of uncertainty, not knowing what the darkness hides, is further emphasized in the shot in which the camera slowly dollies out and the blind man's silhouette is plunged into the darkness (**Figure 2.20**).

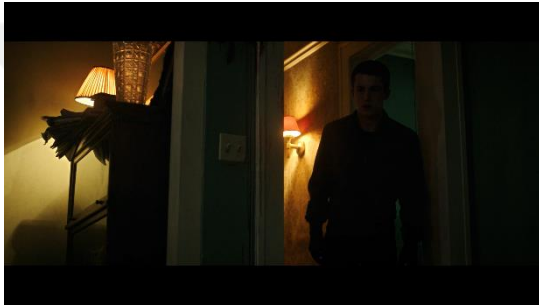


Figure 2.17



Figure 2.18



Figure 2.19



Figure 2.20

Regarding these narration wise strategies that are utilized as objects of horror, this whole sequence evokes a strong sense of uncanny for several reasons: First, there is uncertainty about the blind man's position in the cellar, which renders the off-screen as an uncanny space where the threat is about to lurk. Second, the characters are equated with the blind man because they lose their ability to see, which creates anxiety that is reminiscent of the castration trauma. Finally, by evoking the castration trauma, the cellar becomes the very core of the unconscious where the infantile fears and desires remain repressed, which corresponds to Bachelard's argument of the cellar's being "the dark entity of the house,

the one that partakes of subterranean forces” (Bachelard 1994, 18). Considering the cellar as a metaphorical representation of the core of the unconscious, the house as a whole embodies the unconscious of Rocky where her repressed phantasies strive to return. In this regard, Žižek interprets the unconscious as “fragments of a traumatic, cruel, capricious, ‘unintelligible’ and ‘irrational’ law text, a set of prohibitions and injunctions” (Žižek 1991, 93).

Accordingly, the film utilizes the house as a prohibited site where horror, traumas, and anxieties take root, and consequently, invading the house becomes an act that represents the intrusion of the real, unleashing what is hidden beneath the surface. This metaphorical representation is implicated during the scene where the blind man confronts Rocky in the cellar and blames her for the young woman’s death: “They would be alive if you hadn’t broken into my home”. Through this particular line, the film dialogically stresses that the emergence of the repressed is provoked through the invasion of the prohibited spaces and the destruction of the borders, which is repeatedly emphasized through the narration wise strategies. In the context of repetitive narration strategies, Bordwell and Thompson state that “the repetitions of certain framings may associate themselves with a character or situation” (Bordwell, and Thompson 2008, 193). Therefore, the film’s repetitive use of close-up frames of the doors, keys, and locks (**Figure 2.21-22**) underlines that the prohibited spaces of the unconscious are trespassed, and what is repressed is poised to emerge.

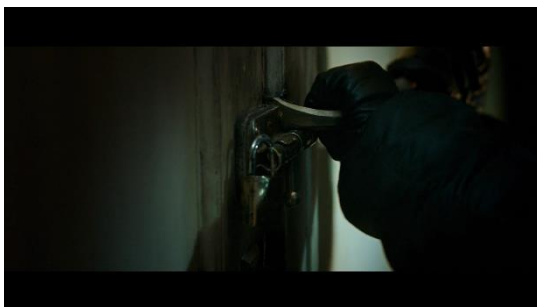


Figure 2.21

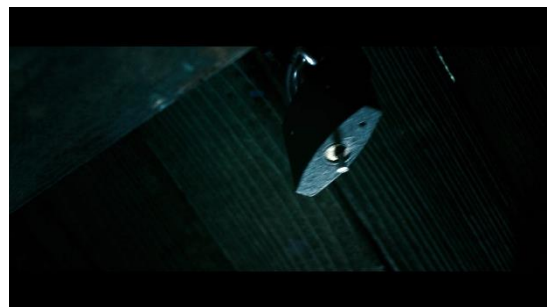


Figure 2.22

The continuous emphasis on the intrusion of prohibited spaces starts in the scene where the three teenagers are about to break into someone’s house, and the camera shows a

close-up shot of the door's keyhole that is forced to open from the outside (**Figure 2.23**). Once the door is unlocked, Rocky, Alex, and Money get inside. In accordance with the conventions of the classical style, the audience expects a medium shot of the characters when they are talking around; however, the camera stays at the same height and focuses on the door that has been forcefully opened (**Figure 2.24**). The film follows the same pattern as the opening credits and draws the audience's attention to the action of breaking into a house by executing an unconventional framing.

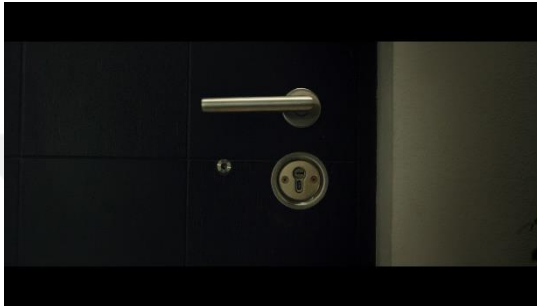


Figure 2.23



Figure 2.24

On the other hand, the whole process of breaking into the blind man's house is strongly accentuated through different obstacles by the doors, the locks, and the keys. When they arrive at the house, Money realizes the front door has four different locks that they don't possess. Consequently, they go to the backyard to try other entrances. While Alex is trying to open the side door, the camera cuts to another close-up of the keyhole to show that he eventually fails (**Figure 2.25**). Then, Money notices there is another door that opens to the cellar and tries to use that as a way in; however, he does not manage to open it (**Figure 2.26**). The whole sequence demonstrates that the house is well-protected, and there are a lot of obstacles that make it challenging to unmask, which reinforces the metaphorical bond between the house and the unconscious mind.



Figure 2.25

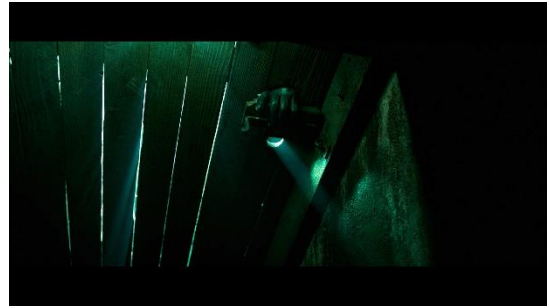


Figure 2.26

After they go through different doors and entrances that won't open, Rocky realizes there is a window with no bars on the side wall and volunteers to get inside from there. According to Žižek, the form or the place in which the real intrudes is crucial because it erupts on “the very boundary separating the outside from the inside”, and he gives the window as a sample material in this context (Žižek 1991, 12). This interpretation reinforces the film's metaphorical bond between the house and the unconscious and signals the intrusion of the real through an unprotected form that represents the borders.

In the scene where Rocky first gets inside the house, she deactivates the alarm and starts walking around where all is dark. The camera follows her through a tracking shot until she stops in front of the fireplace where she is directly looking at. She is positioned in the center of the frame via a medium close-up shot from her back, and the insert of a non-diegetic eerie sound emphasizes her distress at this moment (**Figure 2.27**). When she walks off the screen, the camera dollies in with a very fast movement and focuses on the photograph on the fireplace (**Figure 2.28**). Since the camera makes its presence felt, the fast movement as an unconventional narration strategy underlines what is in the photograph: the blind man's lost daughter. Although it might be compelling for Rocky, who cares about her little sister, to steal the blood money of a little girl who has died, the dramatization of this scene through the narration is not to point out the ethical issues but to underline Rocky's confrontation with her childhood phantasies which are about to emerge.



Figure 2.27



Figure 2.28

The emergence of these phantasies is further extended in the scene where they are all inside the house. The camera suddenly tilts up and adopts an impossible point-of-view and goes all the way to the blind man's bedroom (**Figure 2.29**). The impossible point-of-view is another unconventional narration device that is used here to create a feeling of uneasiness. In this tracking shot where the camera slowly moves toward the bedroom, the image of the dark corridor overlaps with a nursery rhyme that is coming from the off-screen. Then, the camera enters the bedroom and zooms into the television which shows a videotape of the blind man's little daughter (**Figure 2.30**). The rhyme that she sings is important because of its lyrics, which are as follows: "I love you - Yes, I'll be your Valentine - Valentine, Valentine - Yes, I'll be your Valentine - I love you". By overlapping these lyrics with an uneasy image of the man's bedroom door, the film makes a direct implication to the Oedipal desires of the female child whom she sees her father as the love object.



Figure 2.29

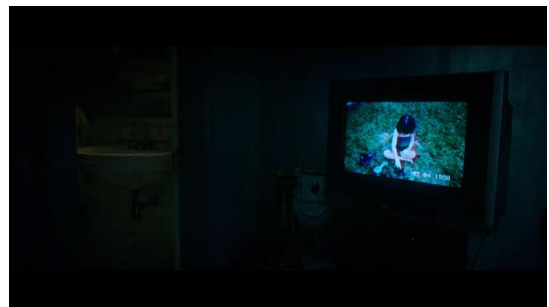


Figure 2.30

Considering that the intrusion of the unconscious provokes the repressed phantasies to emerge, the film designates this provocation through the blind man's awakening in the scene where the cellar's door is broken. While Alex and Money are trying to find the

money in the house, Rocky realizes that there is a “big-ass lock” on the cellar door, which makes them assume the money is stored there. The film utilizes another impossible point-of-view through the cellar door (**Figure 2.31**) as if it were a human with a consciousness, underlining the cellar’s representation of the core of the unconscious. Then, the blind man reappears in the hallway even though he has been chloroformed in his sleep. His sudden and unexpected appearance from the off-screen reinforces the uncanny attribution of the character and evokes a sense of anxiety by drawing the audience’s attention to the edges of the frame. Even though he acts a little cautious at first, he gets very aggressive when he figures out the lock of the cellar’s door is broken and then kills Money. In this respect, the blind man’s outrageous reaction to the cellar’s invasion illustrates him as a perverse authority figure of the prohibition and the enjoyment in a paradoxical way, implicating his return as the Father-of-Enjoyment.

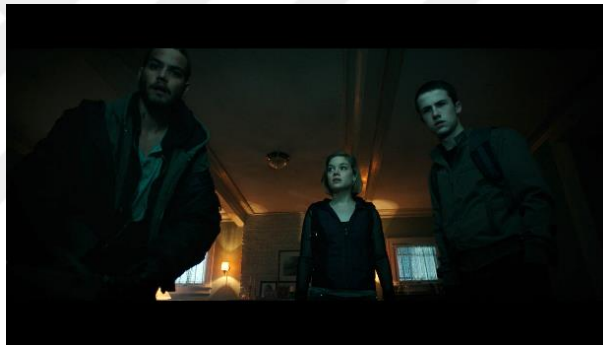


Figure 2.31

Furthermore, while Rocky and Alex try to hide and find a way out, the blind man locks and covers all the windows and doors in the house. In other words, all the places and forms that separate the inside from the outside are blocked, and those who transgress the borders should face the consequences, implicating what is repressed must return when there is an intrusion of the real. At that point, Alex suggests that the only way out is the cellar. Through this narrative strategy of the cellar being the only option to escape, the film underlines that one must confront their repressed phantasies to be able to restore the repression and avoid the anxiety they promote. Accordingly, Rocky and Alex go down the cellar only to encounter the young woman, who unintentionally alarms the blind man with a connected ring, emphasizing the intrusion of the real as what provokes the return of the repressed. Then, the blind man appears at the cellar’s door while the camera shows

him from a low-angle shot that is highlighted in all red (Figure 2.32), portraying him as a powerful and monstrous figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment who wants vengeance.



Figure 2.32

The blind man's almost inhumane capabilities that underline him as a persistent and revengeful figure is designated through his repeated returns although he is defused or eluded several times, which is a common horror trope that represents the return of the dead that comes back regardless. In this manner, Žižek underlines that the return of the living dead is the “fantasy of a person who does not want to stay dead but returns again and again to pose a threat to the living” (Žižek 1991, 16). From the zombies in *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero 1968) to the evil cat in *Pet Sematary* (Lambert 1989), there is an awkward persistence in the dead's return at the points where the victims think the dead are defeated. In the case of *Don't Breathe*, although the blind man is not dead, he metaphorically represents the return of the dead whose dissolution resulted in failure; and therefore, his revenge for “unpaid symbolic debt” is necessary (Žižek 1991, 16).

To illustrate, Rocky and Alex manage to escape from the blind man after he figuratively blinds them in the cellar; however, his super-aggressor dog greets them upstairs and forces them to hide one more time. While Alex gets caught and beaten to death by the blind man, Rocky tries to run away through the air well only to be captured by him one more time. Then, he grabs her down and starts beating her on the ground, which is an essential scene in terms of its mis-én-scene that implicates the incestuous phantasies. The camera first shows Rocky as she is crawling on the floor, from a ground-level low angle, which positions the blind man as a powerful figure above her body. Then, he bends down, takes the young woman between his legs, and starts hitting her in the face. However, the

reverse lighting makes the details disappear, and their placement in the frame resembles a traditional love scene with a sexual implication (**Figure 2.33**).



Figure 2.33

The sexual implications get more perverse when the blind man takes Rocky down the cellar again and tries to impregnate her by putting his sperm into her vagina. During this scene, the camera cuts to the close-up shots of the sperm he carries (**Figure 2.34**) and the scissor he uses (**Figure 2.35**), which all metaphorically implicate the castration trauma through which the incestuous phantasies originate, as discussed above. This perversely illustrated action does not result in success when Alex comes to the rescue, and they tie up the blind man in the cellar and run away. However, the blind man comes back from the cellar and kills Alex when they are just about to go outside, and the film accentuates his repeated and almost illogical returns from the darkness by not displaying how he managed to untie himself.

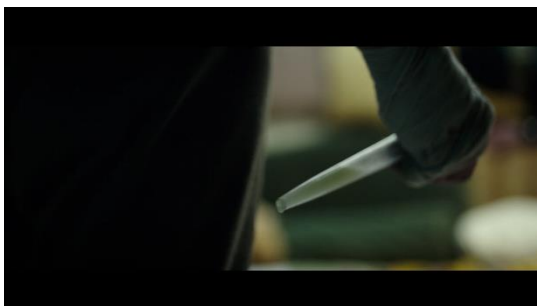


Figure 2.34



Figure 2.35

From another standpoint, the blind man's recurrent returns and the challenging functioning of the house make Rocky and Alex get lost in a vicious circle of trying to find

a way out while there is an impending threat from all around. Within this context, Freud's description of being lost in Venice and returning to the same place over and over again as an uncanny kernel is a plausible case to articulate. Cherry interprets Freud's argument and underlines that the narrative of being lost is a common horror trope in the genre, and she exemplifies *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick, and Sánchez 1999) where three teenagers are lost in the woods and cannot find their way out because they keep coming back to the same place (Cherry 2009, 128). This idea of being lost and repeatedly coming to the same place evokes uncanniness because "being lost is to be figuratively blind" (Cherry 2009, 128), and it is also reminiscent of the functioning of trauma that blurs the boundaries of time and place and creates an everlasting sense of dread.

Within this context, one of the strongest uncanny illustrations of going back to the same place occurs in the scene where Rocky finally manages to go outside after Alex's death. The film promotes a sense of relief through her survival; however, the aggressor dog starts chasing after her, which forces Rocky to get stuck in the car. After minutes of struggling, she overpowers the dog, gets outside, and takes the money. However, the blind man appears from behind and makes another comeback. In this respect, Kendall R. Phillips argues that "the violation of an audience's expectations contributes to their experience of terror and, in so doing, redraws the contours of the horror genre" (Phillips 2005, 5). Similarly, *Don't Breathe* allows its audience to gain a sense of relief through Rocky's escape only to destruct their expectations afterwards. The next scene demonstrates the blind man who is dragging Rocky on the shredded street while her blood is dripping all over, which is a repeated scene from the opening (**Figure 2.36**). Through this scene that requires a retroactive analysis to complete the story time, the film also takes the audience back to the beginning where it all started and creates a self-reflexive moment by referring to its narrative strategy of going back to the same place.



Figure 2.36

The final fight between Rocky and the blind man takes place in the house and ends with a statement on the film's metaphorical manifestation of the return of the repressed phantasies. While Rocky is helplessly lying down on the floor, the camera cuts to a close-up shot of the ladybug on her hand (**Figure 2.37**). The hallucinatory image of the ladybug functions as a stimulus for Rocky to go back to her childhood during which she was forced to repress her longing for her father to avoid the anxiety. Accordingly, she decides to act, reaches for the controller, and activates the alarm whose sound drives the blind man crazy. When he starts shooting around out of despair, the camera cuts a close-up shot of his daughter's photograph that shatters and collapses in slow-motion (**Figure 2.38**). Slow-motion is conventionally used to render important details that would be missed otherwise (Bordwell, and Thompson 2008). Therefore, the film utilizes this detail to underline that the manifestation of repressed phantasies is going back to repression. When the alarm sound goes off, Rocky hits the blind man with a stick in the face, and he falls into the cellar in slow-motion. The dead father who returns as the perverse figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment goes back to the core of the unconscious where he should remain repressed. Then, from a low angle through the cellar's point-of-view, the camera shows Rocky as a powerful figure while it is slowly zooming in to her face as she breathes in and out (**Figure 2.39**). Then, the camera shows the blind man who is lying down on the ground from a high angle (**Figure 2.40**), indicating his powerlessness. While Rocky is closing the door, the blind man's out-cold face is plunged into darkness, indicating he is dead.



Figure 2.37



Figure 2.38



Figure 2.39



Figure 2.40

In the end, the little girl overpowers the perverse figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment and manages to send him back to the unconscious where he belongs, resulting in the restoration of the repressed fantasies. Within this context, Wood argues that “the happy ending (when it exists) typically signifying the restoration of repression” (Wood 2003, 68). Similarly, the film demonstrates a happy ending through the death of the monstrous figure and indicates the restoration of the repression of unconscious fantasies. However, as the film repeatedly underlines through the blind man’s unexpected comebacks and almost inhumane skills, what is repressed must always strive to return (Wood 2003, 72), and it does return in the epilogue scene.

The epilogue scene is important to analyze how the film emphasizes the return of the repressed as a lingering threat within its metaphorical narrative. When Rocky and her little sister are at the train station, she notices the news on the television and finds out that the blind man is still alive. The news reporter gives information about the robbery and states that he is in stable condition and will be able to “return” to his home soon. While she is looking at the television in shock, the camera slowly zooms into the screen which shows a grainy image of him with his eyes open (**Figure 2.41**). The last shot of the film

shows Rocky and her little sister through a medium-long shot while they are walking toward the gate. Although going to California with her sister has been Rocky's ultimate motive all along, the portrayal of the scene does not radiate any happiness or joy (**Figure 2.42**). As they are slowly disappearing in the frame, the film overlaps the dark portrayal of the surrounding with a distressing score. This final shot underlines what is repressed is not annihilated, and its return is inevitable when there is another intrusion of the real that will haunt as a lingering threat.



Figure 2.41



Figure 2.42

In a nutshell, *Don't Breathe* creates horror and terror through surviving against a physical threat within a home invasion narrative; however, the underlying themes implicate that the real object of horror is the return of the repressed phantasies which take root in the family, the home, and the society. The decayed portrayal of Detroit and its corrupted suburbs as a setting creates a placeless and unrecognizable world where the societal anxieties linger around the American nation's psyche. On the other hand, the depiction of a dysfunctional family structure with abusive or irresponsible parents deconstructs the notion of home and indicates the real threat originates from within. These two parallel illustrations both indicate that the symbolic social order has been disrupted in this place, and therefore, whatever has remained repressed beneath the surface is poised to emerge and threaten the very same order. In this context, the film utilizes the character of Rocky who suffers from the abandonment of her father and the blind man who mourns for his lost daughter, which both indicate the traumatic effects of the female child's incestuous phantasies that are originated and repressed during the Oedipal period. The emergence of these phantasies and the uncanny sense they evoke are manifested through both the narration and the narrative wise strategies throughout the film. Within the narration, the

sense of uncanny is created through the imbrication of uneasy images with the dialogues, recurrent shots of the keys that signal the prohibited spaces, and unconventional camera movements that evoke uncertainty. Within the narrative, the blind man's attribution of being visually-impaired, his persistent and illogical returns as a threat, and the teenagers' losing their way out in a deadlock are the sources of uncanny. Considering the uncanny is a prominent kernel of the unconscious, the film directly points out the theme of the return of the repressed to represent the unconscious fears and phantasies whose emergence promotes anxiety. In this regard, while trespassing upon the house represents the intrusion of the real and the cellar becomes the core of the unconscious, the blind man who seeks vengeance as a perverse authority figure becomes the very representation of the Father-of-Enjoyment who returns from the dead. In the end, the film demonstrates a bitter-sweet ending to illustrate the restoration of the repression while implicating that it is a fallacious closure because what is repressed always returns.

3. ANALYSIS OF *IT FOLLOWS* (2014)

It Follows (Mitchell 2014) is the second feature film of the American director David Robert Mitchell, whose debut feature is *The Myth of the American Sleepover* (Mitchell 2010). Although the former is a coming-of-age story of a group of hopelessly romantic teenagers, the setting of Detroit, Michigan stands out as the common point between the two films. Considering the director was also born in Michigan, it is not surprising to see the appliance of the location; however, Detroit plays an even more significant role in *It Follows* to display the destruction of the American dream. In *Beautiful Terrible Ruins: Detroit and the Anxiety of Decline*, Dora Apel states that “although deindustrial decline is widespread across the country and abroad, Detroit has become the preeminent example of urban decay” (Apel 2015, 3) and underlines the portrayal of Detroit’s ruination in artworks speaks to the fears and anxieties of the era including homelessness, degradation, and fear of the other (Apel 2015, 3).

Within this context, *It Follows* utilizes Detroit and its suburbs as the setting to portray the collective fears that are evoked by the corruption that represents the social breakdown in the nation’s psyche. Throughout the film, the ruined buildings and the desolate surroundings are designated through long shots to emphasize the corrupted social order that the place is suffering from. One of the prominent examples of such representation occurs towards the middle of the film when the teenagers are on their way to break into a house in the suburbs. With the insert of the compelling score, the film applies numerous long shots that display sealed factories whose walls are covered with graffiti, uninhabited suburban neighborhoods with abandoned houses, and empty streets where homeless people wander around (**Figure 3.1-2**). In *Dead Places: American Horror, Placelessness, and Globalization*, Katherine A. Wagner argues that “through the destruction of everyday places, the horror genre does not simply strip the map of its markers; it offers a totally alien landscape, one that is completely unfamiliar, unrecognizable, and placeless” (Wagner 2017, 123). From this perspective, the portrayal of the urban decay in *It Follows* can be interpreted as a narration device that alienates the everyday places of the characters

and reinforces the theme of placelessness to create a nightmarish world that evokes the sense of fear and anxiety in the unrecognizable.



Figure 3.1



Figure 3.2

The destruction of everyday life and the distressing impact of the unrecognizable is first demonstrated in the prologue scene of *It Follows*. In *Film Theory: An Introduction through Senses*, Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener argue that a prologue scene plays a significant role in setting the tone and mood for the rest of the film and introducing important information about what is to come (Elsaesser, and Hagener 2009, 42). In the same fashion, the prologue scene of *It Follows* stands out as a separate segment with its filmic structure and the plantation of the primary themes that will be expanded within the film's main plot.

The prologue scene starts with a long shot of a desolate street in a suburban neighborhood during an autumn eventide (**Figure 3.3**). Then, the camera slowly pans to the right to show a two-storied house where a teenage girl, Annie, starts running. An extra-diegetic pulsating score is inserted with her appearance in the frame, and the camera continues its pan movement to follow Annie through her run. When she stops in the middle of the street, the camera concurrently stops its movement, too. According to Bordwell and Thompson, the camera's dependence on the figure movement may affect how the audience perceives the space within the frame and the off-screen (Bordwell, Thompson 2008, 200). Therefore, the camera's persistence in following its subject creates an awareness of the off-screen space, and the designation of what threatens Annie is not revealed. A few moments later, the direction of her gaze changes with the sound of the door's opening, and her father's words are heard from the off-screen: "Annie, what are

you doing?”. However, in contrast to the classical film style, the film does not cut to a reverse shot to display the father; instead, his question overlaps with his distressed daughter’s image. By executing unconventional editing, the film locates the father in the off-screen space and emphasizes his absence within the frame. With the distressing score getting more intense as she restarts running around the street, the camera continues to pan in a circular motion until she gets back to the house. Her father asks her what the matter is and follows her inside; however, the camera stands still and shows the exterior of the house through a long shot. In his analysis of *Rear Window* (Hitchcock 1954), Santiago Fillol says that “when the blinds go down and an off-screen space is established, there is something there that we should not see although we can easily imagine it” (Fillol 2019, 50). Similarly, when Annie and her father get into the house and the door is closed, the camera does not follow them inside and lingers on the long shot of the house even though there is not any moving figure (**Figure 3.4**). In this way, the film creates an awareness of the off-screen space and implicates that whatever is happening there cannot be shown on the screen. A house is a place where one lives with their family and is a safe and sound space within its social understanding. However, in this scene, what is left on the off-screen space that is purposefully concealed underlines that the threat arises from that very place which is not safe anymore.



Figure 3.3



Figure 3.4

Considering the utilization of the off-screen space where the threat is located, the off-screen presence of the father pictures him as a threatening figure as well, which is further accentuated during the beach scene. The camera starts its movement by the car and slowly dollies into Annie, who is sitting alone at a deserted beach, and it stops when her phone starts ringing. In this way, the film creates a self-conscious moment as the camera makes

its presence felt by conveying the diegetic sounds and signals a relation between what is seen and what is heard. Accordingly, while Annie is talking to her father on the phone, the long shot frames her as a small figure under the yawning sky (**Figure 3.5**), indicating her vulnerability toward him. His voice is not audible; however, the words that Annie utters are important to examine their relationship: “I love you. I know. I know. I just want you to know how much I love you”. Then, the camera jump-cuts to a medium close-up shot as she continues. The jump-cut editing, as an unconventional narration device, is used here to underline this particular part of the conversation: “Dad, I’m sorry I can be such a shit to you sometimes. I don’t know why I do that”. After the repetitive dialogues of the young girl’s love for her father, the film underlines an unspoken yet alluded disgrace in their relationship through these lines. Then, in accordance with the change in Annie’s gaze, the camera cuts to a long shot of the desolate surrounding where her abandoned car is located by the forest. Although there is not any moving figure in the frame, the camera lingers on this long shot while the extra-diegetic throbbing score is building up (**Figure 3.6**), which both evoke a sense of an impending threat from the outside. Regarding the relation of what is seen and heard, by overlapping a disquieting image with the young girl’s final words to her father, the film associates the alluded disgrace in the father-daughter relationship with what is threatening her.



Figure 3.5



Figure 3.6

The threat that causes Annie to run away from home and say goodbye to her parents, specifically to her father, is not visually or verbally depicted. However, through the mis-én-scene, the film establishes obscene and uncanny imageries to implicate the nature of the threat, which also corresponds to the off-screen presence of the father. The theme of obscenity is constructed through the sexual objectification of Annie as a female figure.

Within this context, Laura Mulvey claims that women are simultaneously looked at and displayed in their traditional exhibitionist role with their appearance that is coded for strong visual and erotic impact (Mulvey 1989, 62). Accordingly, Annie is running around in her underwear and high heels, which is not concordant with the seasonal expectations and does not develop the plot. In contrast, her visual presentation serves as the erotic exhibition of the female figure who is being looked at and underlines the obscenity of the threat that is looking at her. The visual and erotic codes that objectify Annie is further emphasized in the close-up shot that shows her dead body from a canted high angle, which resembles sexual intercourse (**Figure 3.7**). Then, the camera cuts to a medium-long shot that displays her disjointed body parts in a way that is reminiscent of a fragmented doll (**Figure 3.8**). Since dolls are inanimate objects that look so much like animate ones, they tackle the dichotomy of living and the dead (Freud [1919] 1955, 233) and evoke an uncanny feeling, which is the other theme that is strongly implicated in this shot. Freud encapsulates the term uncanny as “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (Freud [1919] 1955, 220). Therefore, the film’s implication of the threat as being originated from or being related to the house or the family (especially the father), which are the oldest and the most familiar, alludes to the threat an uncanny phenomenon. However, to better understand the relation between the uncanny threat that features obscene attributions and its lingering presentation in the off-screen space, it is crucial to first examine how these themes are utilized within the nightmarish world that is designated in the film’s main plot.



Figure 3.7



Figure 3.8

The main plot of the film opens with a scene where a teenage girl, Jay, relaxes in a pool in the backyard of a suburban house. Through a tracking shot, the camera pans from the

right to the left to show the shattered and polluted pavement in close (**Figure 3.9**). Then, it tilts up and continues its pan movement in which Paul is knocking on the front door. However, while the extra-diegetic eerie sound is slowly building up, the camera passes by the door and dollies into the backyard where Jay is about to plunge into the pool (**Figure 3.10**). The way the camera bypasses the door and approaches the backyard violates the privacy and the security of the home while it also resembles the movements of the followers who are the metaphorical agents of such intrusions. Soon after, Jay realizes that two little boys are peeping into her and says: “I see you”. Despite her response of warning, the camera cuts to a medium close-up of the boys who reappear behind the bushes, emphasizing that these acts of transgression will continue to reemerge regardless. This particular scene, with its emphasis on shattered and polluted pavement that signals a crack in the order and the act of peeping that violates the boundaries, can be interpreted as a clear contrast to the safe and sound image of suburbia.



Figure 3.9



Figure 3.10

In his book *Projected Fears*, Kendall R. Phillips discusses that the suburban way of life has deconstructed domestic happiness by creating a place where “the dark under-side was a sense of confinement, isolation, and confusion (Phillips 2005, 68). In this regard, it is not surprising to see that the underlying anxiety of suburbia has been utilized as a threatening element in the works of the horror genre in which suburban dream turns into a nightmarish experience. According to Bernice M. Murphy, one of the prominent features of the suburban nightmare is the description of “a place haunted by the familial and communal past”, in which “the threats come from within, not without” (Murphy 2009, 3). Within this context, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven 1984), where the bright image of the suburban life is dramatically shattered through a communal trauma, is a

convenient example since it shares some common points with *It Follows*. In Craven's film, a group of teenagers is haunted in their dreams by the ghost of Freddy Krueger, who was burnt alive by their parents due to his hideous actions. Although Freddy is an evil figure who murdered (and molested though it is only implied) children, the film emphasizes the real threat is the society that generates the dysfunctional family structure. Throughout the film, the parents are portrayed as dishonest, irresponsible, and troubled people who constantly ignore their kids' struggles out of their own guilt. To illustrate, Glen is murdered in his dream because of his parents' restrictions while Tina's death is a result of her parents' irresponsibility. With her parents being divorced, Nancy is forced to live with her alcoholic mother who hides the truth about the past, and her father is an incompetent figure of authority who ignores his daughter's cries for help. In the same fashion, the parents in *It Follows* are visually absent in most of the events where they are expected to show up, and their absence within the plot directly points out the dysfunctional family structure in this suburban neighborhood. Yara and Paul often sleep over at Jay's house, and the audience never meets their parents as if they didn't exist. Greg and Hugh/Jeff are living with their single mothers while their fathers are not mentioned at any point. Similarly, Jay and Kelly's father is absent throughout the film and their single mother is depicted as an alcoholic woman who is never present during serious events that Jay goes through. In the scene where the police come to investigate Jay's abduction, the dysfunctionality within the family structures is further verbalized as Greg's mother comments: "Those people are such a mess". Within this context, the troubling portrayal of the family structures, which constitutes an important layer of the suburban nightmare, corresponds to the view that the real threat is long familial and signals the disruption of the social order.

In the scope of the social order and its disruption, Slavoj Žižek reinterprets the Lacanian concept, the symbolic order, as follows: "our common everyday reality, the reality of the social universe in which we assume our usual roles of kind-hearted, decent people, turns out to be an illusion that rests on a certain 'repression,' on overlooking the real of our desire" (Žižek 1991 13), and he further emphasizes that these real desires consist of a set of prohibitions that include perverse and obscene implications (Žižek 1991, 57). Due to their prohibition, these perverse implications cannot be articulated or presented in the

symbolic order where they remain repressed; however, what is repressed can be manifested when the symbolic order does not function properly. Accordingly, in *It Follows*; the corrupted portrayal of the suburban way of life, the destruction of the privacy of home, and the dysfunctional family structures with absent parents indicate the disruption of the social symbolic order where repressed desires are poised to emerge. Considering the perverse-looking and obscene illustrations of the threatening followers and the concealment of the parental figures through uncanny implications, as discussed in detail below, it is possible to say that these repressed desires are directly linked to familial perversity. Within this context, Robin Wood discusses that “in a society built on monogamy and family there will be an enormous surplus of repressed sexual energy” (Wood 1979, 15). Therefore, these repressed sexual tendencies within the family become the very elements that would demolish what the society has been built on: the family, and their prohibition is needed to avoid the anxiety they arouse, which attributes these sexual desires or thoughts to taboo status.

In this regard, Sigmund Freud explains that “everybody descended from the same totem is consanguineous; that is, of one family; and in this family the most distant grades of relationship are recognized as an absolute obstacle to sexual union” (Freud [1913] 1955, 13). Freud’s theory of sexual acts’ prohibition in primordial family structures remarks incest as one of the longest and the strictest taboos in the social unconscious. Furthermore, Žižek discusses the incest taboo through Lacan’s fundamental paradox, which defines the prohibition of incest, as “a prohibition of something that could also not be prohibited: it is not a prohibition of something that is already in itself impossible” (Žižek 1991, 29). Therefore, it can be said that incestuous desires adopt a taboo status because of their inherent prohibition from the very beginning, and the articulation or symbolization of such desires is not possible within the symbolic order where they remain repressed. In the context of *It Follows*, the dismantled portrayal of the symbolic social order signals the emergence of these repressed incestuous phantasies; however, they cannot be symbolized on the screen because of the taboo status that roots in their impossibility to be attained. Accordingly, the film only implicates such desires through subtle and ambiguous dialogues, the unintelligible followers that are perversely sexual, and the concealment of the parental figures that renders them uncanny threats.

The most noticeable portrayal that accentuates the absence of the families and depicts them as threatening figures belongs to Jay's parents who are purposefully concealed within both the narrative and the narration. The first point where the audience gets a glimpse of Jay's mother occurs after the pool scene in the backyard. After a temporal ellipsis, the camera follows Jay as she walks inside the house where Kelly, Yara and Paul are watching *Killers from Space* (Wilder 1954), which creates a self-reflexive moment as it foretells the teenagers' final battle against the follower. However, no one seems to address the presence of the mother who is on the phone and drinking wine at the table as if she was invisible. Her voice is partially audible though what she says is unclear, and the camera positions her in the rear panel of the shot while her side face is covered by her hair (**Figure 3.11**). Throughout the film, the mother's face is never fully framed on the screen, and her physical existence is only displayed through fragmented images. Towards the middle of the film, there is a particular shot in which the camera first shows her feet on the bed and then slowly moves toward the mirror which reflects her lying body even though her face is not clear (**Figure 3.12**). While leaving her out of the frame, this shot also pictures her as an alcoholic woman with a wine glass and a half-empty bottle in front of the mirror, implying she has been drinking all day.

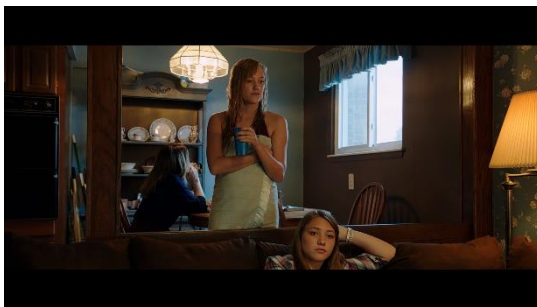


Figure 3.11

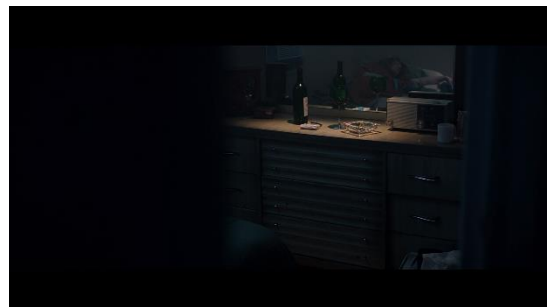


Figure 3.12

The mother's alcoholism is emphasized during the only scene where she is not inarticulate. While pouring some gin into her coffee, she is talking to Greg's mother about Jay's issues. However, the camera displays her behind her back and keeps her face out of the audience's sight. Then, the film cuts to a medium close-up shot, in which her face is out of focus and partially cut out from the frame, and the camera focuses on the rear panel

of the image where their family photographs can be seen on the wall (**Figure 3.13**). Their conversation about Hugh/Jeff is followed by a close-up shot of Jay and her grandparents' photograph (**Figure 3.14**) after her mother utters these words: "Breaks my heart the things he said to her. Some weird, sick". Considering the filmic structure of the film that creates a link between what is seen and heard, overlapping these lines with the family photographs implicates the incestuous phantasies "on whose repression families are built" (Wood 2003, 104). While the impartial figure of the mother and the ambiguous dialogues reinforce the taboo status of such phantasies that cannot be symbolized, the film implicates the familial perversity as a threat to the family in which they take root.

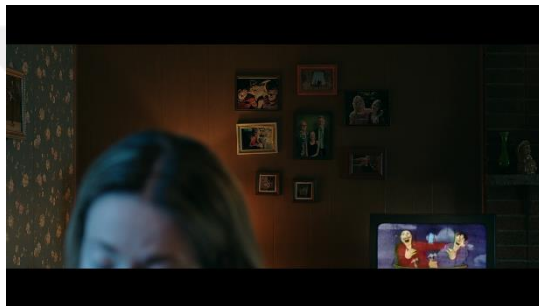


Figure 3.13



Figure 3.14

This implication that pictures these desires as threatening is further accentuated in the scene where Jay's mother fondles her half-awake daughter's back; however, only her arms are shown in the frame (**Figure 3.15**) and her face is blurred (**Figure 3.16**). Alongside the uncanny imagery that is created through the mother's impartial presentation, this shot also points out the familial perversity because the way she fondles Jay's back looks like she is assaulting her daughter. In this scene, the film signals the emergence of the incestuous phantasies, but the fragmented and blurry representation of the mother underlines the non-symbolization of such phantasies on the screen because they are impossible to attain. Then, with the insert of a non-diegetic eerie score, the camera cuts to a close-up shot of their family photograph where Jay's father is shown in the frame, too (**Figure 3.17**). The editing that connects the father's photograph with the mother's seemingly assaultive behavior associates his threatening absence with the perversity within the family that is concealed on the screen. In the course of the film, except for his appearance as a perverse-looking follower in the end, the father is never

mentioned by any of the characters and is only displayed through photographs. Mulvey claims that “the photograph as index almost literally ‘haunts’ the blurred boundary between life and death” (Mulvey 2006, 64). From this perspective, the photographic depiction of the father attributes him as a haunting and threatening presence over the family and creates a sense of uncanny through the uncertainty of whether he is dead or alive. According to Freud, the uncanny is “something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression”, and he further argues that “the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimlich*, familiar; the prefix 'un' is the token of repression” (Freud [1919] 1955, 245). Therefore, it is possible to say that the concealment of the parental figures suggests the repression of incestuous phantasies and the uncanny implications of their portrayal indicate the return of the repressed.

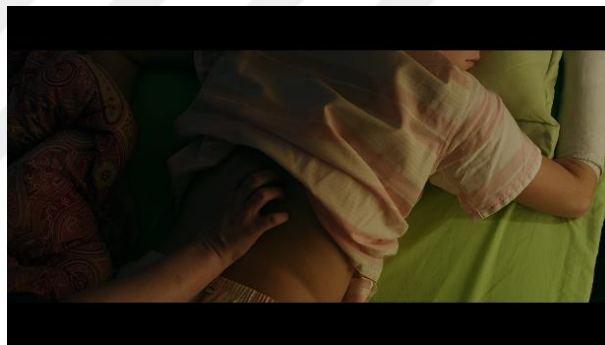


Figure 3.15



Figure 3.16



Figure 3.17

The theme of the return of the repressed is often associated with the return of the dead to evoke fear and terror within the horror genre. From Jason from the Crystal Lake franchise which started with *Friday the 13th* (Cunningham 1980) to Michael Myers in *Halloween* (Carpenter 1978), the dead persistently return to pose a threat to the living. Within this

context, Žižek explains that “the return of the dead is a sign of a disturbance in the symbolic rite, in the process of symbolization; the dead return as collectors of some unpaid symbolic debt (Žižek 1991, 16). Therefore, it is possible to interpret that the return of the dead is a manifestation of the emergence of what has gone under repression due to the failure of its destruction. In the context of *It Follows*, as discussed above, the return of what is repressed corresponds to incestuous phantasies that are long-suppressed and forgotten in the social unconscious. The origin of the repression of these phantasies goes long way back to “the primal father” who prevented sexual promiscuity as the oldest and strongest male in small hordes (Freud [1913] 1955, 148). The myth of the primal father can be described as opposite to the Oedipal father, whose murder implies the removal of the prohibition and access to enjoyment, whereas the parricide of the primal father does not bring the expected enjoyment. According to Žižek, the dead father turns out to be stronger than the living one and “the former reigns as the Name-of-the-Father, the agent of symbolic law that irrevocably precludes to the forbidden fruit of enjoyment” (Žižek 1991, 17). In this context, he further argues that “this transformation, this integration, however, is never brought about without remainder; there is always a certain leftover that returns in the form of the obscene and revengeful figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment, of this figure split between cruel revenge and crazy laughter” (Žižek 1991, 17). In this regard, the symbolic law that prohibits incestuous and perverse acts is constructed by the murder of the father, which also causes the return of the dead father as the Father-of-Enjoyment.

This paradoxical agency of the father goes in parallel with the father figure that is designated in *It Follows*. In the film, though it is not certain whether Jay’s father is dead or alive, his notable absence signals the loss of the father figure while his haunting presence through the photographs (**Figure 3.18**) implicates his remainder that strives to return. Accordingly, the follower reveals itself in the form of Jay’s father during the climax of the film when the teenagers set up a booby trap at the community pool. They firstly place different electronic devices around the pool with an aim to electrocute the follower in the water. It is important that these devices that teenagers brought are all household items including a television, an iron, a lampshade, and a hairdryer. By utilizing these items as weapons against the follower who represents the return of the incestuous

phantasies, the film underlines that such phantasies pose a threat to the home and family where they originate and should remain repressed. Accordingly, the follower appears as Jay's father whose absence is implicated as threatening throughout the film. He is wearing an all-white night robe and looks quite aggressive with a perverse smirk on his face (**Figure 3.19**), portraying him as the perverse figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment. When Kelly asks Jay about the follower, she rejects to tell what she sees, which underlines the taboo status of the incestuous phantasies. Then, the follower starts attacking Jay in a very revengeful and assaultive way by throwing the household items into the water (**Figure 3.20**), indicating familial perversity as something that destructs the notion of home and family. After a sequence of attacks, Paul manages to shoot and defuse it for a second; however, it resurrects in the water and grabs Jay by the leg before Paul shoots it one more time. When Jay goes out of the water, the film cuts to a close-up shot of a deep scar that the follower has left on her leg (**Figure 3.21**). Within the context of this scene, the film creates an analogical bond between the theory of the Father-of-Enjoyment and the portrayal of Jay's absent father who returns as a perverse and assaultive follower. However, the mark that it leaves on Jay's leg signals that it is not demolished, and there is a remainder of it that will continue to return.



Figure 3.18



Figure 3.19



Figure 3.20



Figure 3.21

The persistent and inexhaustible nature of the follower that is compulsive to return is closely related to Freud's theory of the pleasure principle. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud explains that the pleasure principle automatically regulates the course of mental events which is "invariably set in motion by an unpleasurable tension, and that it takes a direction such that its final outcome coincides with a lowering of that tension—that is, with an avoidance of unpleasure or a production of pleasure" (Freud [1920] 1955, 1). In this context, he talks about repetitive games that are played by the child during the mother's departure to overpower the unpleasant experience because "the repetition carried along with it a yield of pleasure of another sort but none the less a direct one" (Freud [1920] 1955, 16). At this point, the inquiry of how the compulsion to repeat is related to the pleasure principle is essential to discuss. According to Freud, what is re-experienced under the compulsion to repeat brings about the activities of repressed instinctual impulses because it causes the ego unpleasure, which doesn't contradict the pleasure principle as: "unpleasure for one system and simultaneously satisfaction for the other" (Freud [1920] 1955, 20). In his reflection on Freud's conundrum of the pleasure principle, Joy Mills states that "this yield of satisfaction of 'another sort' is achieved in the context of absence, hence lack or nothingness, a property of death" and underlines the manifestation of the death instinct in the repetitive thoughts, fantasy, and the uncanny as follows:

From oppressive guilt, disabling shame, explosive rage, contagious hate, self-loathing, and unbearable symptomatic agony, there is a perverse appeal to suffering, to embrace our masochistic jouissance—our ecstasy in pain; whether this be an addict's craving for a bottle or a drag off a cigarette, there is an inherent destructiveness imbued in the very act of the pursuit of pleasure. All aspects of the progression of civilization and its decay are the determinate teleological fulfillment of death-work. (Mills 2006, 377)

Within this context, it is possible to interpret the recurrent appearances of the film's perverse, unintelligible, and contagious followers that seek destructive pleasure as the emergence of the death instinct, which has been liberated from repression. Apart from the prologue scene where Annie is killed by the follower, there is only one scene where the follower fulfils the pleasure within the death. When the follower is passed to Greg after his sexual intercourse with Jay, it emerges at night in the form of Greg himself. Jay, who has been watching the street, realizes its arrival and goes to the house where she encounters Greg's mother who is aggressively knocking on her son's bedroom. Jay stands still for a second as she is not certain if it's his actual mother or not; however, the way she deviously glances at Jay and keeps on knocking implicates it's the follower (**Figure 3.22**). Despite Jay's screams, Greg opens the door and sees his mother who is wearing a white nightgown with one of her breasts exposed (**Figure 3.23**). This is one of the strongest uncanny appearances of the follower because of its perverse and disturbing depiction of someone very familiar to its victim. Then, she attacks Greg by the neck, and the film cuts to Jay who is in pure shock, leaving the actual event off-screen. The camera follows Jay as she cautiously approaches the room and shows her frightened face before showing what is hidden outside the frame. With the screeching score starting, the film displays the mother who is moving back and forward on Greg's body on the floor (**Figure 3.24**) and cuts to several close-up shots of their joint legs (**Figure 3.25**), holding hands (**Figure 3.26**), and genital areas (**Figure 3.27**), which all implicate the sexual intercourse. This sequence ends with a close-up shot of Greg's deceased face. By means of the follower's depiction in this scene, the film strongly underlines incestuous phantasies that are returned from repression and indicates the fulfilment of the death instinct that is imbued with pleasure through sexual intercourse.



Figure 3.22

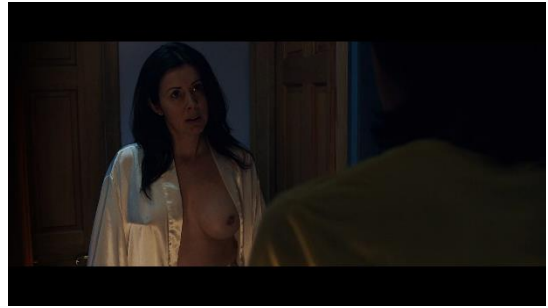


Figure 3.23



Figure 3.24



Figure 3.25



Figure 3.26



Figure 3.27

From another standpoint, the designation of the death instinct and the perverse pleasures through the repetitive appearance of the followers is also concordant with the notion of trauma. In her book *Experience, Trauma, History*, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (Caruth 1996, 11). In this regard, trauma is not located in the original past event; in contrast, it is a lingering sense of dread that continues through recurrences in the present time. Caruth further states that these repetitive appearances indicate an extension beyond what is seen and known and are “inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility” (Caruth 1996, 92); thereby, the trauma that lingers around is not merely a detained return to the original event but also the ambiguity

of what returns to haunt its subject. From this perspective, it is possible to interpret the portrayal of what is threatening in *It Follows* within the context of the functioning of traumas. To begin with, the threat that persistently follows the teenagers is unintelligible and cannot be clearly identified because of its ever-shifting appearances.

In the scene where Hugh/Jeff explains the follower's disposition to Jay, he specifies that it can look like someone she knows or a stranger in the crowd. Accordingly, throughout the film, the follower reveals itself in the divergent figures of perverse parents, aggressive friends, and gruesome strangers that are not agreeable to the environment. In this way, the film creates a frightening effect through the intangibility of the threat, which leaves the characters and the audience defenseless, and corresponds to the functioning of traumas that rests on the distressing effect of the unknowable. Moreover, the follower emerges at unexpected times and in unexpected places to attack its victim, and it relentlessly returns even though it is defused several times. There is always an impending feeling of terror that is about to intervene, and the film utilizes this lingering sense of uneasiness through the soundtrack, camera movements, and framing. The extra-diegetic pulsating and eerie score is often inserted when the threat approaches or is about to approach, which creates anxious anticipation in the audience. There are many extreme-long shots that display the characters in desolate surroundings (**Figure 3.28-29**), rendering them as vulnerable to the threat that is about to intrude from anywhere, and the circular pan movements signal that the threat lingers outside the frame. This appalling presence of the non-existent threat in the frame draws the audience's attention to what is hidden beyond the edges, utilizing the off-screen as a space where the threat is about to lurk. In her analysis of the film, Tarja Laine discusses this presentation within the traumatic terms as "simultaneously present and absent, visible and invisible: present in the somatic dimension of the self where it resists narrativization (off-screen), and absent in the semantic dimension where it could be narrated and worked through (on-screen)" (Laine 2019, 290). In this regard, all the followers enter the frame from the off-screen space where they are flourished, implicating the non-symbolization of traumas within the frame.



Figure 3.28



Figure 3.29

Finally, the film purposefully manipulates time within its diegetic world and resembles the functioning of traumas that blurs the line between the past and the present. In *Trauma, absence, loss*, Dominick LaCapra states that the inefficacy to overcome trauma prevents one from effectively comprehending the distinctions between the past and the present time, which causes trauma to be entrapped in the “arrested process” (LaCapra 1999, 713). Within this context, the film’s ambiguous and inconsistent presentation of the time period serves the temporal indistinguishability of traumatic effects and underlines their ongoing haunting. To illustrate, in the house searching scene, Paul finds a photograph of Hugh/Jeff and Annie, and it becomes apparent that the events in the prologue scene are in the same timeline as the main plot. However, Annie drives a modern-day car and uses a cell phone while Jay and her friends drive cars that belong to the ‘80s and the earlier decades. They always watch films from the ‘50s on a tube television (**Figure 3.30**) while Yara possesses a futuristic e-reader (**Figure 3.31**). Furthermore, the audience’s seasonal expectations are rejected by the characters’ outfits because they sometimes wear heavy jackets during the daytime (**Figure 3.32**) while walking around in summer clothes at night without any physical discomfort (**Figure 3.33**). All these aspects considered, it is possible to state that the inexhaustible threat that follows the teenagers in the film is reminiscent of the lingering effect of traumas, and its recurrent designation renders both the followers and the off-screen space as uncanny.



Figure 3.30



Figure 3.31



Figure 3.32



Figure 3.33

According to Ernst Jentsch, “one of the most reliable artistic devices for producing uncanny effects easily is to leave the reader in uncertainty as to whether he has a human person or rather an automaton before him in the case of a particular character” (Jentsch [1906] 1997, 11). Within this context, *It Follows* utilizes the followers as uncanny through the uncertainty of their ambivalence of real or imaginary, living or dead, and familiar or stranger to emphasize the return of the repressed.

The first case where the audience is left with an intellectual uncertainty of the follower occurs during the diner scene where Jay and Hugh/Jeff are having dinner and chatting. The camera positions them in the right panel of the image, leaving a space on the left side of the frame, and their conversation is inaudible because of the non-diegetic distressing score. When the camera starts zooming into the empty space, the focus shifts from the characters to the outside of the diner where an indistinguishable figure is slowly approaching them (**Figure 3.34**). Then, the camera focuses on Jay’s face again and blurs the outside (**Figure 3.35**). This scene evokes a sense of uncanny in the audience, whose

range of information is greater than the characters because it is not certain if the ambiguous figure is someone they know or just a stranger in the street.



Figure 3.34



Figure 3.35

During the scene where Jay learns about the follower, it emerges as a middle-aged naked woman who is slowly approaching Jay from the off-screen space (**Figure 3.36**), implicating the non-symbolization of traumas that are both absent and present. It will be later revealed that the follower here is actually Hugh/Jeff's mother; however, the follower does not seem to recognize Hugh/Jeff (**Figure 3.37**) even though the way it is looking at Jay implies that it has consciousness. So, the uncanny feeling is created through the uncertainty of the follower's consciousness as Hugh/Jeff further remarks: "It is very slow, but it's not dumb". Also, the obscene depiction of a parental figure indicates the incestuous phantasies that return from the repression and renders the threat uncanny in the context of Freud's emphasis on "repressed infantile desires as the sole source of uncanny feelings" (Schneider 1999, 6).



Figure 3.36



Figure 3.37

The moment where the follower becomes perceptible to Jay occurs in the classroom scene in which the camera first shows the teacher and makes an almost full circular pan

movement until Jay is visible in the frame. The camera's projection of the whole environment before focusing on its subject renders the off-screen space uncanny since it creates an impending sense of threat that is concealed and about to lurk. In the meantime, the teacher is reading an excerpt from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (Eliot 1915). The line "And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat" (Eliot 1915), which is a personification of death, overlaps the moment when Jay glances outside. As the extradiegetic eerie score starts, the film cuts to an extreme long shot of the schoolyard where an old woman in hospital clothes is distinguished in the environment (**Figure 3.38**). Through a shot/reverse-shot editing, the film shows Jay's growing distress on her face while the old woman is slowly getting closer. There is a strong sense of uncanny in her depiction since it is not certain if she is real or imaginary, or in other words, living or dead. At this very moment, the teacher, who has been reading the poem, utters the line "I am Lazarus, come from the dead. Come back to tell you all" (Eliot 1915). In the context of the film's structure of overlapping what is seen and heard, it becomes clear that the follower that recurs is the death instinct itself from the very beginning as Freud states: "the aim of all life is death" (Freud 1955, 38). Then, Jay leaves the classroom, and the old woman reappears in the hall as she slowly but directly walks toward her. However, as opposed to the conventions of the horror genre, she doesn't suddenly emerge but enters the frame from the side hall (**Figure 3.39**), which renders the off-screen space uncanny.

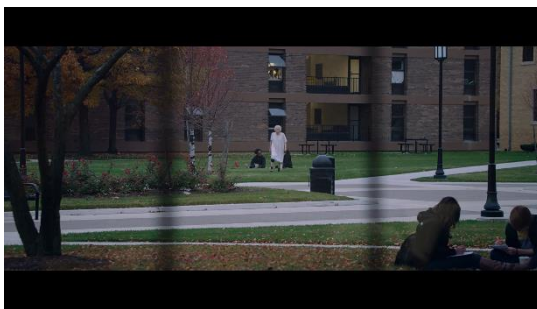


Figure 3.38

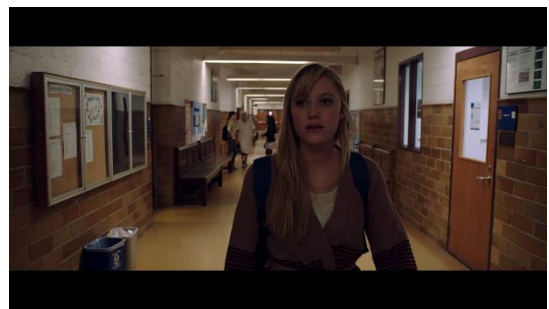


Figure 3.39

Later in the film, the follower intrudes on the house in the scene where Jay and Paul are talking about their childhood memories as the camera repeatedly cuts to the scenes from the film, *The Giant Claw* (Sears 1957), which is playing on the tube television. This is another self-reflexive moment since there is an unidentified monster that causes unknown

distress to people in that film, which is almost reminiscent of the threat in *It Follows*. In the meantime, Paul mentions some porn magazines that they found as they were kids and comments on how Greg's mother got upset when she found out about them, which signals the prohibition of sexual and perverse desires that the film recurrently implicates. The sound of a shattering window interrupts their conversation. Paul goes to check it out, but the film does not follow him and leaves the audience with the anticipation of terror that is about to arrive, depicting the off-screen space as uncanny. He quickly comes back since there is nothing as he says. However, Jay, who is not convinced, starts walking around the house while the distressing score that starts off alarms the audience about the impending threat. When she enters the kitchen area, the follower reveals itself in a disturbing figure of a violated young woman who is urinating herself with one of her breasts exposed (**Figure 3.40**). The uncertainty of her living and the intangibility of her depiction evokes a sense of uncanny while her assaulted portrayal reinforces the perversity of the threat. Then, Jay runs upstairs in panic and locks herself in her bedroom; however, the follower returns from the dark hallway as a giant man with extremely dark eyes (**Figure 3.41**), which underlines its persistent and menacing recurrences.



Figure 3.40



Figure 3.41

Apart from the incomprehensibility of the follower's designation, the ambiguity of if someone is a follower or not is another element that is applied to arouse the uncanny feeling. This ambiguous depiction is heavily emphasized in the scene where Jay and her friends arrive at Hugh/Jeff's abandoned house to learn more about the threat. The camera places Jay in the center of the frame while the house is shown in the background, and she slowly turns her head and directly looks back at the camera (**Figure 3.42**), creating a self-conscious moment as if the audience were the one who follows her. Then, the film cuts

to a reverse-shot of another house where a woman's silhouette can be seen in the garden (**Figure 3.43**), and it evokes an intense sense of uncanny through the uncertainty of whether this woman is a follower or just a curious neighbor.



Figure 3.42



Figure 3.43

This menacing feeling is repeated when they are inside the house. While looking outside through the window, Jay notices a young man who enters the backyard from the off-screen (**Figure 3.44**), and there is a sudden feeling of anxiety that is evoked through that the ambiguity of the man's true self.

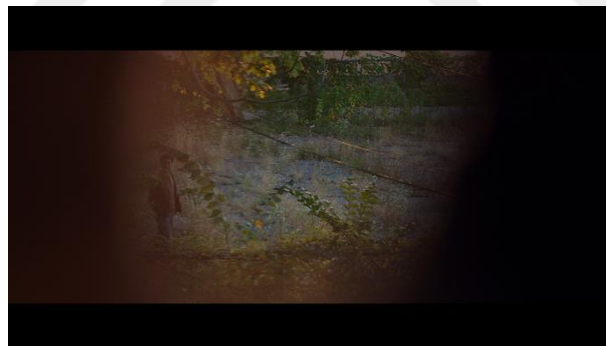


Figure 3.44

The anxiety of being followed is further accentuated in the scene where Jay and her friends are at Hugh/Jeff's school to learn his real identity. While they are going through the records with the officials, the camera makes two circular pan movements of 360 degrees until the characters are visible in the frame. During this movement, it is noticeable that there is an obscure figure of a young girl with a backpack in the schoolyard, and she is slowly and directly walking toward the camera (**Figure 3.45**). Once the camera completes its circular movement, it slowly dollies into Jay and Greg as if they were

secretly watched; however, the audience whose range of information here is greater than the characters, feels the anxiety of the upcoming threat that is slowly approaching them. Through this scene that is constructed by an unconventional mobile framing, the film utilizes the off-screen and its full extent as an uncanny space where the threat is flourished and about to intervene, which is reinforced in the next scene when they are back in the car. While they are talking about Hugh/Jeff in the car, it is visible that the young girl with a backpack is slowly walking toward them in the rear panel of the image even though she is out of focus (**Figure 3.46**).



Figure 3.45



Figure 3.46

One of the few scenes where the follower is able to get close enough to physically attack Jay occurs when they are at the lake house. The film applies extreme long shots that isolate the teenagers in the open surrounding while they are chilling by the sea. Then, the camera cuts to a medium-long shot of Jay, and the follower that takes the form of Yara emerges from the edge of the frame and starts slowly walking (**Figure 3.47**). The extra-diegetic score starts when it comes right behind Jay and pulls her hair up. They all run away and hide inside the cabin, and Jay shoots it in the head; however, it is defused only for a split second and is resurrected immediately. Jay closes and locks the door while her friends are trying to calm her down. Then, through the door's window, it becomes visible that the follower passes by the door in the form of the extremely tall man (**Figure 3.48**) and starts insistently knocking. A few moments later, the door is partially destroyed by an unseen force, and the follower, in the form of the little kid who was peeping at Jay, enters the cabin from the edge of the frame (**Figure 3.49**). Out of intense terror, Jay goes out through the back door and drives away, and the follower chases after her in the form of Annie, who is the young girl in the prologue scene (**Figure 3.50**). In the context of this

scene, the film underlines the follower's compulsiveness to return and its uncanny nature that is evoked through unfamiliar portrayals of the familiar figures.



Figure 3.47



Figure 3.48



Figure 3.49



Figure 3.50

Toward the end of the film, there is a particular image of the follower which strongly emphasizes the return of the repressed phantasies. As Jay and her friends are headed to the community pool, with the insert of the extra-diegetic score that alarms its arrival, the follower appears as Jay's bare-naked grandfather on the roof of the house (**Figure 3.51**). The camera displays the follower through a low angle from Jay's subjective point-of-view, portraying it as a powerful figure of authority, and the film attributes its manifestation a particular significance since it is the only follower that does not move (**Figure 3.52**). The significance here is that it is a direct reference to the dead father who returns as the perverse figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment. In this context, Žižek states that the dead father who reigns as the symbolic law can only demonstrate its authority through its redoubling of the perverse figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment, and he further points out this as a reason why Lacan writes the perversion as "père-version", meaning the version of the father (Žižek 1991, 17). Accordingly, the follower's standing still on the roof of the house points out the father's symbolic agency of authority that seeks reconciliation in the order while its perversely sexual and revengeful depiction underlines

the figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment whose return complements the father's symbolic authority in a paradoxical way. Through this particular manifestation of the follower that appears as a perverse figure of Jay's grandfather, the film directly demonstrates the return of the incestuous phantasies within the family and underlines the inherent prohibition of such desires whose enjoyment is only attributed to the father, implicating "the father is most radical perversion of all" (Žižek 1991, 17).



Figure 3.51



Figure 3.52

In accordance with the perverse figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment, the follower that is manifested in the next scene appears in the form of Jay's father who has been purposefully absent in the film. As discussed above in detail, the follower's manifestation here metaphorically represents the dead father who returns as the obscene figure of Father-of-Enjoyment because of its perverse, assaultive, and revengeful illustration through the father figure. However, the most distinguishing theme in this scene is the dissolution of the follower in the pool because water is one of the recurring motifs throughout the film. To illustrate, Annie is killed by the sea, Jay is first seen when she is plunging into the pool in the backyard (**Figure 3.53**) while her photographs mostly show her swimming, and one of the most assaultive followers emerges at the beach which Jay goes back to later (**Figure 3.54**). More importantly, they try to demolish the threat by bringing it into the swimming pool which is wholly covered by its blood in the end.



Figure 3.53



Figure 3.54

Within this context, Adriano D'Aloia discusses the visual representation of water as:

a substance that particularly lends itself to the representation of nightmares, hallucinations, depression and trauma, an unusual place of concealment and refuge, and element that can wash away sin, or from which sin emerges. Water is strategically used as a substance capable of [...] "hosting" a crucial event, e.g. loss, trauma, separation, or death. (D'Aloia 2012, 93)

From this perspective, it is possible to interpret that the dissolution of the recurrent threat in the water signals the water as a representation of the unconscious where perverse phantasies, traumatic effects, and the death instinct are repressed and concealed. Therefore, with its repetitive appearances as a motif and utilization as a substance to demolish the threat, the film underlines its function as a concealed space of what is/should be gone under repression. However, as mentioned above, the mark the follower leaves on Jay's leg signals that it is not destroyed, which is visually emphasized at the end of the scene. When Jay finally gets out of the water and realizes the mark on her leg, she slowly crawls toward the pool in which the thick red blood slowly spreads in the water (**Figure 3.55**). The camera slowly zooms in to the water as the blood covers the frame at its full extent (**Figure 3.56**), which signals that its dissolution results in failure because "what is repressed, of course, is never annihilated: it will always strive to return, in disguised forms" (Wood 2003, 222).



Figure 3.55



Figure 3.56

Accordingly, its inevitable return is implicated in the final scene. The film first shows the serene neighborhood through an extreme-long shot, and the camera cuts to a medium close-up shot of Jay and Paul who are walking down the street. There is no one around except a man who is sweeping the leaves. Then, the film applies a shot/reverse-shot, and it becomes visible that there is an obscure silhouette who is slowly walking behind them in the rear panel of the frame; however, it is not certain whether it is following them or not (**Figure 3.57**). Then, the screen turns black. Through its final scene, in the same fashion as the uncanny revelation of the repressed phantasies and the traumatic effects of the death instinct, *It Follows* leaves the audience with a lingering sense of dread that will continue to haunt thereafter.

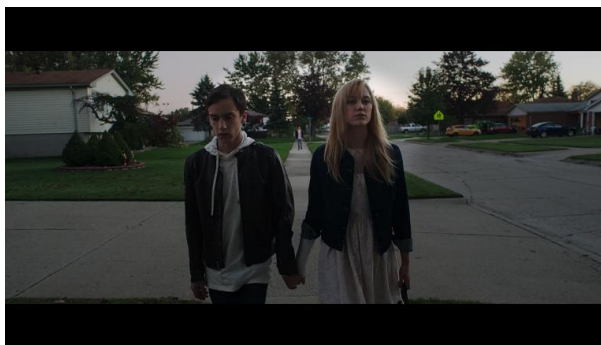


Figure 3.57

In conclusion, with the story of a young woman who is haunted by an ever-shifting follower that is transmitted through sexual intercourse, *It Follows* creates horror by the anxiety of being followed by an unintelligible and ambiguous phenomenon that appears at unexpected times and places. However, the underlying themes suggest a wider range of analysis in which the manifestation of the followers is a representation of the return of

the repressed phantasies, traumas, and instincts. It is possible to say all these themes are interconnected due to their origination, repression, and emergence since they all take root in the infantile period. Incestuous desires of the female child are established through the failure in the dissolution of the Oedipus complex, and such desires go under repression to avoid the anxiety and become inherently impossible to attain from the very beginning. In a similar fashion, the little child's repeated pleasurable acts are a way of overpowering the unpleasant thoughts which remain repressed, and the same pleasure is achieved through repetitive destructiveness that is imbued with the death instinct. Also, the repression of infantile fears and wishes leaves a traumatic wound whose remainders can reemerge through recurrent and ambiguous ways that linger around in a timeless manner. Accordingly, the film imbricates the incestuous desires and the instinctual impulses of death with the functioning of traumas through the followers that represent the return of the repressed. Their perverse and familial designations signal the incestuous phantasies, their recurrent returns to kill are the embodiment of the death instinct, and their lingering nature that creates an impending threat resembles the functioning of traumas. This impending threat that promotes fear in its victims becomes the film's object of horror and further accentuates the traumatic functioning of the return of the repressed phantasies that threaten the symbolic social order. The concealment of the parental figures in the on-screen and the followers' lurking from the off-screen indicate the non-symbolization of such phantasies because of their taboo status. Moreover, the emergence of the followers evokes uncanniness. They appear in the unfamiliar and disturbing figures of what is long-familiar, there is the intangibility of their consciousness, appearances, and movements, and they repeatedly return to fulfil destructive pleasure in death despite being diffused several times. As a result, their compulsion to return from the repression accordingly points out that what is repressed is never annihilated and must always return to pose a threat to the living, which becomes the main underlying theme of the film.

4. CONCLUSION

Horror is one of the most interesting and intricate genres to discuss in the history of cinema; because horror films have often been ignored by critics and rarely achieved a critical success although they have always been popular with the audience for decades. Although the audience, especially teenagers who are often the targets of horror narratives, enjoy the alternative experiences that horror films provide, most mainstream critics frequently snub the works of the horror genre by arguing “their lack of character development and weak dialogue” (Keisner 2008, 413). However, the central element of horror films has never been the dialogues or verbal clues but the power of images and visuals which “horrify not simply because of what they reveal but also because of what they do not reveal” (Creed 2004, 198). The visual narrative of horror films as metaphors for something concealed beneath the surface allows diverse psychoanalytic interpretations due to its resemblance to the unconscious model of the mind and the functioning of traumas, both satisfying “the deep-seated, psychoanalytically intelligible repressed desires” (Gixti 1989, 45). In this regard, it cannot be denied that the horror genre deserves a more elaborative analysis from a psychoanalytical perspective in which the uncanny and the return of the repressed constitute the main concepts with their arousing of dread and anxiety.

Accordingly, this study is consisted of three main chapters and primarily focuses on the theory of the return of the repressed through formal analyses of the two contemporary horror films, *Don't Breathe* (Alvarez 2016) and *It Follows* (Mitchell 2014). In the first chapter, the theory of the return of the repressed is thoroughly explored with a diverse range of psychoanalytic discussions to explore the paradoxical pleasures of horror films. In accordance with these discussions, it is argued that the pleasure of watching something so horrifying on the screen is reminiscent of a nightmare experience, offers a simulated reality where alternative experiences are allowed, and provides satisfaction to the unconscious thoughts which are too unpleasurable in real life. Therefore, the appeal of the horror is closely related to the return of the repressed which signifies the re-emergence

of the unconscious fears and wishes which go under repression and persistently return to promote anxiety. Therefore, in the second and third chapters, the return of the repressed is discussed with a theoretical context in the analyses of the aforementioned films where the unconscious fears and desires are utilized as metaphorical narratives through the objects of horror and the uncanny figures of threat.

In *Don't Breathe*, the return of the repressed is utilized through the character of the blind man that metaphorically represents the perverse figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment who is the paradoxical agency of the prohibition and enjoyment of incestuous desires. In parallel to this theoretical argument, the blind man becomes an uncanny threat as an authority figure who is vengeful, crazy, and almost inhumane with his capabilities to return regardless. His uncanny attribution is further reinforced through his symbolic castration by being visually impaired and his symbolic role of castrator by making his victims lose their sight in the dark. While trespassing into the house becomes a metaphor for the intrusion of the real that provokes what is repressed to return, the blind man's recurrent returns despite being diffused several times resemble the functioning of traumas that linger around the past and present time. On the other hand, *It Follows* approaches the return of the repressed from a slightly different perspective by creating an unidentified, ever-shifting, and disturbing figure of threat that repeatedly returns in uncanny illustrations. These illustrations become the metaphorical representations of the repressed incestuous desires that are too unpleasurable to confront since the followers often appear in perversely sexual and assaultive forms of the family members who aim to kill through sexual intercourse. The followers' pursuit of pleasure in destruction signals the death instinct that is inherent in the unconscious of all individuals while their compulsion to return is reminiscent of the functioning of traumas that evoke a sense of lingering dread. While the camera's circular pan movements and the extreme long shots reinforce the uncanny feeling by rendering the on-screen and its full extent menacing, the appliance of the off-screen as a space where the followers are about to lurk signifies the non-symbolization of traumas and creates an impending sense of threat.

Although the metaphorical designations of the return of the repressed in *Don't Breathe* and *It Follows* share similar patterns that implicate the emergence of incestuous desires,

the disruption of the social order which is utilized through Detroit's corruption is what interconnects them within a societal context. Detroit, as a result of a shattering economic crisis, has been subject to a dramatic decline and intense corruption that are still going on with the effects of globalization. Consequently, it has turned into a ghost town, a field for crimes and horrors, and a place of placelessness with its abandoned and ruined buildings; and therefore, it is no coincidence that both of the films which tackle the repressed desires and anxieties take place in this decayed setting. The functioning of the repression, within psychoanalytic terms, is dependent on a mechanism of avoidance that would prevent the repressed material to emerge above the surface and accordingly avoid the anxiety it causes. Considering the double-ended structure of the repression, this mechanism can be interpreted as the ego within the unconscious model of the mind, or the societal norms and prohibitions that surpass the taboo desires. In this regard, both of the films utilize the disruption of the social order in Detroit as a setting narrative that functions as a promotor for the removal of such mechanisms, allowing what is prohibited and unspoken to return from the repression. On the other hand, the disruption of the social order also illustrates the deconstruction of the family and home, which are sacred to the American dream; therefore, fears and anxieties that linger around the nation's psyche find a place to re-emerge and threaten the very same place where the perverse desires are originated and repressed.

In conclusion, I support the argument that the return of the repressed is a prominent narrative tool in the horror genre because of the fact that horror is deeply linked to the unconscious fears and desires that are repressed to avoid anxiety. Although the figures of monsters/threats/events that cause horror in films can adopt various forms and shapes, what is repressed and then returns is often familial and goes long way back to the infantile period. However, considering the family is a notion in which the infantile desires are established and also one of the main structures in the social world that the humankind has grown into, it is possible to interconnect the infantile desires within a societal context due to the resemblance of the prohibition mechanisms in the family and the society. In this regard, *Don't Breathe* and *It Follows* follow the same pattern of imbricating societal anxieties and traumas with individual fears and desires through the social order which has been shattered and the female protagonist who confronts her incestuous phantasies. All

in all, I believe and hope that this study will contribute to horror cinema studies with its exploration of the return of the repressed in the contemporary horror films, on which academic studies are inadequate, and its interpretations from a new perspective on the paradoxical pleasure of horror films in a social and psychoanalytic context. In future studies, I aim to study the cinematic designations of the return of the repressed within the context of the parodic productions of the horror genre. The questions of “how do figures of monster/threat which are portrayed as comedic or satiric in horror films represent the return of the repressed?” and “what do the comedic approaches to the objects of horror which embody the repressed content say about the cultural evolution?” can provide further discussions. Therefore, I believe that these inquiries are capable of opening up a new perspective which may shed a light on the pleasure of horror films within a sociological and psychoanalytical relevance.

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