Sit, Wait and Situate:

The Centrality of the Situational Uncanny as a Narrative Engine in the (Un)homelike Spaces of Contemporary Horror Films.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the pivotal role of uncanny situations in contemporary horror cinema as engines of suspense, narrative tension, and affective engagement. Grounded in affect theory and narrative theory and framed through the innovative lens of *situation* as a narrative concept, this study analyzes how the uncanny—the unsettling transformation of the familiar into the strange—operates as a narrative mechanism to drive story progression and shape audience experience. Focusing on three acclaimed films, *Parasite* (2019), *Hereditary* (2018), and *Get Out!* (2017), this project demonstrates how horror narratives engage situational dynamics to construct affective experiences that resonate with contemporary anxieties about class, race, and domesticity. This thesis thus challenges the limitations of previous research in film studies, which has predominantly analyzed cinema through traditional narrative elements such as character, setting, and context. By foregrounding situation as the most critical narrative element, this study argues that it is the situational uncanny—and by extension, the situation itself—that drives the story's affective and structural momentum. A qualitative methodological approach, centered on close analysis of narrative structures, visual composition, and character dynamics, is employed to illuminate how these films construct their affective resonance. This study concludes that the situational uncanny transcends its role as a thematic or psychological motif, emerging as a dynamic narrative tool that crafts intricate affective ecologies. Additionally, it contends that situations, with their inherent unpredictability and ability to reshape narrative and spatial coherence, provide a more expansive framework for understanding how horror narratives evoke affective resonance. By examining how the uncanny situation mediates intersections of narrative, affect, and social commentary, this study ultimately highlights its potential to provoke socio-political critique and engagement.

Résumé

Cette thèse explore le rôle central des situations inquiétantes dans le cinéma d'horreur contemporain en tant que moteurs de suspense, de tension narrative et d'engagement affectif. Ancrée dans la théorie de l'affect et la théorie narrative, et analysée à travers le prisme innovant de la situation en tant que concept narratif, cette étude examine comment l'inquiétant—la transformation perturbante du familier en étrange—fonctionne comme un mécanisme narratif pour faire avancer l'histoire et façonner l'expérience du spectateur. En se concentrant sur trois films acclamés, *Parasite* (2019), *Hereditary* (2018) et *Get Out!* (2017), ce projet démontre comment les récits d'horreur exploitent les dynamiques situationnelles pour construire des expériences affectives qui résonnent avec les angoisses contemporaines liées à la classe sociale, à la race et à la domesticité. Cette thèse remet en question les recherches cinématographiques traditionnelles, qui se concentrent seulement sur des éléments narratifs comme les personnages, le cadre spatio-temporel et le contexte. En soulignant la situation comme l'élément narratif clé, elle soutient que l'inquiétant situationnel, et la situation elle-même, impulseront la dynamique affective et structurelle de l'histoire. À travers une analyse qualitative des structures narratives, de la composition visuelle et des dynamiques des personnages, l'étude montre que l'inquiétant situationnel va au-delà d'un simple motif thématique ou psychologique pour devenir un outil narratif dynamique façonnant des écosystèmes affectifs complexes. De plus, elle soutient que les situations, avec leur imprévisibilité inhérente et leur capacité à redéfinir la cohérence narrative et spatiale, offrent un cadre plus large pour comprendre comment les récits d'horreur suscitent la résonance affective. En examinant comment la situation inquiétante médie les intersections de la narration, de l'affect et du commentaire social, cette étude met en lumière son potentiel à provoquer une critique et un engagement socio-politiques.

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Introduction: The Situation at Hand

The term "situation" is a fixture in various cultural discourses, both vernacular and intellectual. We might speak of our discomfort with a "sticky situation," or our entanglement in a "situation-ship," without giving much thought to our use of the word. We encounter the term in academic spaces as well, where works are often 'situated' within a specific temporal or conceptual framework, and even in philosophical discourse, where it functions as a heuristic tool for understanding how historical events emerge from the dynamic interplay between individuals and the larger collective (Martin 63). As such, this versatile descriptor carries with it a remarkable depth that transcends casual use, and its ubiquity only reflects its adaptability and its capacity to convey both the immediate and the speculative. Thus, it emerges as a term laden with potential which facilitates explorations of narrative space and viewer affect. In the realm of narrative theory, the concept of situation is a powerful tool for understanding the complexities of human experience. A situation, in its most basic form, is the "*field of relation* among the basic elements of plot, character, setting and audience" (Frank et al 661). It serves as the foundation for storytelling, offering not only the environment in which characters interact but also the constraints and possibilities that drive their actions.

Situations operate as stable framings of instability, that is, as intricate narrative devices that both contain and catalyze tension as it brews, thus giving "rise to plot, just as plot tends to land in fresh situations" (Frank et al. 666). What drew me to the concept was not only its flexibility but its capacity to name moments that feel both ordinary and charged. Thus, by examining the intricate ways in which they are crafted in horror cinema's domestic confines, I expound how narratives can reflect and challenge the structures that define our world. This project begins with a deceptively simple question: What if situation is not merely the setting in

which horror unfolds, but the very mechanism through which it is made to happen? In other words, what if horror emerges not through rupture or incursion, but through the slow accumulation of pressures internal to a situation already in motion? My work relies mainly on Frank, Pask, and Schantz' pioneering work "Situation: A Narrative Concept," as well as Schantz's findings in "The House of Horror and the (Un)Mapped Situation," where he argues that when "an opportunity turns into a trap, when victory becomes defeat, [or] when home becomes a foreign country," the situational uncanny becomes a narrative engine that "undermines all confidence (3). Moreover, this project draws upon the insights of Nicholas Royle in his book *The Uncanny* (2003). Royle builds on Freud's definition of the "unheimlich" by emphasizing its pervasive and transgressive nature, as "it involves feelings of uncertainty… regarding the reality of who one is and what one is experiencing (1). Royle's exploration of the uncanny highlights its liminality, noting that it operates within a realm of instability where boundaries—whether between the conscious and the unconscious, the known and the unknown, the real and the imaginary—are consistently disrupted. This liminal quality of the uncanny renders it a particularly potent force within horror cinema, where the suspension of certainty is a central element of the genre's narrative and affective architecture. Furthermore, this research is anchored in affect theory, so as to support my inquiry into how the selected films elicit an immersive experience that integrates cognitive interpretation, affective sensations, and aesthetic enjoyment (Plantiga 140).

This thesis defies the assumption that horror measures its success "in terms of screams, fainting, and heart attacks in the audience" (Williams 5) by arguing that the genre actually thrives on the subtle distortion of everyday situations, which it then amplifies to create unease. Horror, thus, engages with situations in a way that magnifies their latent dangers and

vulnerabilities, not only through the grotesque and supernatural but through the unsettling transformation of the ordinary. I would go as far as to argue that the most unsettling moments in horror often arise not from the presence of monstrous entities, but from the subtle shifts in the dynamics of the most ordinary situations. A family dinner turns ominous with an offhand remark; a friendly encounter becomes thick with unspoken tension; an otherwise mundane home morphs into a site of invisible menace; it is in these shifts that horror reveals its intrinsic ability to expose the anxieties embedded in spaces regarded as safe and stable. Thus, I center domestic horror, in particular, because I find that the situations it arranges are *felt* before they are observed, with the uncanny as their most preeminent architect of suspense.

Domestic spaces, long associated with safety, routine, and intimacy, have always been fertile ground for both storytelling and analysis. These spaces—homes, kitchens, bedrooms—serve as more than physical structures; they are permeated with emotional and cultural weight that reflects societal values and personal histories. Within their walls, memories are etched, power dynamics are negotiated, and identities are shaped. Yet, the seemingly stable foundation of the domestic space belies its latent instability. In horror cinema, domestic settings assume a dual role: they are at once sanctuaries of comfort and containers of profound dread. The home, which "houses more than one might like to think" (Schantz 3), morphs into a place where boundaries blur, identities fragment, and the intrusion of external forces brings to the fore deep psychological anxieties. As such, the paradox of the home renders it a compelling locus for narrative and affective exploration. The idealization of the nuclear family and the suburban home, particularly in Western contexts, has been both a cornerstone of modern identity and a site of ideological critique. Horror films often exploit the fissures in this ideal, exposing the tensions, hypocrisies, and violences that underpin the chimera of domestic bliss. For instance, the home's

role as a repository of patriarchal authority, heteronormative expectations, and capitalist aspirations provides fertile ground for subversive storytelling. At the heart of this subversion dwells an affective register. Barker argues that the 'body' of the film and the viewer's body tend to exist in "a relationship of analogy and reciprocity" (77). Horror reflects this relatedness as it elicits a profound visceral response in its audiences by locking them into a state of discomfort or fear. This thesis argues that affective engagement with the audience is established through the affordances of the situation, which in turn makes the audience increasingly aware of the significance of that situation (Tan 30). Accordingly, the audience is made aware that home is not necessarily where the heart is; it can also be where horror lurks and the uncanny emerges.

The very familiarity of familial forces inside the home makes them "prone to uncanny returns" (Schantz 3), as it renders them metonyms for the subconscious and spaces where repressed truths and buried histories resurface. The uncanny emerges at the intersection between familiarity and estrangement and often "attacks the tension between the typical and the unique" (Schantz 2). In the context of horror, the uncanny manifests in the blending of the ordinary with the horrific—not as an external force but as a by-product of the situation itself. Indeed, the uncanny's transformation of the home into a labyrinthine space teeming with secrets, traumas, and spectral presences is highly situational; this disturbance often manifests through subtle dissonances this research will account for. The creak of a floorboard, a distorted reflection in a mirror, or the disquieting feeling that an empty house is somehow occupied— these are affordances of the narrative situation that reimagine the home as a site of contested meanings and a space where the boundaries between known and unknown, self and body are blurred. My study maintains that affective and spatial dynamics within the situation produce sustained uncanny effects. To expand on Frank et al's assertion that situation's "emergent quality erodes the

boundaries between the classical categories of narrative and lived experience" (662), this thesis does not just analyze horror films; it engages with the affective and political conditions they help us confront.

This interplay between domesticity and the uncanny is central to the films examined in this thesis: Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* (2019), Ari Aster's *Hereditary* (2018), and Jordan Peele's *Get Out!* (2017). As "neither plot nor character… sets these famous stories apart," but rather the concept of situation that allows "their essential contours to be distilled, recognized, and indeed, interpreted" (Frank et al 659), this thesis offers a new way of reading horror—not through what happens, but through how it feels to be there. I think about the films spatially, relationally, and affectively to show how situations can function as sites of resistance, critique, and uncanny intensity. In a world where the domestic is increasingly politicized—where home is both refuge and threat—these films remind us that horror is not always what arrives from outside. Sometimes, it is what is already there.

In the first chapter, I examine *Parasite* (2019) as a case study for the situational uncanny to demonstrate how Bong Joon-ho constructs economic and social instability through spatial and narrative design, particularly with his incorporation of a "secret architecture with unexpected accommodations" (Schantz 3). While the film has been widely analyzed for its critique of class struggle, this chapter explores how space is not merely a backdrop for inequality but the mechanism through which class divisions are enacted, negotiated, and violently ruptured, rendering them utterly horrifying. From the semi-basement apartment that traps the Kim family in partial visibility, to the opulent dining table where social roles are both performed and reinforced, to the hidden bunker that exposes class struggle as a subterranean battle for survival, *Parasite* mobilizes its settings to stage economic violence as both concealed and inevitable.

Thus, this chapter argues that the film's architecture does not merely reflect existing social hierarchies—it actively produces them, structuring the conditions of movement, concealment, and confrontation in an uncanny fashion.

Chapter two analyzes *Get Out!* (2017) to reveal how Jordan Peele constructs horror not through supernatural terror but through a series of uncanny situations that expose racialized structures of power. Frank et al mention this film as an example of how a situation such as that of "white people stealing the bodies of Black people" can "resonate as a full-blown allegory of American race relations" (661), but my project seeks to understand how the allegory itself becomes effective. Accordingly, and while *Get Out!* has been widely analyzed for its critique of liberal racism, my analysis focuses on how horror emerges from spatial and corporeal entrapments that progressively strip the protagonist of agency. The defining situation of *Get Out!* is also a "misrecognition," where progressive racial benevolence— the false admiration of Black exceptionalism—serves as a pretext for appropriation (Frank et al 672). Yet, I venture to trace three key spaces—the Armitage estate, the Sunken Place, and the commodified Black body—that formulate a racialized horror and implicate both its characters and audience in systemic power structures. The estate, initially framed as a space of liberal hospitality, is revealed as an apparatus of surveillance and containment; the Sunken Place visualizes the immobilization of Black subjectivity; and the commodification of the Black body exposes horror not as a transgression, but as the deliberate extraction of Black life. This chapter, hence, argues that *Get Out!* uses the situational uncanny not only to narrate a story of escape but to implicate its audience in the structures that render Black existence precarious.

My final chapter turns to *Hereditary* (2018), analyzing how the film uncannily transforms grief from an internalized emotional state into a situation of spatial and ontological rupture.

While *Hereditary* has been widely discussed for its psychological depth and occult themes, this chapter argues that grief is not just a personal trauma but a situational force that erodes agency, distorts time, and destabilizes bodily integrity in the film. While situation theory is concerned with situation's catalytic function as it triggers narrative motion, in this chapter, I focus primarily on how *Hereditary*'s horror often thrives in durational situations—those that trap characters and viewers alike in suspended affect. To achieve this, I study how the film warps temporality, entangling characters in cyclical hauntings that collapse past and present, inheritance and inevitability. I subsequently explore how the home becomes a stage for grief's suppression and violent resurgence. Finally, I examine the body as a site of horror where mourning manifests as a transformative, visceral process, culminating in possession as the ultimate dissolution of the self. This chapter ultimately contends that *Hereditary* situates grief as an uncanny condition—one that fractures perception, undermines autonomy, and renders reality itself unstable.

This project makes a significant contribution to the field of film studies by offering a nuanced exploration of the situational uncanny in contemporary horror cinema—a concept that has received limited attention in existing scholarship but wields immense potential. Frank et al. position situation primarily within narrative theory, and this thesis expands the discourse on situation by incorporating affective states—like grief, paranoia, and claustrophobia—as active forces that shape narrative space. These affects do not merely color the story—they structure its logic, its rhythm, and its stakes. Drawing on—and departing from—Schantz's reading of entrapment, my analysis insists on the materiality of domestic space as a site where affective forces such as grief, dread, and alienation become narratively generative. Accordingly, this project foregrounds situation not as a passive backdrop but as a volatile assemblage of spatial, emotional, and political tensions that immerse viewers in a perpetual state of anticipation (Frank

et al. 659; Barker 75). Moreover, while traditional approaches tend to treat the uncanny as a psychological or thematic concern, my account reconfigures it as an affectively charged and materially embedded condition—one that urges a revision of narrative theory itself, since the nuances of situation can "supply [what] otherwise eludes narrative analysis" (Frank et al. 663). Furthermore, by situating horror within broader socio-political landscapes, this thesis emphasizes that the situational uncanny is inextricable from the systemic structures it dramatizes—economic, familial, racial—where horror arises not from supernatural disruption but from the realization that these structures are inescapable. As Frank et al. argue, "one crucial role of narrative situations is to convey politics" (661); my intervention takes this further by attending to how domestic horror's architectural and affective textures stage political critique at the level of lived experience. Ultimately, the films under study confront viewers with a horror that is both intimate and collective—where the uncanny emerges from the everyday and implicates both personal terror and structural violence. I thus posit that the situational uncanny unfolding in contemporary horror cinema's domestic spaces informs our awareness of how we inhabit political worlds and shapes not only our spectatorial experience but our capacity for confrontation.

CHAPTER 1: Beneath the Surface: The Intrusion of the Uncanny in the Obscure Spaces of *Parasite* (2019)

In Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* (2019), set in Seoul, South Korea, the Kim family—clever yet impoverished—scrapes by in a cramped semi-basement apartment, folding pizza boxes for cash and stealing Wi-Fi to stay connected. Their home— a semi-basement apartment half-submerged below street level and known as 'Banjiha'— is both a refuge and a trap: it offers them just enough visibility of the world above to fuel their aspirations while keeping them firmly tethered to poverty. In stark contrast, the wealthy Park family lives in a sunlit architectural marvel: a spacious modernist mansion designed by a famous architect, where air, light, and privacy are abundant luxuries. This stark contrast between both the two domestic spaces reflects how, in the 'republic of apartments'[1], they are not mere housing units but determinants of one's wealth, class, and status (Lee 3). When Ki-woo, the Kim son, is offered a chance by his accomplished friend Min to substitute him as a tutor for the Parks' teenage daughter, it is not just a job opportunity but an opening into a world previously out of reach. Sensing a rare chance for economic mobility, the Kims orchestrate a careful infiltration of the house. While Ki-woo tutors the Parks' daughter, his sister, Ki-jung poses as an art therapist for the Parks' son; his father, Ki-taek, becomes the family's chauffeur; and his mother, Chung-sook, replaces the Parks' long-time housekeeper, Moon-gwang, through a calculated act of deception. For a time, their plan

[1] In her 2003 book, *Seoul, Giant city, Radiant citadels (Séoul, Ville Géante, Cités Radieuses*), Valérie Gelézeau notes that apartment complexes as emblems of Korea's "three-way preferential alliance among the government, chaebol (family-run conglomerates) and the middle class." Built quickly to accommodate urban growth, these structures left behind working class individuals who, instead, resided im semi-basement units. (19-51)

succeeds. The Kims revel in their access to the Parks' home, indulging in luxuries that do not belong to them, but the arrangement is never entirely stable. Their enjoyment is conspicuous, marked by an acute awareness—shared with the audience—that they are borrowing a lifestyle that can never truly be theirs (Schantz 7). The illusion shatters when Moon-gwang unexpectedly returns to the mansion while the Parks are away, revealing a hidden bunker beneath the house where her husband has been secretly living for years, surviving off the scraps of the Parks' excess. This discovery ignites a desperate struggle between the two working-class families, each vying for continued access to the Parks' home.

At first glance, the film frames them as parasites clinging to their hosts and siphoning off resources from those above them. Yet *Parasite* deliberately complicates this metaphor: just as the Kims and Moon-gwang's family depend on the Parks for survival, the Parks, too, rely on their workers' invisible labor to maintain their privileged existence. The true horror emerges not from one family exploiting another, but from a system that forces them into competition for scraps from the same table. As tensions escalate, the carefully constructed facade collapses into chaos during the Parks' son Da-Song's birthday party. The Kims' plan turns deadly when suppressed rage and class resentment erupt into a violent spectacle, leaving the Park patriarch, Geun-sae and Ki-jeong dead, Ki-woo injured, and Ki-taek forced into hiding within the very bunker that caused his plan to fall through. This climax not only epitomizes the 'Han' (한)[2] felt by the working-class families of but also fits into the uncanny notion of repressed emotions or

[2] Scholars describe this distinct emotion, passed down through generations among Koreans—some even suggesting it is ingrained in their DNA—as an all-consuming sense of bitterness. It is a complex blend of angst, endurance, and a longing for retribution that challenges the soul, characterized by profound sorrow and an enduring feeling of incompleteness, sometimes leading to tragic outcomes.

past traumas resurfacing unexpectedly. The film closes with Ki-woo imagining a future in which he can buy the Park mansion and free his father, but the weight of reality crushes this fantasy before it can take shape. The result is a darkly comic yet deeply tragic tale of class struggle that exposes not just the precarious foothold of the working class, but the uneasy dependencies that hold any stratified society together.

House(s) of cards: The Architecture of Inequality in Parasite

Parasite is a testimony to how the horror genre has increasingly embraced hybrid forms to engage with social and political anxieties; it stands as a landmark not only or its masterful blending of genres but for its incisive social critique. Blurring the boundaries between thriller, dark comedy, and horror, the film aligns with a growing wave of "social horror" that channels real-world tensions—such as economic precarity and class struggle—into unsettling narratives. In line with the recent wave of horror films that fuse psychological drama with class critique, such as *Us*, *Get Out!*, and *The Platform*, *Parasite* reconfigures domestic horror by transforming the home from a site of refuge into a battleground of concealed power struggles and creeping dread. At its core, *Parasite* exposes the stark inequalities perpetuated by capitalist systems, using the architectural and class divides between the Kim and Park families to literalize the chasm between privilege and deprivation. Kunkle sees this as a new way to illustrate how “capitalism veils its continual generation and re-appropriation of an excess, [and] one that paradoxically both connects and dismantles the link between surplus value and surplus enjoyment” (184). Thus, unlike traditional horror films that externalize their threats—monsters lurking in the dark, masked killers invading homes—*Parasite* embeds its horror within the everyday: in subterranean living spaces, exploitative service work, and the quiet humiliations of economic precarity.

In contemporary horror cinema, the home frequently serves as a battleground for anxieties surrounding security and the erosion of private life. The "home invasion" subgenre, in particular, exploits the tension between domestic stability and external threat. From the grotesque dismantling of family structures in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* to the spectral disruptions of *The Others*, these films align viewers with besieged homeowners, underscoring the terror of an intruder destabilizing the home's protective boundaries. Traditionally, such intrusions manifest through forceful ruptures, with an antagonist—human, supernatural, or hybrid—violently breaching the domestic perimeter. Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* engages with this framework but radically subverts it. Unlike classic home invasion films—The *Lonely Villa*, *Straw Dogs*, *Funny Games*, or *The Purge*—which position viewers alongside affluent homeowners under siege, *Parasite* aligns spectators with the intruders. The Kim family does not represent malevolent aggressors but rather victims of an entrenched class hierarchy who are forced into deception as a means of survival. This reconfiguration of home invasion tropes is inextricable from Bong's spatial manipulations. The Park family's modernist home, ostensibly a sanctuary of affluence, first operates as a performative space where the workers enact roles, producing an uncanny doubling of identity sustained by precarity. It then becomes a site of unearthing, where hidden depths—both literal and figurative—undermine surface-level order. This reliance on spatial disruption as a mechanism of horror aligns with broader theories of the uncanny while also lending itself to a structural study of film through the lens of situation. Here, the Park house is not merely a setting but a structuring force, mediating class relations and orchestrating their inevitable collision. As the narrative unfolds, spatial navigation transforms the home into an arena of deception, revelation, and violence, demonstrating how situation operates as a generative force within the film's uncanny framework.

Situational dynamics are thus central to *Parasite*'s narrative construction. Even the film's climactic sequence—structured around an elaborate performance of class hierarchy that erupts into violence—reinforces what Georges Polti identifies as the fundamental role of situation in shaping dramatic conflict (Frank et al. 660). In *Parasite*, spatial arrangements do not merely reflect class divisions; they actively produce them, generating conditions under which economic violence is both concealed and inevitable. My analysis will therefore focus on three primary spaces in *Parasite*—the bunker, the coffee table, and the semi-basement apartment—as key sites through which the film constructs its uncanny effects. Each of these spaces functions as a nexus of situational horror, where class dynamics are not only represented but enacted through spatial and affective disjunctions. By examining how these spaces structure both narrative and allegory, this chapter will demonstrate how *Parasite* mobilizes the situational uncanny to unsettle traditional spatial hierarchies, to expose the fragility of class boundaries, and to render the narrative politically effective because by channeling the affective. I will then conclude by commenting on how *Parasite* uses these situational dynamics to entangle individuals in their social positions and examining whether the promise of social mobility is a destructive illusion or an achievable prospect within the film's unforgiving social landscape.

Class-ified Secrets: The Parasitism of both the Bunker and the Bourgeoisie

Each situation that is weaved into the narrative of *Parasite* is layered with interpersonal conflict, class dynamics, and stakes that reinforce its central themes of inequality, invisibility, and the dysfunctional coexistence of privilege and deprivation. These situations often position opposing forces in direct confrontation, such as the Kims versus the Parks or the Kims versus Moon-gwang and her husband, which creates a series of escalating tensions. The stakes, initially grounded in the Kims' quest for financial stability through their infiltration of the Park

household, gradually intensify to encompass survival and existential collapse, culminating in the film's violent climax. To begin with, the general situation propelling the narrative of *Parasite* forwards, or at least the one presented overtly to the audience from the onset, is the Kims' gradual infiltration of the Park household. The Kims' carefully orchestrated deception, as they present themselves as unrelated, highly skilled professionals, contrasts with the Parks' naïve trust in their employees. The uncanny tension arises from the proximity of the two families: the Kims' intimate knowledge of the Parks' private lives erodes the boundary between familiarity and estrangement. While the Kims view the Park household as their only escape from poverty, and function "both as object (an object lacking its place) and as the excess thing that threatens to overflow and cross a line" (Kunkle 186), the Parks remain oblivious to the fragility of their privileged stability and themselves inadvertently rely on the very individuals deceiving them to maintain their ideal lifestyle— stakes are inextricably linked as the fulfillment of 'the good life' for each community is contingent upon the manipulated presence of the other. It is these stakes, centered on the Kims' need to maintain their deception and the Parks' dependency on this facade, that reveal how the domestic space becomes an arena for a conflict of interests, where the stability of one family hinges on the subjugation of the other.

From the outset, Bong Joon-ho's mise-en-scène establishes the Park residence as a near-impenetrable fortress of affluence. The house is perched on a hill, designed with sleek modernity and imposing minimalism. Its wide-open spaces, sharp angles, and glass walls convey a sense of transparency and order, suggesting a home where everything is meticulously curated and controlled. The Parks' residence seems, in many ways, impervious to the chaos of the world below, creating a sharp contrast with the Kim family's cramped, sub-basement apartment. Gradually, the notion of home as a secure, uncontested space is slowly undermined as the

narrative unfolds, especially through the lens of the working-class characters who find themselves within these walls. However, because as “plot simplifies and forecloses, situation complicates” (Schantz 7), an additional situation that also pre-existed the onset of the story comes to the forefront: Halfway through the film, when the wealthy Park family leaves for a camping trip, the Kims take the opportunity to stay at the house, indulge in its luxuries, and momentarily inhabit the roles of its rightful owners. The composition of this shot evokes parallels to the renowned depiction of The Last Supper as it similarly represents a final feast for the Kim family (Torres 8). However, their celebration is abruptly cut short by the arrival of Moon-gwang, the Parks’ former housekeeper, who pleads to be let inside under the pretense of retrieving something she left behind. The film’s use of situation as a mode of identification is central to this scene. Moon-gwang’s plea to Chung-sook is an attempt to appeal to her pathos since they both serv(ed) as housekeepers. However, as soon as it is revealed that Moon-gwang possesses knowledge that Chung-sook does not—namely, the existence of the hidden bunker—this bond collapses even as Chung-sook attempts to level the playing field by saying: “I know you must be startled, I would be too in this situation” (01:07:37-01:07:40). Moon-Gwang's secret knowledge of the basement fractures the seeming symmetry of their situations, exposing a deeper, hidden structure that reshapes our understanding of the house itself. As Schantz notes, situation initially serves as the primary means of narrative identification, but characters disrupt this process by fixating on what sets them apart rather than what unites them (6). Both situations laid out above could have potentially coexisted peacefully; had the parties involved set their differences aside, Geun-sae could have stayed in the bunker while the Kims proceeded with their performances in the Park house, and both collaborated to ensure their survival. In nullifying this

possibility, *Parasite* creates an uncanny effect where the characters' differences alter the plot in a way that makes it land in fresh situations (Schantz 1).

Once inside, she reveals the hidden entrance to an underground bunker where her husband has been secretly living for years, which exposes the Parks' house as a unit built on an "an uncanny foundation—quite literally" (Schantz 5). Todorov's narrative disequilibrium is established almost immediately when the Kims' infiltration ploy is set in motion, yet the discovery of the bunker represents the moment of true recognition of this imbalance, as the Kims emerge as the primary disruptors within the Park family's seemingly stable existence (Chandran et al 5565). Although it is undeniable that the bunker serves as a powerful metaphor for the buried class struggles and hidden labor that underlie the apparent stability of society, I argue that it moves beyond this to become the very nexus of the uncanny. Indeed, the discovery of the bunker reveals the discordant coexistence of two worlds—one of privilege and surface-level order, and the other of subjugation and hidden instability. *Parasite* literalizes the uncanny as a return of the repressed and the revelation of hidden forces within the familiar (Freud 16) through the man in the basement, whose concealed existence does not necessarily disrupt the stability of the Parks' home but that which the Kims have built for themselves within the home. Because the Parks' lives were unscathed by the presence of the bunker until the Kims got involved, the revelation that the house contains a secret inhabitant in the story does not reconfigure the situation per se, but it does imbue the narrative with an uncanny nuance. In fact, it forces a confrontation with what was always there but never seen, echoing Royle's assertion that the uncanny is an "unsettling encounter with the already known" — the 'already known' being that capitalism does not just create parasites (what the Kim family appears to be in the film), but that parasitism is actually a fundamental element on which capitalism is predicated (Kunkle 184).

To construct this uncanny atmosphere, particularly within the bunker, Bong Joon-ho employs meticulous stylistic contrasts that deepen the film's thematic tensions. The stark distinction between the bright, well-lit upstairs spaces and the dark, oppressive bunker beneath highlights the film's preoccupation with concealed truths and social stratification. While the Parks' home is bathed in warm, open lighting that enhances its sense of luxury and security, the bunker is cloaked in dim, suffocating shadows, mirroring the psychological and literal entrapment of those forced to live below. This interplay of light and dark does more than mark class divisions—it transforms the home into a layered space of secrets, where visibility equates to privilege, and darkness becomes a site of forced invisibility. The bunker's emptiness works in opposition to the luxurious, fully-furnished spaces of the Park family's home above; what is within reach in the bunker is rather an absence of furniture—nothing comfortable, no sense of home or hospitality. This exemplifies the uneven relational structures that underlie the film's social dynamics, structures that Michel Serres, in *The Parasite* (1980), reconceptualizes as constitutive rather than exceptional. Serres stands as the foremost theorist of parasitism, reconfiguring it not merely as a biological condition but as a structural principle that underlies systems of exchange, communication, and power. In *The Parasite* (1980), and by foregrounding asymmetry, interference, and appropriation as fundamental to any network—be it linguistic, social, or economic—Serres shifts our understanding of agency and dependency away from clear binaries of host and intruder. He asserts that "the host, the guest, breathes twice, speaks twice, speaks with forked tongue as it were … we don't know what belongs to the system, what makes it up, and what is against the system, interrupting and endangering it." (16) This instability is embodied in the Kim family's infiltration of the Park household, where deception blurs the lines between guest and host, parasite and host-body, insider and intruder. Yet, just as the system itself

enables their infiltration, the house's hidden basement reveals that what seems external and disruptive is, in fact, an intrinsic part of the structure—both sustaining and corrupting it at once. The space itself seems devoid of human presence, yet it is brimming with eroded identities and untold stories. The basement's near-complete lack of material goods signals not just a lack of wealth but a lack of recognition from society itself. Additionally, the sound design intensifies this uncanny effect, particularly in the bunker sequences. The diegetic sounds of footsteps echoing through the confined space create a precarious tension: every footstep below is a reminder of what might be heard above. When the Kims descend into the bunker, the ominous sound of their movements is not just eerie—it threatens exposure, reinforcing the instability of their carefully orchestrated deception. The uncanny unease hence grows from the instability of their position; at any moment, their presence could be discovered, not because of an active antagonist but because the house itself functions as a surveillance mechanism—doors creak, lights flicker, spaces conceal and reveal. In this way, *Parasite* renders the home not as a place of containment but as something porous, layered, and haunted by unseen presences. By the same token, since affect accumulates spatially to shape the very way bodies move through and inhabit space (Ahmed 64), the house itself appears to be *alive*—its hidden spaces operating like a subconscious mind which contains the buried class tensions that the Parks, and the upper class by extension, choose to ignore. The bunker is not merely a hidden room but rather a psychological abyss—one that threatens to consume those who descend into its depths and exhibits how a situation is "a genre of living that one knows one is in but that one has to find out about, [and] a circumstance embedded in life but not in one's control" (Berlant 195).

The verticality of the Park home itself becomes a key visual cue for class disparity, with the opulence of the upper floors contrasted against the darkness and decay of the underground.

These angles emphasize the precarious separation between those who live in the light and those who are relegated to the shadows. The illusion of wealth and stability is quite literally built on top of hidden suffering, creating an unsettling fragility—the deeper one descends, the more the façade of order is revealed as a thin surface masking buried desperation. The pacing and editing of the bunker sequences are also integral to the film's uncanny effect. When the bunker is first discovered, the viewer is given only fleeting glimpses of it, heightening the sense of mystery. The gradual unveiling of its full extent, both physically and symbolically, intensifies the unease. The shock of the reveal is compounded by the unsettling realization that the seemingly pristine Park home rests uneasily atop hidden depths of deprivation, transforming a space of luxury into one of latent horror. In addition, the bunker seems to operate as a kind of time capsule, but not in any nostalgic sense. Instead, it embodies decay—both physically and metaphorically. The shelves filled with expired food, the dampness of the walls, and the stale air suggest not just the deterioration of the space but also the erosion of human agency under socio-economic strain. When asked by Chung-sook, Oh Geun-sae can specifically recount that he has resided "4 years 3 months and 17 days" in the bunker. This, along with other particularities such as him crawling instead of walking up the stairs (01:12:24) and defending his comfort in the bunker by stating "I feels like I was born here. Maybe I had my wedding here" (01:22:45-01:22:52), suggests a deep entrenchment in his 'hidden' condition and attests to why his very sense of self seems to have gradually faded. Accordingly, this marker of entrapment underscores that the hidden space is not simply a place where time stands still; it is one where it quietly decays, almost imperceptibly.

In addition to these affordances, other narrative particularities valuable to this assessment continue to emerge as this sequence unfolds. For instance, a key detail that amplifies the uncanny occurs when Kim-taek engages in conversation with Oh Geun-sae. While the latter's discovery

provides a structural foundation for the uncanny, the idiosyncrasies of his demeanor, such as his ritualistic worship of the Park patriarch and his use of Morse code as a perverse form of communication, complicate a straightforward reading of him as a figure of pure desperation or concealment. He is not merely hiding to avoid detection; he exists in an uneasy coexistence with the space above him, oscillating between the invisible and the overtly spectral. Moreover, as we take stock of the situation and vital details come to light, a 'doppelgänger effect' between Mr. Kim and Geun-sae is exposed not just a broad structural parallel but as a culmination of specific spatial and narrative conditions of the Park house. This same uncanny effect is established in the early stages of the film between Min—the "impressive friend [and] college student [who has] a real vigor" (06:48-06:53) — and Ki-woo who forges his school documents but confidently asserts: "I don't think of this as forgery or crime. I'll go to this university next year…I just printed out the document a bit early" (11:55-12:08). For Ki-taek and Geun-sae, however, their correlation is clearer. Their existence on the fringes on society, their emasculation, and their shared subterranean existence which Geun-sae expresses by saying "lots of people live underground, especially if you count semi-basements" when Kim-taek asks him "how do you live in a place like this?" (01:22:26-01:22:35) are conditions that actively produce their uncanny resemblance. Mr. Kim and Geun-sae therefore function as uncanny doubles—both are displaced men existing in the margins of the Park household, unseen yet dependent on its wealth. Even further, Geun-sae represents Mr. Kim's possible future, that is, a man who has fully descended into literal and figurative darkness. Their uncanny resemblance becomes disturbing because it is not just metaphorical but situational: The house itself produces this doubling by structuring visibility and invisibility. The ultimate horror is that Mr. Kim, by the film's end, does not just resemble his doppelgänger—he becomes him.

***Traps and Transformation: Can the Tables Really Turn*?**

Much scholarly discourse has positioned *Parasite* as an allegory for late capitalism, emphasizing its clear division between the rich and the poor. My project does not discredit this reading but rather recognizes it as a context, that is, a "category of remote understanding," before filtering it through situation, which is "a category of immediate experience" (Frank et al. 666). While context provides a broad thematic framework, it does not fully account for the film's affective intensity; centering it risks undermining the importance of situation and making class struggle seem like an abstract and totalizing condition. Yes, the film revolves around the hidden man in the basement, but its affective centerpiece—the scene in which the Kim family hides under the Parks' living room table—most forcefully translates its political allegory. The suffocating tension in this scene is not merely a moment of narrative suspense but a deeply corporeal confrontation with power, hierarchy, and the disorienting instability of social positions. To fully grasp the affective stakes of this moment, it is essential to lay out the spatial arrangement and structure of the scene: As the tension culminating from the discovery of the bunker escalates, with both families trying to subdue each other to avoid exposure, the situation takes a critical turn when the Parks unexpectedly return home due to a storm. The Kims scramble to hide: Ki-taek, Ki-woo, and Ki-jung squeeze underneath the large wooden coffee table in the living room, barely inches away from where Mr. and Mrs. Park settle onto the couch. Chung-sook, who remains aboveground, barely manages to compose herself and blend back into her role as the housekeeper. Here, the frame tightens as they press their bodies against the cold floor, limbs folded uncomfortably, their breaths shallow. The Parks, oblivious to the intruders lurking mere feet away, first engage in casual conversation until they decide to sleep on the couch in order to supervise their son who spends his night in a tent outside. The camera oscillates between

framing the parks on the couch and a low-angle perspective on the Kims, emphasizing the crushing weight of the Parks' presence. When Mr. Park offhandedly describes Ki-taek's scent as "subway-like," which is a quiet but cutting marker of class difference, Ki-taek's face, partially illuminated by the glow of the living room lamp, tightens almost imperceptibly. His expression flickers between humiliation and something more difficult to name, and which perhaps resonates with Korean viewers who might conceive this feeling as Han (한). This latter is not only a quiet rage that simmers beneath the surface but also a silent endurance in the face of deep humiliation that is significant in South Korean culture— a wound on the Korean body carved by a history of colonization, cultural divides and collective suffering (Kang). Ki-woo and Ki-jung, pressed beside their father, lock their gazes on some fixed point beyond the frame. Their enforced stillness transforms the space into a site of oppressive suspense where proximity itself becomes a source of dread. The uncanny in this scene is not simply about concealment but about the destabilization of space and subjectivity. Their forced stillness transforms the space into a zone of suffocating suspense, where even the smallest movement could collapse the fragile illusion of separation. The scene distills class oppression into bodily experience—Ki-taek's stillness, the stifled breath of his children, the weight of the Parks above them, utterly unbothered. In particular, the coffee table, an object typically associated with casual domesticity, becomes a site of perverse inversion—rather than gathering people together, it functions as a shield, dictating an oppressive physical hierarchy. Class boundaries are therefore viscerally enforced not through direct violence but through the impossibility of movement—the Kims must remain still while the Parks, completely unaware, discuss their odor and status. Thus, their silent, immobilized bodies are not merely reacting to the oppressive gaze of the Parks but are also undergoing a transformation, that is, a visceral affective experience that Massumi describes as the

'intensification of the body's potentiality' in response to external stimuli (86). This shift from being seen to being trapped magnifies the feeling of powerlessness in a way that transcends narrative explanation. More than a plot device, this scene distills the film's spatial uncanny into an experiential event shaped by forced performance—one that embodies the crushing asymmetry of social power through proximity, surveillance, and imposed invisibility. The affective stakes in this moment transform the film from a class satire into an oppressive horror, where tension is drawn from the very bodily act of remaining undetected.

Moreover, the unbearable tension of the scene is not merely visual but auditory. The Parks, oblivious to the Kims' presence beneath them, first engage in idle conversation. But as their conversation turns intimate, the scene takes on an excruciating duality—above the table, Mr. and Mrs. Park begin a slow, languid foreplay, while beneath it, the Kims remain frozen in suffocating stillness. The contrast is palpable: the Parks, cushioned in their privilege, begin having sex. Entirely unaware that their bodies hover mere inches above the intruders, the sound of their pleasure amplifies in the silence of the living room. Beneath the table, the Kims remain frozen, pressed together in suffocating stillness. Every breath must be controlled, every slight shift a potential disaster. Ki-taek, Ki-woo, and Ki-jung—who, just hours earlier, moved through the Park home with unchecked ease—are now paralyzed, reduced to mere bodies pressed against the hardwood floor, their physical proximity to the Parks at once unbearably close and impossibly distant. The scene's horror is not just in the risk of discovery but in the sheer helplessness of the Kims' position: trapped beneath the couple's most private moment, forced into an unbearable intimacy that highlights the stark divide between the two families. In this moment, the Kims are not simply concealing themselves from the Parks but also performing a complex role as silent observers and positioning themselves as passive recipients of a social

order they both navigate and exploit. A quirk I found fascinating with this scene is the fact that Bong teases the viewer with a moment of equivalence between the Kims and Parks. Earlier in the film, the Parks condemn their former chauffeur for engaging in sexual relations with a woman they deem to be a drug addict, casting him as both morally degraded and socially inferior. However, not only was this a direct culmination of the daughter's manipulation scheme, this moral outrage is then starkly juxtaposed by the subscene, where the Parks not only adopt but eroticize the very dynamic that they had previously derided. As Mrs. Park begins to enact a persona of promiscuity, effectively stepping into the role of the "fallen woman" they had once scorned, the situation itself destabilizes. Indeed, this not only exposes the hypocrisy of their class-based values but also transforms their earlier disdain into an intimate, charged enactment of the very roles they had previously sought to control or dismiss. This shift from condemnation to fetishization represents a key moment, where external forces (in this case, class and moral judgment) intersect with internal psychological dynamics (desires, fantasies, and repression) to create a tension that disrupts the stability of the situation. The uncanny emerges as both an affective and narrative force in this instance, as the Parks' own situation—one rooted in apparent moral superiority—unravels, revealing a hidden, unsettling desire that mirrors the very exploitation they once scorned. Through this reversal, the film not only critiques the class system but also shows how situations—shaped by power, sexuality, and social norms—can expose the contradictions within individuals and their relationships. As the Park couple hypocritically replace their repulsion with a fetishization of the scenario, they are quite literally "one soiled laundry item away from the Kims… [and] neither family [seems] invulnerable to eruptions of the repressed unconscious" (Ridgeway 793).

In the same vein, the table scene in *Parasite* intricately manipulates the dynamics of spectatorship by inviting the viewer into a multilayered act of watching that generates another distinct form of the uncanny. The arrangement of seeing and being unseen exacerbates the horror: As the Kims watch the Parks in their unaware leisure, they are simultaneously watched by the audience, who, in turn, becomes complicit in the unfolding tension. This voyeuristic dynamic shifts the power of observation—the Kims, who had been manipulating their roles in the Park household to their advantage, are now stripped of any agency and reduced to passive, unseen witnesses to an interaction they cannot escape. The Parks, in contrast, luxuriate in their self-unconscious pleasure, oblivious to the fact that their privacy is an illusion. This contrast underscores the ways in which privilege operates: The Parks can afford to be unguarded in their own home, while the Kims—despite their physical presence—are rendered invisible, their bodies crammed into the smallest possible space. The audience's role as witness is further complicated by the social commentary embedded in the scene: As we observe the Kims' hidden fear, we also implicitly become aware of our own complicity in a system that marginalizes the vulnerable. In this sense, the scene not only evokes the traditional horror trope of the unknowingly observed but also critiques the broader socio-political structures of power, class, and visibility that shape the relationships between the film's characters and, by extension, the viewer's relationship to them. Indeed, films, as autonomous entities with their own "muscular bodies," possess the capacity to either draw the audience in or distance them, while viewers also decide to either approach the narrative or resist its pull, creating a dynamic interplay of engagement (Barker 72). In this scene, *Parasite* skillfully positions the viewer in an in-between space, where the physical proximity of the Kims' bodies under the table both invites empathy and maintains a degree of separation. On one hand, the tight, confined framing of the Kims under the table, along with the heightened

physical tension in their bodies, draws us in by making us experience their discomfort and fear, aligning us with their vulnerability. On the other hand, the suspenseful, almost voyeuristic nature of the scene, coupled with the implied class divide and the sense of watching rather than participating, creates a sense of distance. The viewer is positioned at once as an empathetic observer, experiencing the characters' tension, while also maintaining a critical, distanced awareness of the socio-political dynamics at play. As such, this scene exemplifies how particular situations crystallize the film's larger forces at play by transforming abstract class dynamics into deeply affective, spatial experiences. Barker's conception of the relationship between the film and the audience as being expressed "through movement, comportment, and gesture, [and] in the way they carry themselves through the world" (69) illuminates how the physical confinement of the characters' bodies—tense, contorted, and restricted—mirrors both their emotional strain and the broader socio-economic tensions in the film. This tactile engagement not only conveys the characters' fear and vulnerability but also immerses the viewer in the experience, making the psychological weight of class struggle viscerally felt through the characters' physicality.

Tension continues to brew as the Kims remain trapped beneath the coffee table for a while, with every breath measured and every shift in position a gamble. Outside, the rain drums against the wide windows almost as a steady metronome to their anxious wait. The contrast between the rhythmic, steady sound of the rain and the palpable stillness within the room heightens the sense of suspense. Rain traditionally symbolizes cleansing or renewal, but here, it becomes an ironic marker of inaction, as the Kims are too afraid to move. It also deepens the temporal disorientation: In a way, the Kims are caught in a limbo where time moves forward but they remain stuck, waiting for the opportune moment to act. The rain almost mocks their inertia, providing a sharp contrast to the frenetic energy required for their eventual escape. When the

Parks finally fall asleep, the Kims, drenched in sweat, begin their slow exodus. Ki-jung is first, unfolding herself in increments, careful not to let her stiff joints betray her with a crack. Ki-woo follows, slipping out like a shadow. As Ki-Taek attempts to leave, the Parks' son flashes a light and wakes his parents up. Mr. Kim freezes while his head is still bowed, his body rigid, and he is lying on the ground half hidden, half exposed like a man awaiting judgment. Ki-taek's stillness here is one of the most haunting moments in the scene, and itself constitutes a micro-situation and a microcosm of broader class dynamics. Even his position evokes the ambiguity of a person caught between submission and defiance; his rigid, kneeling form echoes both submission and resistance (refusing to reveal himself fully, as though hiding his true nature). In fact, in his frozen state, he seems to exist at the edge of visibility as a symbolic figure of both the hidden and the revealed. Ultimately, as if miraculously, the Parks turn away and Ki-taek rises at last and crosses the room, with his steps soundless and his pulse deafening. When the door finally shuts behind them, the night swallows them whole, sending them into the floodwaters below. They have escaped, but what was left behind lingers—the smell, the shame, the knowledge that their existence is only ever one slip away from exposure.

The Tidal Forces of Fate: The Significance of the Semi Basement

The opening scenes of *Parasite* offer a striking visual and spatial introduction to the Kim family's semi-basement apartment— a setting that is rendered emblematic of the liminal nature of their social position. The camera moves through the cramped, dimly lit space with a deliberate slowness, capturing the low ceilings and small, ground-level windows that allow only faint slivers of light to filter in. The apartment is claustrophobic, and its confined nature is further exacerbated by the disarray within; mismatched furniture, cluttered surfaces, insects and a sense of accumulated neglect pervade the space. This space, half-exposed and half-buried, serves as

both a literal and metaphorical threshold between two realms: the upper-class world of the Parks, just a stone's throw away, and the invisible, often forgotten lower-class strata. The semi-basement also operates as a spatial allegory of the Kim family's liminality: just as the apartment is neither fully within the light nor fully submerged, so too are the Kims caught in a state of perpetual in-betweenness. Their aspirations, while visible, are always in tension with the structural forces that seek to keep them confined to the margins. In this sense, the semi-basement apartment functions as an uncanny space—a literal microcosm of the larger social landscape in which the Kims' movements are constrained by forces both internal and external. This cramped dwelling positioned at the bottom of a hill also has a street-level window that exposes them to both opportunity and humiliation. This vantage point is crucial; when a passing drunk urinates outside their apartment, and when they are exposed to fumigation, the Kims are not simply at the bottom of a socioeconomic hierarchy in the abstract, but their living space quite literally subjects them to degradation. Such spatial dynamics embody societal stratification, reinforcing our understanding of their structural subjugation. The film's spatial logic also extends to character movement, carefully orchestrating the limits of each figure's ascribed agency. The Kims must always ascend from their semi-basement home to enter the world of the Parks, only to descend again at the end of each day, while the Park family almost never descends within their own house. This vertical movement—or lack thereof—visually underscores the inequitable dynamics at play (Chandran et al. 5566). The Parks remain insulated from downward movement and detached from the struggles of those below, while the Kims' mobility is conditional, requiring labor and deception to be sustained. As such, beyond the bunker and the coffee table, *Parasite* constructs its situational uncanny through another defining space: the Kims' semi-basement apartment which the film revisits in less than fortunate circumstances as the table scene

continues to unfold. In fact, immediately after they creep out from under the Parks' table, the Kims are forced to deal with a devastating reality: The rain that earlier seemed merely atmospheric has seeped through every crack in their semi-basement apartment. The flood that inundates the Kim family's home transcends a mere physical disaster to become a critical juncture in the film—a moment of radical physical disruption that symbolically encapsulates the volatility of class mobility and the systemic forces that govern it.

This unraveling of their socio-economic aspirations, made all the more pronounced in the flood, is underscored by Ki-taek's remark to his son that the "kind of plan that never fails [is] no plan at all" (01:39:39-01:39:50). This statement of resignation contrasts with his initial strategic approach— which we understand from his family members constantly asking him "what's the plan?" (02:17) and him questioning Geun-sae "you don't have a plan?" (01:22:36) —to convey the psychological toll of a lifetime of thwarted attempts to rise above their circumstances. It is not merely a moment of defeat but an internal recognition that in such a situation—one defined by chaos and unpredictability—the notion of planning for a better life is futile. The flood does not allow for strategic thinking, as the external situation overwhelms any possibility of control or foresight. This nihilism in Ki-taek's statement illustrates a fatalism shaped by their inability to control their situation and the reality that it is therefore unwise to invest in the idea of social mobility—an illusion that is washed away as quickly as the water floods their home (Annis 4). Consequently, the Kims' flood experience—triggered by a sudden and uncontrollable force—does not just destroy their home but destabilizes their sense of identity and their place in the world. In the flood's aftermath, there is no space for recovery or return to the status quo.

The shared experience of vulnerability in the face of the flood is crucial to understanding its situational power. As Frank et al. contend, the expansion of a situation creates shared

experiences that amplify affective resonance (Frank et al. 664). In *Parasite*, this expansion is witnessed in the way the flood affects not just the Kims but their neighbors as well, signaling that the forces that shape the Kims' social fragility are not unique but part of a larger system of systemic vulnerability. Thus, the flood represents both a specific event (a localized flood affecting the Kim family's home) and a larger, more generalized condition (systemic poverty and vulnerability). The uncanny quality of the flood thus resides in the way it blurs the distinction between the subjective experience of the Kims and the objective forces that shape their world, as articulated by Kim-taek himself who tells his son: "look around. did these people think let's all spend the night in the gym? But look now, everyone is sleeping on the floor, *us included*" (01:40:00-01:40:15). As the floodwaters encroach, and with no plan in sight and no means of escaping the forces of nature or the forces of class that bind them, the Kims are forced to *wait*. This waiting serves as a pivotal situation in itself— a situation which underscores their precarious social position and systemic vulnerability and wherein "the problem of time—if nothing else—is always at stake" (Frank et al 664). The flood forces the family into a state of stasis, where their passivity is not merely a response to a natural disaster but a reflection of their broader social entrapment. As the floodwaters rise, the Kims are forced into a state of passive endurance, their waiting shaped not by choice but by circumstance. Trapped in the submerged remnants of their home, they do not simply wait for the waters to recede but for the possibility of stability that remains perpetually deferred.

The flood scene in *Parasite* introduces a profound disruption not only in the physical environment but also in the Kims' experience of time and agency, marking a dramatic shift from the more controlled tension of earlier scenes. Unlike the coffee table or bunker moments, where the characters are still able to plan, react, and project themselves into the future, the flood is an

unstoppable force that eliminates any sense of control over time. This temporal disruption halts the linear progression of their lives, rendering any forward momentum—whether social or economic—impossible. The flood accelerates the narrative by forcing the characters to abandon any sense of future planning, with survival becoming at stake. It is in this sudden break from the ordinary passage of time that the film aligns with the concept of situation. The bunker, as analyzed previously, represents a carefully constructed, concealed space that houses secrets and social transgressions; what was once hidden is now exposed, and vice versa. The tension of that situation revolves around control, knowledge, and secrecy. In contrast, the flood does not allow for control. It offers no secrets to be uncovered or protected. The Kims' semi-basement is fully exposed to nature's forces, and in this scene, their psychological and social vulnerability is pushed to the surface. There is no hidden space to retreat into. In sum, the flood is not merely an allegory of social inequality, but a situational force that confronts the Kim family with the brutal reality of their vulnerability.

From Rags to Ruin: The (Im)possibility of Social Mobility in Parasite

Bong Joon-ho puts forth a social narrative that unfolds as a dense, suffocating web of systemic forces, where every attempt to escape or transcend the confines of class is a futile pursuit, consumed by an ever-tightening grip. While the narrative concept of situation focuses more on "iterative rules, conventions, and norms" than character-centric dynamics, as a relational field, it frequently does include both (Frank et al. 4). Central to this analysis is, accordingly, Ki-woo—a character whose potential for upward mobility is marked not by optimism, but by the relentless weight of class immobility. The tragedy of Ki-woo is that his hopes for escape are built on the fragile scaffolding of his intelligence and adaptability, which are qualities that should—within the framework of meritocratic ideals—lead to success. After all,

Mrs. Park was just as impressed by Ki-woo's talent as she was with Min. In this vein, the only difference between Ki-woo and his friend is that the latter has the financial resources to attend college, which is precisely why "Min wouldn't be in [his] situation" (01:34:10). It becomes apparent that he feels responsible for—and by extension capable of—saving his family from poverty, as exhibited in his interaction with his father after the flood where he says, "I'm sorry…For everything" (01:40:50-01:40:55). As such, the film invites us to believe, for a fleeting moment, that Ki-woo might defy the situation through sheer will, as he successfully enters the world of the wealthy Park family. This, however, is not the mark of success but the beginning of an insidious illusion: His misguided belief that social mobility is attainable and that, through wit and adaptability, one can overcome the immobility of class. To illustrate, Ki-woo repeats the phrase "this is so metaphorical" twice in the film to describe, first, the scholar's rock and, second, the start of the infiltration scheme. This reveals his attraction to abstract meaning, which is ambitious but also a sign of his situational naiveté; Ki-woo misreads the forces at play, for the irony lies in the fact that reality of the situation acts less like a *metaphor* and more like an *indifferent structure*. The film repeatedly draws us back into this awareness that the potential for mobility is forever closed off through the pronounced uncanniness of the situations that the characters grapple with. However, this tragedy reaches its fullest expression when Ki-woo sustains a head injury following the violent turn of the narrative's climax—an injury that renders him incapable of intellectual and emotional regeneration. This is not simply a physical wound; it is a symbolic marker of the irreversible destruction inflicted by the very hope he clung to. His fate is not death but seems to be something crueler: survival without the faculties that once made escape imaginable. His laughter, detached and unmoored from meaning, signals not resilience but cognitive diminishment—the ultimate confirmation that the system does not merely suppress

but permanently incapacitates. His hope, then, is conceivably the true parasite of the film; it feeds on his delusions of upward mobility and tethers him to a Sisyphean cycle of pushing a boulder that will never crest the hill. In *Parasite*, Bong Joon-ho therefore draws a complex portrait of the neoliberal dream, where class ascendancy is framed not as a utopian possibility but as a cruel mirage—a cruel optimism that remains forever out of reach[3].

While Ki-woo's narrative arc articulates the false hope of social mobility in the film's situational framework, Ki-Jung's character provides a contrasting, though equally tragic, lens through which I reveal the film's insistence on conveying the impossibility of class transition. Her effortless adaptability and keen intelligence render her an ideal candidate for upward mobility. This sentiment is verbally expressed by Ki-woo when he tells her "you fit in here. The rich house suits you, not like us" (01:01:00-01:01:14), whereas he doubts his belonging to such a space and resorts to asking Dae-sung: "In this setting, do I fit in?" (01:46:36). However, her own tragic fate also reveals her to be an embodiment of a fatal flaw at the heart of the system. Ki-Jung's ability to seamlessly slip into the role of an art therapist for the Park family is at first a victory—a moment where it seems that she too, like her brother, might rise above the poverty that has defined their lives. Her death, as a result, feels inevitable—a symbolic retribution for her attempt to move between classes, where she is punished not for any personal failing but for the singular transgression of successfully navigating the insurmountable barrier that is class. Ki-Jung's demise is not merely physical; it is a punctuating death of the class fluidity myth, exposing the rigid, unyielding nature of the system and rendering her body the vessel for the

[3] I borrow the term "cruel optimism" from Lauren Berlant, who defines it as a condition in which individuals remain attached to fantasies of the good life that are structurally unattainable, leading to "toxic" ongoing cycles of desire and frustration (24).

social order's reassertion of its power. Her attempt to escape or transcend class boundaries is not simply thwarted; it is violently erased.

Meanwhile, Ki-taek is a central element in almost every situation driving the narrative, for "it is in the forms his punishment takes that we find some of the fullest expressions of the situation" (Frank et al 670). The father's suffering is of a different order—his humiliation is more visceral—more bodily. He is the ultimate reflection of how the film exposes the myth of economic mobility not through overt political messaging but by structuring its narrative around perpetual cycles of striving and inevitable collapse. In this respect, his precarity becomes significantly more than economic; his vulnerability is structural, and various practices imposed on him mobilize this instability in unprecedented ways (Berlant 192). Unlike his children, who demonstrate wit and adaptability, he is bound to a servile role that denies even the dignity of detachment. The chauffeur position, unlike housework or tutoring, requires prolonged proximity to the master, enforcing an intimacy that sharpens his subjugation. It is no coincidence that his defining humiliation stems from "a smell [that] crosses the line" (01:28:19) according to Mr. Park—an inescapable marker of class that signals contamination within shared space. His degradation is made absolute in the table scene, where he is not only demeaned in front of his family but also rendered completely inert and forced to bear witness as his authority dissolves. The Park patriarch, on the other hand, embodies a classical master figure, detached from his own household yet retaining full authority over it—an echo of South Korea's rigid patriarchy, where power structures remain intact even when their foundations are hollow. This detachment extends to his interpersonal relationships with his workers, in which he delineates clear lines that must not be transgressed. He approves of Moon-gwang, because "she knew never to cross the line" (47:22), and overlooks the infringement caused by Ki-tae's smell because although the latter

"always seems about to cross the line, he never does cross it" (01:28:05-01:08:10). Mr. Park maintains this standard in a way that makes them not only perspicuous but revered by those around him. After all, the man in the basement worships him and not his wife, as if instinctively recognizing that even in absent engagement, class and gender hierarchies remain immutable under an order shaped by Confucian principles[4] (Shim 146). Within the Kim family, by contrast, power is evenly distributed—not out of ideological commitment but by necessity. They function as equals because inequality within their own unit would serve no purpose, which produces its own uncanny effect since it defies traditional familial roles in South Korea (Myung-hye 62). And yet, rather than a triumph, this equality reads as failure, particularly for the father, who has been lowered to the level of his wife and children rather than rising above them, and whose bodily degradation transcends the material and becomes a symbol of the ways in which social structures inscribe their violence upon the very flesh of the marginalized. Indeed, his humiliation is economic, corporal, and further amplified by the presence of his children as the Parks complain about his body odor (Schantz 7). This moment is not just a rejection of Ki-taek's body; it is a profound act of emasculation, stripping him of the last vestiges of dignity he might have clung to and framing his lack of dominance as inability to become the patriarch that the structure demands—that his boss demands. Yet, as Butler argues, to seek recognition is not merely to ask for affirmation of what one already is but to "solicit a becoming, to instigate a transformation, to

[4] Confucianism is a philosophical and ethical system that emphasizes hierarchical social harmony through filial piety, ritual propriety, and moral cultivation, and which deeply influenced Korean culture upon its institutionalization during the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897). It essentially reinforces class distinctions by valuing deference to authority and gender hierarchy by prescribing patriarchal roles where women's virtue is linked to obedience and men's to leadership.

petition the future always in relation to the Other…to stake one's own being, and one's own persistence in one's own being, in the struggle for recognition" (24). Ki-taek does not just want to be acknowledged—he wants to be reconstituted so as to emerge as something more than the degraded figure Mr. Park reduces him to. In the end, however, his status as patriarch is not only questioned; it is extinguished, as the only transformation available to him within this rigid class structure is one of further descent, not ascent. His final act of violence is a desperate assertion of agency—an attempt to rupture the cycle of humiliation that has defined him. And yet, instead of liberation, he undergoes a new transformation into a ghostly, subterranean figure, erased from society altogether.

Because the film presents a tragic cycle where the characters seem perpetually caught within their socio-economic positions, Berlant's concept of "situation tragedy" provides a useful framework for understanding this dynamic. According to Berlant, characters in a situation are doomed to express their flaws repetitively and are trapped within a system that offers no resolution, growth, or escape (6). In *Parasite*, both the Kim and Park families embody this form of tragic repetition as they are driven by the survival tactics necessitated by their respective class positions. The Kims, despite their ingenuity and desperate attempts to infiltrate the Park family's world, remain bound by the inescapable class divisions that define their existence. The Parks, in turn, remain blissfully unaware of the systemic inequalities around them, reinforcing the stasis in which both families are locked. Although the narrative does make Mr. Park pay for his ignorance with his violent death, this does not resolve the larger social issues at play in the film but rather serves as a moment of reckoning. From this perspective, the true tragedy in *Parasite* lies not in the characters' individual flaws but in the larger, unyielding systems that perpetuate their suffering. Bong Joon-ho hence complicates the typical "situation tragedy" by positioning Ki-

woo's hope as both a reflection of human resilience and a tool of the very forces that keep him oppressed. This manifests by the same token in Chung-sook's survival; the mother is the one who emerges most unscathed, which is arguably a direct result of a realism that she showcases from the onset of the movie when she asserts that "Food would be better" (08:10) than the scholar's rock that Min gifts to the Kim family. Ultimately, while the film frequently opts to resolve tension by rescuing the individuals in peril, by ultimately embracing a conservative conclusion, it ensures that no one force—whether character, plot, setting or audience —can untangle itself from the situation's narrative web. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily negate or thwart the effectiveness of the film's political allegory; on the contrary, it bolsters it.

The uncanny situation, as explored in my thesis, thrives in narrative spaces that resist full resolution and where tension and discomfort persist, and in situations that "[deliver] the stakes of a narrative, stakes that need not be framed individually or with reference to specific outcomes" (Frank et al 661). Accordingly, I maintain that the circular shape of *Parasite*'s storyline—since it ends exactly where it begins, with a shot of Ki-woo in the semi-basement—along with its open-endedness, serve two critical functions. First, it taps into an uncanny sensation by extending the characters' predicaments beyond their personal fates and allowing their situations to reverberate within the larger societal structure; this dynamic ensures that the narrative feels unnervingly alive. Second, the tragic conclusion facilitates political engagement by keeping these unresolved tensions in the foreground. D.A. Miller asserts that the narratable, as the unstable engine of narrative, stands in opposition to closure and cannot be fully resolved by it (266). Similarly, my thesis contends that the uncanny situation functions as Miller's narratable: A dynamic force that drives the narrative forward and resists final resolution, regardless of the narrative's closure, and instead centers "the narrative possibilities of the situations themselves" (Frank et al 675). In fact,

just by “having Mr. Kim replace the man in the basement [be] an unresolved situation” (Schantz 8), *Parasite* compels the audience to confront ongoing issues of social inequality, class conflict, and systemic oppression. While a neat and/or hopeful denouement might provide relief or catharsis for the audience, the film's open-ended conclusion maintains its emotional and thematic impact, encouraging further reflection on its complex social issues long after the credits roll. As a result, *Parasite* aligns closely with my understanding of the uncanny situation as both an affective narrative engine and a political tool. The unresolved narrative mirrors the cyclical, unending nature of oppression, which does not simply vanish with the film's conclusion. It reflects how marginalized communities remain entrapped in systemic structures that endure beyond individual conflicts. I therefore interpret this lack of closure as a deliberate refusal to offer false hope or comfort and to, instead, urge the viewer to engage critically with the broader political implications of the narrative in real life.

CHAPTER 2: *Get Out!* of the Situation: Black Bodies, White Spaces, and the Politics of Escape.

Jordan Peele's *Get Out!* (2017) does not wait to unsettle—it immediately hurls the audience in a situation structured by racialized horror. Indeed, the film's opening sequence enacts a dislocation that is both physical and psychological: A lone Black man—later identified as Andre Hayworth—navigates a quiet, affluent American suburb at night. His presence is marked by an implicit contrast to his predominantly White surroundings, and his own awareness of this disparity is palpable. When a white car enters the frame, its slow, deliberate movements evoke a creeping inevitability. The tension crystallizes as a masked figure emerges, overpowering Andre and forcing him into the vehicle. The sequence concludes with an image of enforced captivity, establishing the film's central preoccupation with power, knowledge, and entrapment. The narrative then transitions to Chris Washington, an African American photographer, and his White girlfriend, Rose Armitage, as they embark on a weekend trip to her family estate. This shift in register is strategic: The car, previously a vehicle of abduction, now facilitates intimacy and comfort. Their journey through a seemingly pastoral landscape initially suggests tranquility, but subtle unease lingers in Chris's guarded demeanor. A sudden rupture occurs when they collide with a deer—an event that both foreshadows and thematizes disruptions to come. The encounter with a police officer further underscores the film's engagement with systemic power, as Chris is subjected to an unnecessary ID check despite not being the driver. Rose intervenes, leveraging her racial privilege in a performative act of defiance, yet the moment reinforces Chris's precarity instead of alleviating it.

Upon arrival at the Armitage estate, the setting is deceptively warm, its affluence projecting security. However, an uncanny undercurrent is immediately present. The Armitages'

excessive hospitality and self-congratulatory liberalism mask an unnerving scrutiny. The disconcerting nature of their comments and interactions are "initially chalked up to awkwardness and perhaps liberal exoticism of racial difference," but eventually the truth begins to surface: Chris is not simply welcomed; he is observed, appraised and commodified (Henry Jr 334). The presence of Georgina and Walter, the Black housekeepers, intensifies this dissonance. Their expressions are vacant, their gestures unnervingly stilted, and their presence evokes a historical resonance that Chris intuits but cannot yet articulate. The film's psychological horror escalates through a series of increasingly intrusive encounters. Missy, Rose's mother, subjects Chris to hypnosis under the guise of breaking his smoking habit. The session transports him to the "Sunken Place," a state of immobilization that literalizes racial subjugation—Chris retains awareness but is stripped of agency. The Armitages' annual garden party further amplifies this dynamic. Wealthy White guests encroach upon Chris with invasive admiration, and their comments are laced with racial fetishization. This is not casual discomfort; it is the machinery of commodification in motion. As Ahmed's concept of "multicultural managerialism[5] suggests, the liberal veneer of diversity operates as a means of control rather than liberation. Chris's presence at the party is not incidental—he is the product that is being displayed.

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[5] Sara Ahmed's concept of "multicultural managerialism," discussed in *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (2012), critiques how institutions perform diversity without structurally addressing racism. The institution, like the 'good liberal', wants to be seen as inclusive but resists transformation. Thus, just as institutions perform diversity to protect their legitimacy while continuing to exclude marginalized people in practice, individuals perform allyship to maintain their moral self-image (52).

Chris's dawning realization of the estate's true function accelerates when his friend Rod pieces together that Logan, a Black guest at the party whose behavior eerily mirrors that of Georgina and Walter, is in fact Andre. Chris's discovery of photographs depicting Rose with a series of previous Black partners she denied having, including Walter and Georgina, confirms his worst fears. By the time he attempts to escape, the trap has already sprung. The Armitages' seemingly progressive ethos masks a grotesque project of possession: They transplant the consciousness of White individuals into Black bodies, relegating the latter's original selves to a state of powerless awareness within the Sunken Place. Chris is restrained in preparation for the operation. Jim Hudson, a blind art dealer, intends to claim Chris's body, coveting both his physical abilities and artistic vision. Yet Chris, leveraging his environment, disrupts the hypnosis by blocking out Missy's auditory cues. He seizes his moment, outmaneuvering Jeremy and using a mounted deer's antlers to impale Dean—an act laden with symbolic irony. Missy's attempt to reassert control fails, and Chris eliminates her before making his escape.

His flight is marked by further violent encounters. In a moment of conflicted compassion, he attempts to rescue Georgina, only for her to attack him—she is, after all, inhabited by the consciousness of Rose's grandmother. Their struggle ends in a fatal crash. Walter, momentarily freed from Roman Armitage's control by the flash of Chris's phone camera, reclaims his agency long enough to shoot Rose before turning the gun on himself. As Rose clings to life, Chris hesitates, his hand tightening around her throat before he ultimately relents. The film concludes with Rod's arrival in a TSA vehicle, offering Chris his long-denied exit. Through its intricate situational horror, *Get Out!* dismantles the illusion of racial progressivism, revealing the insidious persistence of racial commodification and control. Peele's film operates at the intersection of psychological horror and social critique, demonstrating that the most terrifying

structures are not external monstrosities but the quotidian mechanisms of power that govern the racialized subject's existence. I will begin by tracing Chris's movement through three interrelated spaces—the Armitage estate, the Sunken Place, and the Black body. Each section will survey how the film constructs its horror through an accumulation of uncanny situations which expose the specific conditions and racialized structures that progressively erode his agency. The first subsection will explore how the estate initially presents itself as a site of liberal hospitality, only to reveal its function as a space of surveillance and containment; the second will focus on how the Sunken Place visualizes the psychic and ontological dimensions of racial subjugation, reducing Chris to a state of immobilized spectatorship; and the third will discuss how the film spatializes the body as a site of commodification, imprisonment, and contested ownership, transforming it into both the ultimate locus of horror and the very terrain of resistance. My fourth and final sub-section will examine how, by situating horror within these shifting spatial and corporeal entrapments, Peele moves beyond conventional genre tropes of survival, instead foregrounding the structural conditions that render Black existence precarious. I conclude by arguing that *Get Out!* does not simply stage a narrative of escape but forces audiences to reckon with the enduring, systemic forces that shape and constrain Black life; its use the situational uncanny serves not only to unsettle but to implicate and demand a political engagement.

The Armitage Estate: Where Compassion Conceals Contempt

The Armitage estate in *Get Out!* is not just a setting—its pillars are, literally and figuratively, upholding the narrative situation. The horror does not come from an overtly sinister environment but from the gradual realization that every element of this space has been designed to lure, disorient, and ultimately capture Chris. As such, the more access to knowledge is

enabled, the higher the stakes, which shift from the rejection of Chris based on the color of his skin to the loss of his bodily autonomy. Thus, a situational analysis could prove invaluable for a structural understanding of how the estate transforms over time, as it shifts from an apparent haven into a site of systemic horror.

Before Chris even steps onto the Armitage estate, the situation is already charged with tension. Peele's choice of non-diegetic sound in the scene where Chris gets ready serves as a powerful forewarning for what is to come: The lyrics "stay woke," "don't close your eyes," and "they gon' find you"[6] not only foreshadow the film's central conflict but actively situates Chris within a racialized reality that pre-exists his entry into the Armitage home. This establishes racial tension as a key thematic concern from the outset. Moreover, Chris' proclivity for finding humor in uncomfortable situations is a strong current that runs through the narrative; although his joking that he "[doesn't] want to get chased off the lawn with a shotgun" (07:54) helps him feign intrepidity in front of Rose, his apprehension is palpable and not all unjustified. Humor and irony indeed play a truly significant role in shaping our understanding of the uncanny (Royle 2). This unease is further reinforced by his friend Rod, who explicitly warns him not to "go to a white girl parents' house" (10:00)—a warning that, while delivered with humor and brushed off by Chris, carries an underlying truth that resonates throughout the film. Chris' disregard for these realities that underpin his existence in America is not out of wilful ignorance but rather a result of the situation's setup. After all, he is invited into this space by Rose, which creates an initial voluntary entry that masks the underlying entrapment. This chimera of agency is a condition that is crucial to how the film constructs horror—his entrapment is not sudden but gradual, situationally reinforced, and masked by social norms of hospitality, romance, and politeness.

[6] The song in question is Redbone by Donald Glove (Childish Gambino)

Accordingly, the Armitage Estate initially presents itself as a site of hospitality—an idyllic, well-manicured home set in a seemingly serene rural landscape. At first glance, it mirrors the archetype of the perfect American home: spacious, beautiful, and secluded. The estate is physically isolated yet presented as a comfortable retreat—Chris is positioned as a guest, not a prisoner. Nevertheless, the mansion, with its unsettling mix of opulence and isolation, becomes a physical manifestation of Royle's "strangeness of framing and borders" that disturbs the boundaries of what we perceive as a safe, normal environment (2). The estate grounds are expansive, offering the illusion of space. However, as we come to discover, the estate functions not only as a physical space but the arena for a meticulously constructed situation of entrapment, where the dynamics of race and power intersect with the domestic sphere in chilling ways.

Once inside, Chris is met with a performance of exaggerated hospitality. The progressive rhetoric—"I would have voted for Obama a third time if I could" (18:56-19:00) — is particularly jarring because it is clearly contrived—an attempt to neutralize suspicion. As Dean Armitage insists on giving Chris a tour of the house, we discover that it is designed with numerous hidden rooms, secret corridors, and constant observers that underscore the degree of control imposed on its guests. The "dark" corners of the house—particularly the hidden basement that we do not gain access to in the tour—reveal the spaces of exclusion built into its very architecture. To deflect from a discussion about the basement, Dean informs Chris that it is shut down due to "black mold," then shifts Chris' focus to his collection of souvenirs. As he proclaims that "it's such a privilege to be able to experience another person's culture" (15:11-15:26), the norms of politeness within the domestic space allow for his virtue signalling to go unchecked, thereby diverting attention from the deeper, more insidious exclusions embedded within the very walls of the home. The key situational tension here lies in the fact that the Armitage home is weaponized

as a space of seduction—its warmth and openness coerce Chris into letting his guard down, in spite of his increasing awareness of the house's oppressive undercurrents, which mirrors the audience's growing realization that he is caught in a web of exploitation.

Once Chris is settled in, the estate quickly becomes a pressure chamber of racialized discomfort for him. Chris' attempt to leave the mansion at night qualifies him as an "affect alien"[7] as Ahmed might describe it. His sense of isolation is not only conveyed through verbal resistance—which fails, as seen in Jeremey's disregard for his refusal to fight at the dinner table— but also spatially, as he attempts to navigate the mansion's familiar yet increasingly disorienting spaces. This parallels Schantz's conception of Will from *The Invitation* (2015) as he lingers on the outskirts of the party and ventures into certain rooms to confront his suspicions about the cult (4). Similarly, Chris's movement through the mansion mirrors his growing detachment and the unsettling recognition of something once familiar now turning uncanny. However, Chris' movements are allowed but monitored; he is free to move around, but his comfort is constantly unsettled. The estate, despite its sprawling grounds, becomes a space of entrapment as Chris gradually realizes that the house's architecture itself functions as an instrument of control. In turn, the sheer seclusion of the property reinforces a sense of inescapability, amplifying the feeling that Chris is trapped not only within the walls of the estate but within the social and racial dynamics it symbolizes. Chris's agency is constrained by the

[7] The term "affect alien" appears in Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* (2010)." She argues that we experience affect as alienation when there is a disconnect between the promise of happiness and our actual emotional responses to the objects that are supposed to bring happiness (42). As Ahmed later describes, this results in either "feeling at odds with the world" or perceiving "that the world is odd" (168).

constant surveillance he faces, from the unblinking watchfulness of the family to the seemingly innocuous observations by the house staff. To illustrate, the staff's uncanny presence manifests in the way Walter and Georgina behave almost normally, but with small, dissonant quirks. Walter's constant glares at Chris along with Georgina's creepy forced smiles reflect an unnatural demeanour—though these gestures are familiar, they somehow feel subtly displaced. During an interaction where Chris makes a humorous remark, saying: "Sometimes if there's too many white people, I get nervous" (52:50-52:56), Georgina collapses into tears, then almost immediately forces a smile on her face. This attempt to override her own feelings discloses a subconscious compulsion to abide by an expected social script. What follows this mechanical shift in demeanour is even more robotic repetition of the word "no", and it is particularly haunting—it does not appear to be just a rejection of Chris's statement, but a denial that is directed inward. The uncanny effect of this moment emerges from its strategic mobilization of 'social interaction' as a site of disruption and unease. Chris, expecting a small gesture of recognition, instead encounters an interaction that makes him and the audience profoundly uncomfortable; Georgina's reactions, too controlled and pre-meditated, suggest that she is merely an actor within a staged environment.

The basement is integral to the transformation of the Armitage estate into a site of captivity, where the horrors Chris faces are fully realized. What was once a cozy, upper-class home now reveals its hidden, monstrous purpose: a secret operating room that exposes the chilling contrast between the estate's facade and its true function. This stark reversal underscores the sinister nature of the Armitages, as they are not just wealthy homeowners, but perpetrators of a repeated, calculated racialized horror. The presence of an old television set playing pre-recorded indoctrination videos reinforces the chilling realization that the Coagula Procedure is

not a singular event, but a ritual performed many times before. The imagery of restraints, a chair, and medical instruments all evoke a dark history of plantation-era scientific racism and eugenics experiments, adding layers of historical violence to the estate's modern-day horrors. The surveillance element intensifies as Chris is forced to watch his own fate unfold. The estate's function as a theater of control becomes explicit; Chris is not just a captive but a spectator to his own dehumanization. The use of television to explain the Coagula Procedure mirrors real-world systems of ideological conditioning, underscoring the ways in which control and exploitation are normalized.

Ultimately, the true function of the estate is revealed: It is not merely a home, but a factory for stealing Black bodies and a site of production for the Armitages' grotesque business. The key situational tension lies in the realization that the estate was never just a backdrop for Chris's suffering—it was built for this purpose. The operation has long been in motion, and Chris is merely the latest in a long line of victims; he is caught in a system that predates him and will continue long after. Hence, the Armitage estate shifts from an open, inviting space to a closed, inescapable machine of exploitation. Its horror emerges not from overt threats but from its gradual exposure as a place designed to deceive, disarm, and entrap. Through this domestic space, I detect the situational uncanny in how the film ensures that Chris is not physically locked in instantly—he is situationally bound by social codes, manipulation, and finally, direct control. Through these affordances, the audience is therefore made aware the estate is not just where horror happens—it is how horror is *enacted*.

The Spoon, the Sound, and the Snare: Chris's Descent into the Sunken Place

In *Get Out!*, the Sunken Place emerges as the film's most unnerving and politically charged space. This liminal, non-physical space exists outside the conventional boundaries of

reality and consciousness, offering a profound visual and psychological representation of disempowerment. To analyze the Sunken Place situationally, we need to assess how it emerges, when it is triggered, and what it does within the film's logic of power and control. Situational analysis demands attention to the interaction between character, space, and audience (Frank et al 661)—how conditions are arranged to make the Sunken Place possible and how it functions as part of *Get Out!*'s broader uncanny horror.

Following Walter's sudden and almost predatory lunge at him, and his detection of Georgina behind the door, with her rigid posture and her gaze seemingly locked onto him, a disturbed Chris steps back inside in the house, only to find Missy waiting for him in the dim glow of her office. She invites him to sit, her voice gentle but firm, as if the invitation is not really an offer but an order. This pervasive and often intrusive presence of Missy is uncanny in the way that it crafts "an experience of something duplicitous, diplopic, being double" (Royle 16). Her interactions with Chris seem to exist in two conflicting layers: a surface of politeness and concern, undercut by the hidden, manipulative agenda at play. He hesitates, then lowers himself into the chair across from her. With a rhythmic clink of her spoon against the teacup, she draws him into conversation, steering it toward his mother's death. Her words are precise, deliberate, peeling away his defenses as she taps into what she senses to be a locus of his vulnerability. The sound of the spoon tapping against porcelain becomes hypnotic, as its cadence tightens around him like invisible binds. The "feelings of uncertainty" that arise, as Royle suggests, are tied to the constant manipulation of perception (16), particularly in the context of the ritualistic control being exerted over Chris, who tries to resist, but whose body betrays him. His limbs grow heavy, his breath shallows, panic sets in, and yet he cannot move; locked in, Missy solidifies the fact that "[he's] paralysed, just like that day when [he] did nothing" (35:03-

35:06). Suddenly, the floor gives way beneath him, and he plummets, weightless, into a vast, inky void— “now [he’s] in the Sunken Place” (36:34). Above him, reality shrinks to a distant frame—a window through which he can see but not act. His own body and his own voice are no longer his to control. This liminality renders Chris simultaneously 'here' and 'there,' 'now' and 'then', the known and the unknown (Royle, 2). He reaches out, but the abyss swallows him whole, leaving him trapped in a state of powerless awareness, a spectator in his own mind.

The Sunken Place’s visual composition is simple yet very important. Peele depicts it as an abyss where Chris floats helplessly while the real world recedes into a small, unreachable window. This contrast between vast nothingness and a minute fragment of reality amplifies his sensory deprivation and renders him bodily and psychologically powerless. This visual setup mirrors the cinematic experience itself, where Chris, much akin to the viewer, is reduced to a passive observer with no ability to intervene or impact the unfolding events. His flailing gestures resemble drowning and link the Sunken Place to historical and symbolic images of Black suffering, such the Middle Passage[8]. The latter transcends its nautical meaning when Chris ‘passes’ into a limbo state and becomes understood as a conceptual framework that connects the expropriation of people in one region with their exploitation in another—becoming relevant to a

[8] This refers to the harrowing transatlantic journey that enslaved Africans were forcibly taken on from West Africa to the Americas between the 16th and 19th centuries. As part of the triangular trade, this passage was characterized by extreme brutality, with millions of Africans enduring horrific conditions on overcrowded ships, resulting in high mortality rates. *Get Out!*, which thematically explores the legacies of exploitation and displacement within racial and societal dynamics.

range of migrations involving the coerced movement of racialized bodies (Christopher et al 2). It is important to note that specific elements such as "what objects are in reach, what sounds carry, what lines of sight open up and close off—these and myriad other details inform our assessment." (Frank et al 660). As such, the Sunken Place forces Chris into a state where his only point of visual and psychological focus is Missy—the very person who put him there. This creates a power dynamic where she is not only his captor but also his only reference point for reality, for he is "able to see and hear… but [his] existence [is] as a passenger, an audience" (01:23:58-01:24:12). Unlike a typical captor who might loom over their victim, Missy remains distanced, composed, and clinical, reinforcing her control through the very structure of the situation. Chris's entrapment is not just physical but epistemic—his entire field of vision is curated, allowing him to perceive what is unfolding but leaving unable to intervene. He is a powerless observer rather than a knowing subject who can act on his knowledge.

The sound design complements this visual configuration, with a muted and distorted soundscape that emphasizes Chris's loss of agency. The hollow, distant echoes of Missy's voice further underscore his disconnection from the real world, creating a dissociative effect that deepens his affective isolation. These details which shape the situation enforce the resonance of the film's allegory beyond its overt message, namely because they "fulfill an affective function" (Nichols 88). The disorienting design—the endless fall, the fractured perception of time and space, and the eerie sound distortion—amplify the affective quality of the Sunken Place. This space is not only a psychological prison for Chris but also a device that disrupts the audience's sense of reality, thereby drawing them into Chris's disempowered state and diffusing the visceral terror, sensory overload and helplessness that accompany his forced immobility. Owing to its rigorous configuration, the horror of the Sunken Place is not just in its imagery but in its

affective weight: It conveys the existential terror of being unable to influence one's fate—a fate determined by a system far larger and more powerful than the individual. It reveals the art dealer's foreshadowing statement when he reminds Chris that life is inherently unfair, for "one day you're developing prints in a dark room, the next day you wake up in the dark" (47:50-47:55). Even more importantly, it recalls situations of real-world oppression where Black individuals witness their own disenfranchisement but are structurally prevented from intervening.

The Sunken Place, additionally, does not exist in isolation—it is situationally activated through a sequence of escalating conditions that place Chris in a vulnerable position. In fact, the inception of this space is only possible because Chris is embedded in a situation— "White people stealing the bodies of Black people" (Frank et al 661)—where he is structurally powerless. He is essentially invited into a space where he is an outsider and his social conventions that dictate civility prevent him from resisting too soon. First, his emotional openness about his mother's death becomes a key weakness that the Armitages exploit. In this vein, Dean Armitage's comment about the deer can be read as a deliberate attempt to incapacitate Chris. He asserts: "One down, a couple hundred thousand to go... I do not like the deer…they're taking over, they're like rats, they're destroying the ecosystem. I see a dead deer on the side of the road, I think to myself: That's a start" (15:11-15:26). This comment appears be a harmless gripe about overpopulation and is enabled by the casual setting in which it occurs to go unchecked; Chris, as a guest in an unfamiliar environment, is expected to overlook or laugh off any discomfort. Yet, implicitly, this moment operates on two levels. First, it sets up the Armitages' larger scheme, as their polite, liberal exterior conceals a system of violent racial exploitation. Second, since it simulates Chris' mother's hit-and-run death, Dean's statement

reinforces the film's meditation on systemic disregard for Black lives and the first attempt to compromise Chris' psyche, thereby paving the way for the Sunken Place's inception.

Moreover, in his performative eagerness to appear as an ally, Dean overcompensates with forced mannerisms—calling Chris "my man" (14:27), using AAVE (this "thang"), and emphasizing his alleged admiration for Jesse Owens' triumph before Hitler's "Aryan race bullshit" (17:18). While this does unnerve the protagonist, the situation itself—Chris being the only Black guest in a wealthy White household—inhibits resistance and stifles reflection. Chris, much like the deer Dean castigates, is a silent figure whose fate is dictated by those who hold power in the situation. Furthermore, the Armitage home is not just physically enclosing but situationally structured to make Chris feel safe until it is too late, not only through the aforementioned architectural distinctions but also through its hosts' conduct. For instance, Missy's initial invitation—offering to "help" Chris quit smoking—is a moment of misdirection, cloaking her control as benevolent paternalism[9]. Ultimately, the Sunken Place is only be triggered because the specific situational conditions coalesce to make Chris inadvertently *allow* himself to sit in that chair. As such, the horror stems not just from the hypnotic act; it also emerges due to his inability to concede that the entire situation itself is a trap. While the latter is "among the most common of situations" (Frank et al 664) so it is easily recognizable for

[9] The term benevolent paternalism refers to a practice where those in positions of power, often under the guise of kindness or protection, make decisions for others, limiting their autonomy in the process. In *Get Out!*, Missy Armitage's behavior reflects a paternalistic attitude that assumes the subject is in need of guidance or help, masking the darker intent of exerting control over him. This dynamic speaks to the way power is wielded in subtle, often deceptive ways.

audiences, the psychological manipulation and the distractions our protagonist has to fight off veil his ability to do so.

The Sunken Place's emergence is also not abrupt; it is triggered by a simple, domestic act—the rhythmic clinking of a spoon against a teacup— which eventually becomes the Armitage key mechanism of control. This act is important in highlighting how, in domestic horror, the forces at work are so familiar that their intricacies are often overlooked, making them more susceptible to the uncanny (Schantz 3). The sound pattern works like a Pavlovian trigger, conditioning Chris's body to shut down involuntarily; the situational uncanny manifests when this usually comforting gesture is weaponized into a hypnotic switch, conditioning Chris's body to shut down in a chillingly mechanized response. Furthermore, Chris does not go willingly—he fights. However, the horror lies in the fact that his resistance is already factored into the design of the situation. Missy does not need to restrain him physically because the structure of the moment ensures that resistance is futile. Her power operates not through brute force but through pre-emptive control, overriding his agency before he can assert it. The situational uncanny is established, therefore, not just because Chris loses control, but because, by the time he fully grasps what is happening, the moment where he could have stopped it has already passed.

In short, the profusion and interrelation of the structural dynamics that sow the seeds for the Sunken Place—the centerpiece of the film—prevent Chris from gleaning the danger of the situation. In other words, our inability to think schematically as the film unfolds is due to the fact that the situations presented are frequently embedded within one another, creating interwoven layers of complexity (Schantz 2). As such, what makes the Sunken Place the affective and political centerpiece is not just its imagery or its symbolism, but how it operates as a situation—a structured entrapment that is socially, psychologically, and physically inescapable. Since the

uncanny permeates in all nooks of the Sunken Place as a space, pattern recognition—and by extension defiance—becomes nearly impossible, reflecting Schantz's assertion that "when an opportunity turns into a trap…the uncanny undermines all confidence" (3). This mental prison is, thus, a culmination of power imbalances set in motion from the moment Chris enters the Armitage estate—he is always one step behind in recognizing the situation for what it truly is. Only by dismantling the situational traps' mechanics can Chris escape—a task that becomes tedious with the infiltration of the uncanny, which "attacks the tendency to impose pattern recognition prematurely (Schantz 2).

The Captive Flesh: The Body as a Space in *Get Out!*

The film engages with a critical discourse that frames the body as a site of power, resistance, and political struggle. This lens is particularly prominent in Black studies, postcolonial theory, and feminist theory, all of which examine how bodies, especially those racialized as Black, are sites of control and exploitation. The commodification and dispossession of Black bodies—an issue embedded in historical structures of racial violence such as slavery, medical experimentation, and cultural appropriation—are central to the narrative of *Get Out!* (Henry 336). In this film, the body is not just a vessel but a contested space—a site of control, transformation, and violation. The horror of the Armitage family's scheme is not only about bodily possession but about the body as a territory that can be invaded, repurposed, and re-inhabited. By approaching the body as a space that the situation exploits in order to proliferate, I will demonstrate how the Peele's project constructs the body as a *home*, a *prison*, and a *marketplace* all at once, to reflect how domestic horror opts for "intensive spatial arrangements that no one can keep track of, no matter how familiar they think they are with the house in question (Schantz 7).

To begin with, Rose's transformation from what Henry calls "a seemingly supportive and "social justice" orientated white woman" to a calculating predator is crucial (334). The particularity of her character is how seamlessly she shifts from affection to cold detachment (e.g., eating dry cereal while looking for her next victim online). The way she feigns forgetfulness about taking Chris's keys—delaying his escape—demonstrates her subtle yet deliberate control over the situation. She is the first to embody the narrative's portrayal of the Black body as an object of white desire, yet the last to be unmasked as such. Though situation permits analysis "undistracted by assumptions about plot or character as the primary sources of narrative interest" (Frank et al 676), it remains useful to consider how characters are enmeshed in the situation, sometimes resisting, reinforcing, or revealing its mechanics. In this sense, Rose represents how individuals can operate as extensions of a situation's structural forces, rather than acting purely as autonomous agents. In fact, even before her guise is lifted and the horror of bodily possession is revealed, various situations frame Chris's body as something to be assessed, admired, and claimed. This appropriation begins with Jeremy's drunken insistence that Chris should try MMA, which subtly reinforces that his body is seen as a tool rather than an autonomous entity. This moment foreshadows the later horror: Chris's skills, endurance, and physical capabilities are desirable to the Armitages not for who he is. Instead, he is "chosen because of the physical advantages [he's] enjoyed [his] entire lifetime" (01:14:04-01:14:10).

Subsequently, Chris's body is rendered a spectacle at the garden party, which serves as a ritualistic display of Chris's objectification. As the party unfolds, Chris is not a guest but an object of evaluation, guided through orchestrated encounters—which act a series of micro-situations—rather than freely engaging with his surroundings. The White guests' probing questions—focused on his physicality, his "form", and even his sexuality, through the invasive

question “is it true? is it better?” (43:33-43:37)—reinforce the dehumanizing nature of his presence. Affirmations like “Black is in fashion” (43:48), accompanied by unwelcome touching of his muscles, further underscore the commodification of his body. These interactions establish that his body is not his own, which situates Chris within an economic framework of ownership and possession. Chris’s body is being inspected before he even realizes it is set up for sale; the situation is rigged, for his physical form has already been commodified without his knowledge. It is important to evoke Chris’ constant “misrecognition and lost opportunity” due to his inaccessibility to knowledge, because in “reading for the situation, we triangulate historical knowledge, what characters think about their own situations, and the narrative facts on the ground” (Frank et al 667). In the same vein, the subtle implication that Chris is not here for leisure but for something more sinister becomes evident when the silent auction is revealed to the viewer only. The key situational tension is clear: The Armitage estate is not merely the setting for Chris’s captivity—it is the place where his fate has already been sealed. Yet, Chris defies it and manages to, indeed, get out.

The Coagula’s operation turns the body into a scarce resource that can be sold to the highest bidder during the silent auction, of which our protagonist is unaware. This technique hinges on the strategic release of information, where the audience is privy to certain elements of the narrative before the characters. This is a key component of narrative situations, which are often disclosed incrementally, leveraging the disparity between character and audience awareness to produce a significant dramatic effect (Frank et al 660). Moreover, the lack of verbal negotiation during the auction highlights that this system is already established—the process of body-stealing is routine. This segment serves as a reenactment of historical slave auctions, yet it also transforms that past into a present-day, uncanny ritual. Nichols describes reenactment as

"the more or less authentic recreation of prior events," but crucially, it also functions as "a representation of a prior event while also signaling that they are not a representation of a contemporaneous event" (73). The auction mimics the commodification of Black bodies from slavery, but it occurs within a modern, privileged context, creating an "uncanny repetition" (Nichols 74). This distortion of time—past and present colliding—introduces "a fantasmatic element that an initial representation of the same event lacks" (Nichols 73). The auctiongoers, much like reenactors, "go through the motions" of exploiting Black bodies, attempting to possess "irretrievable moments" (Nichols 73) of control and dominance. Thus, as Chris unwittingly wanders into this sci-fi version of the political situation in the U.S., the situational uncanny triggers the realization in the audience that racial exploitation has not ended—it only got camouflaged in a seemingly progressive, modern society. Henry argues that, through this reenactment, Peele erases "the line of demarcation between slavery and post-slavery" to communicate that "the past is [still] present" (334). In this sense, the situational uncanny does not merely unsettle the viewer with eerie familiarity—it actively re-stages historical power structures under contemporary disguises, making visible the continuity of racial violence in the everyday. Moreover, as Jim Hudson, the blind art dealer, reveals that he does not care about Chris's race—only about his eyes, we discover that the horror is not just about racism but about instrumentalization—bodies are exploited for specific functions, such as reaping aesthetic, which Farley ascribes to "whiteness [being] a sadistic pleasure and…the black body [being] a fetish object" for white hegemony (461). This reinforces the broader theme: The Black body is a desirable property, but its conscious inhabitant is irrelevant. Chris is thus not just a victim of a horror plot—he is a piece of inventory. His body serves as a mere currency within a larger political situation which perceives sees him as valuable but disposable.

Once the Armitages reveal their plan, and the Coagula's promise of inhabitation come to the forefront, the body itself is now treated as a *house*—an entity that can be occupied by someone else. Roman Armitage's recorded message presents the body as a modular structure, as if personalities can simply be swapped in and out. The Coagula procedure is not framed as a destruction of the self—it is framed as a real estate transaction: The original owner is forced into the Sunken Place while the new tenant takes full control. The Sunken Place functions as a locked-off chamber within the body— "a sliver of [Chris] will still be there somewhere" (01:23:50) as he retains a "limited consciousness" but is unable to act. This mirrors horror tropes in which someone is trapped in a house while an intruder takes control and again blurs the lines between host and guest. As such, the loss of control through Coagula is not about death but displacement, since Chris is forced to be a spectator as his body is lived in by another. The Coagula system does not destroy the Black body—it re-purposes it, turning it into a vehicle for white longevity and enhancement. This tension is intrinsically situational since it operates within a carefully orchestrated sequence of situations—social encounters that establish Chris's body as desirable, the hypnotic paralysis that renders him powerless, and the surgical procedure that would enact the final possession. Each stage reinforces that the horror is not in bodily destruction but in bodily exile. Furthermore, Chris' final journey to the Sunken Place highlights it as a 'zone of non-being'[10], that is, a space where Black individuals are denied full humanity and

[10] Frantz Fanon identifies the zone of non-being in his seminal work, *Black Skin White Masks* (1952), and defines it as "an extraordinarily sterile and arid region—an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born" (2). It functions as a space where Black individuals are denied full humanity and recognition. Before rejecting its confines, he refers to it as a "hell," as it is a place of profound suffering, alienation, and absence of full identity.

recognition. Interestingly, however, Fanon counteracts the negative perception of this zone by ascribing it a positive vision; he states that in recognizing this condition—honestly confronting it—a path to a revolutionary affirmation of self is cleared (2). I contend that Chris's trajectory echoes this possibility: the Sunken Place, while initially paralyzing, ultimately becomes a vantage point—a place of recognition from which he is able to reclaim his agency. This reversal underscores how the situational uncanny can also generate resistant subjectivity, forcing confrontation not only with horror but with the conditions of its emergence.

Beyond Survival: On the (In)escapability of the Situation

In *Get Out!,* the situation fortunately gets out of hand as the film nears its end. The final sequence of the film is a liminal moment—a border between captivity and freedom, where the possibility of escape is constantly at risk of reversal. However, the external chaos and the disruptions that underpin this last segment do not alter the fact that we directly engage with the situation; even in getting out of *hand*, this "hand figures immediacy and interaction if not control" (Frank et al. 667) Thus, by analyzing the ending as a situational event in and of itself, we can see how its affective and thematic weight comes from a combination of reversals, delayed recognition, and symbolic confrontations. Chris's escape is framed as a reclamation of his bodily autonomy—a fight to take back the space that is rightfully his, proving that his body with inhabited but that the domestic houses more than one might like to think (Schantz 3). To begin with, The film's climax is structured as a direct counter-situation to the hypnosis scene first through repetition of setting arrangement. Chris is restrained in a chair, watching the TV—mirroring the Sunken Place's spectator effect. The teacup is present, reinforcing that the same structures of control are still in play. The situational reversal occurs when Chris recognizes that the key to his escape is not just physical struggle but situational awareness. He then blocks his

ears with cotton, and in doing so, Chris turns his own body into a tool of resistance. The cotton, which is historically tied to slavery, is reappropriated as a means of escape and a reclamation of control. This moment marks the turning point where Chris begins to use his body strategically rather than passively endure its occupation. Indeed, Chris's takedown of Jeremy, Missy, and Dean is not just survival—it is a battle for ownership. The impalement of Dean Armitage on the antlers subverts the connotations of the deer motif and by reversing the hunt. Chris is no longer the prey. Walter/Roman initially follows Chris with Rose, but when given a gun, he shoots Rose and then turns it on himself. This moment solidifies the endurance of the political situation: the Black body, even when reclaimed, remains irreparably compromised by its violation. The only way for Walter to truly escape is bodily destruction, which conjures up Fanon's declaration that "decolonization is always a violent event" (*The Wretched* 35).

When a police car arrives to the scene, Rose begins to plead not in pain but in *strategy*—she is aware of the optics of the situation. Playing into the image of White female victimhood to frame Chris as an aggressor, the film echoes past racialized narratives in which Black men were demonized and punished based on false accusations. Even further, by weaponizing history against Chris even in the final moments, Rose's performance highlights how "there is no redemption in or for Whiteness [since] Whiteness' reproductive terroristic power is secured by its parasitic appetite for blackness" (Henry 334). Per Contra, Chris hesitates to kill Rose; this is not solely a moral quandary, but a strategic decision shaped by the implications of his actions within the given situation. Though the audience might desire a sense of catharsis through this act, the protagonist exhibits a heightened situational awareness by deciding to let her go; he is able to recognize that killing Rose would solidify the narrative she is trying to construct—the image of a dangerous Black man murdering a helpless White woman. This is arguably the first instance in

the film where the discrepancies between character and audience awareness are in the protagonist's favour, though this likely depends on the audience in question. Nevertheless, while Chris has done nothing wrong, we still expect the situation to turn against him. As such, the police car moment is one of the most layered situational reversals in the film. Peele plays on audience expectations by making us expect one outcome while delivering another. The shot composition, with Chris standing over Rose, mirrors real-life moments of racial injustice where law enforcement has sided against Black victims. The situational tension is heightened by the flashing lights, which act as an uncanny, double-edged symbol—they carry both the threat of death and the promise of escape. Rod's presence reframes the vehicle—not as an instrument of state power but as a lifeline of friendship. Rod, throughout the film, is not just comic relief but Chris's only tether to reality. Chris's silence is a statement in itself; he does not respond with words, only exhaustion. This moment signals the full weight of what he has endured—the horror of not just the Armitage estate but the entire system that made its existence possible. His silence is a refusal to explain, justify, or relive what he just escaped from. The car is moving away from danger, but Chris carries the trauma with him. The horror is over, but the weight of survival remains, and although Rod assures Chris: "Consider this situation fuckin' handled" (01:39:40), the political reality which Rod has been articulating the entire movie still awaits them.

Additionally, by having shattered the teacup before Missy can reach it, Chris shatters the situation's hold by preventing the re-activation of the Sunken Place rather than just escaping it. His final act is not just to escape but to dismantle the entire situation of captivity. This is highly informative for a politically charged situational analysis: The horror does not end when Chris leaves the Sunken Place—it ends when he breaks the *conditions* that allow it to exist. Yet, the ending is not merely a resolution to the narrative but a culmination of the film's central tensions:

the fight for bodily autonomy, the lingering specter of captivity, and the ever-present racial threat that structures Chris's entire experience. One might assume that the alternate ending, in which Chris is arrested for killing the Armitages, is more aligned with the nature of American race relation—it is, after all, more realistic. Interestingly, Peele originally considered this ending to highlight the inescapability of systemic oppression—a moment where Chris's individual resistance is ultimately futile against the broader structures of racial injustice. However, he chose this ending because, by 2017, the political landscape had shifted. With Trump's election, racial violence was no longer coded or hidden—it was overt, state-sanctioned, and explicit. Peele recognized that the horror of reality had already caught up to the horror of fiction. Audiences, particularly Black viewers, did not need a reminder that the system is rigged against them (Keegan). They needed a moment where the protagonist defies the situational constraints placed upon him and survives. It is imperative to note that Peele does not allow Chris to "win" in the traditional sense—he escapes, but the system remains intact, which highlights how the "situation delivers the stakes of a narrative, stakes that need not be framed individually or with reference to specific outcomes" (Frank et al 661). Yes, institutionalized racism is still a behemoth. Yes, it still shapes economy, politics and society overtly and subtly. However, by ensuring that his horror does not end in an inevitable situation tragedy, he reconfigures what horror can do politically. If Chris were arrested, the situation would remain static—it would affirm what we already know about the racialized carceral state. By weaving in details such Walter and Georgina's deaths, he does signal the persistence of the situation, but by letting Chris escape, Peele shifts the horror from inevitability to agency, suggesting that systemic oppression does not have to be an inescapable narrative. At this juncture in the thesis, a pertinent question arises: If both *Parasite*

and *Get Out!*'s politics of representation and allegories are effective, what do we make of their different approaches to the outcomes of the narrative situation?

Essentially, both the films I have studied so far confront structural oppression through situational horror, but their endings function differently based on what they demand from the audience. The difference in their endings reflects the kinds of systemic oppression they critique and the level of agency their protagonists have within those systems. In *Parasite*, class oppression is structural and deeply entrenched, but it is also something that operates through negotiation and illusion. The hardships associated with class mobility can—and often are—contested through principles of meritocracy—institutionalized racism cannot be contested in the same way. Ultimately, the Kim family is able to infiltrate the Park household, maneuver their way into employment, and even momentarily perform as though they belong in the upper class. Their tragic ending is necessary because it exposes the myth of social mobility—no matter how cunning they are, they remain trapped. A hopeful ending would undercut the film's critique by suggesting that individuals can escape systemic inequality through sheer deception. Instead, the film leaves us with a situation that remains unresolved, forcing audiences to confront the inescapability of class divisions. In *Get Out!*, however, Chris's situation is one of absolute disempowerment—his body itself is stolen from him. The Coagula procedure completely erases his autonomy, reducing him to a passenger in his own flesh. There is no illusion of negotiation here; Blackness in the film is positioned as an object to be controlled, not a subject that can maneuver through the system like the Kims attempt to. If the film ended with Chris in prison, it would reaffirm the inevitability of racial subjugation rather than challenging it. Peele's choice to let Chris escape disrupts the cycle of exploitation, offering a moment where resistance is possible even in a system designed to strip him of all his agency. In short, *Parasite* denies catharsis

because its political critique demands that we feel the weight of its tragedy, whereas *Get Out!* grants brief catharsis because its horror is built around the total negation of agency—meaning that for the political allegory to function as resistance, Chris must escape the Armitage estate. Hence, by capitalizing on how "situation …[shifts] critically from constraint to emergence" (Frank et al 676), rather than framing horror as an inescapable condition, Peele situates it within a network of systemic entrapments that can be confronted, if not entirely dismantled.

CHAPTER 3: When the Heir Looms: The Horror of Grief Across Space, Time, and Bodies in *Hereditary* (2018)

Despite its supernatural richness, the first sign of horror in Ari Aster's *Hereditary* is not a ghost or a demon—it is a eulogy. Annie Graham stands at the podium, delivering a speech that should feel intimate, yet lands as cold, practiced, oddly distant, hinting at a complicated relationship with her mother. She speaks about her mother, Ellen, who is portrayed as "a secretive and private woman" (04:25), but the words fail to summon any true emotion—only obligation. The funeral is well attended by her husband, Steve, her son, Peter, her daughter, Charlie, and a sea of unfamiliar faces who gaze back at her. These are mourners that Annie does not recognize, yet who somehow knew Ellen intimately. We eventually understand that, even in death, Ellen's presence lingers—oppressive, intrusive, unknowable. In fact, back at home, Ellen's presence lingers through strange artifacts, unsettling memories, and an eerie atmosphere that seeps into the family's home. the Graham house feels too still; its wooden walls, lined with miniature replicas of itself, create the illusion of a world that can be controlled, arranged, made comprehensible. But Annie, a miniaturist artist by trade, knows better. The house is not just a structure—it is both a stage and a diorama of doom already set in motion.

Annie's daughter, Charlie, carries grief differently: not as an external weight, but as an internal condition coded into her very being. One night, Peter is forced to take Charlie to a high school party. After consuming cake prepared with nuts, to which she is severely allergic, Charlie's throat begins to close. In a desperate race to the hospital, Peter speeds down a dark, desolate road. Charlie gasps for air, sticking her head out of the window—just as Peter swerves to avoid a dead animal. The moment of impact is brutal: Charlie is suddenly, violently decapitated a telephone pole. Peter, in shock, drives home in silence and crawls into bed, leaving

Charlie's headless body in the car for Annie to find the next morning. Annie's guttural wail fills the house, marking the film's first descent into all-consuming grief. This event is less an inciting incident than a predestined shift in an ongoing cycle. Charlie's head—disconnected from her body—mirrors a fundamental theme of the film: severance from one's own self, from one's own autonomy, and from one's own grief.

Subsequently, Peter, the surviving son, is condemned not just to guilt, but to the unbearable condition of inhabiting a world where the past never stops pressing inward. His mother's eyes sear through him, first with blame, then with something worse: *expectation.* Steve, the father, resorts to silence as self-preservation as he tries to be the pillar that holds a collapsing house together. But silence does not stop what is looming. In fact, nothing does. Annie, in a desperate to find meaning and solace, attends a grief support group and meets Joan, an eerily kind woman who introduces her to a séance ritual, claiming it can help her communicate with Charlie. At first, Annie is skeptical, but after experiencing unexplainable supernatural phenomena—including Charlie's presence in their home—she becomes convinced. She drags Peter and Steve into a séance, unleashing something deeply sinister. Peter becomes plagued by nightmarish visions and eerie occurrences, while Steve, as the last bastion of reason, attempts to resists but fails. As a result, he is forced to simply watch his family crumble under Annie's obsession.

The signs were always there. The cult, the symbols, the body in the attic. However, *Hereditary* does not reveal its horror through shocking twists; rather, it enables its horror to seep, accumulate and fester until reality itself becomes untenable. Accordingly, as Annie uncovers Ellen's secret life as the leader of a demonic cult devoted to Paimon, one of Hell's eight kings, all the pieces fall into place: Ellen had groomed Charlie to become Paimon's earthly vessel, and

now that Charlie is gone, the cult is preparing Peter as the next host. Annie, frenzied, searches through her mother's old belongings, discovering ritualistic texts, photos of Joan with Ellen, and symbols matching those carved into their home. Her attempts at imposing a kind of control over the situation fails as it the forces in play have already crystallized. By the time Annie is levitating as she slices her own neck open with knives and her body moves independent of her will, the supernatural has become redundant. The horror was never about Paimon; it was about a family that is so tangled in the inevitability of grief that they were never truly alive to begin with. The film ends with Peter—vacant, emptied, remade—sitting in the treehouse as robed figures kneel before him, chanting. They do not mourn; they celebrate. The final horror of *Hereditary* is not death, but the even more sinister dynamic of succession. As such, the audience is left with an uncanny tension which, due to the horrific cycles of possession that subdue the narrative, seems inevitable; the original host of the body is gone, but the inheritance remains.

While we are familiar with horror that is constructed through the gradual erosion of family dynamics—whether in the hysteria of Jack Torrance as he succumbs to the Overlook Hotel's psychological grip in *The Shining* (1980), or in the unseen conspiracies of *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), where Rosemary is both the victim and vessel of Roman Castevet's cult—*Hereditary* embeds it into the situation itself to make grief an uncanny force that shapes space, ritual, and flesh. Grief does not simply haunt the Graham family—it structures their world: the home becomes a claustrophobic site where every room locks its occupants into a situational uncanny, trapping them in cycles of mourning and manipulation; time distorts, stretching grief into a perpetual, suspended state where the past never loosens its grip; bodies become vessels of inherited trauma, contorting under its force; and the final ritual seals their fates, not as a break from suffering, but as its ultimate fulfillment. Accordingly, *Hereditary*'s explication of horror

spatially, temporally, bodily and psychologically places it in conversation with my broader analysis of the situational uncanny in the domestic spaces of horror cinema, alongside *Parasite* (2019) and *Get Out!* (2017).

At first glance, *Hereditary* seems fundamentally different from *Parasite* and *Get Out!*. Both of those films deal with social horror—how class and race create systemic entrapments that turn the familiar into the sinister. *Hereditary*, in contrast, appears to be a family tragedy overrun by supernatural forces. But this is precisely where a situational analysis becomes crucial. *Parasite* and *Get Out!* construct horror in situations forged by systemic forces that render characters powerless within spaces they are forced to navigate. The Kim family in *Parasite* infiltrates the Park household, believing they are gaining access to a better life, only to find themselves trapped in a hierarchy where they can never truly belong. Chris in *Get Out!* moves through an environment that appears welcoming but is designed to entrap him. Similarly, *Hereditary* operates on a structural inevitability: Annie, Peter, Steve and Charlie are not merely experiencing loss—they are living inside a trap, which is "among the most common of situations" (Frank et al 664)—where loss has already determined their fate. What makes *Hereditary* uniquely unsettling, however, is that its horror is not social but deeply personal, generationally inherited, and highly inescapable. While *Get Out!* and *Parasite* allow their protagonists a fleeting moment of either mobility or escape, no such moment exists in *Hereditary*. The film does not offer any hope—inevitability is static and consistent. Unlike conventional horror narratives, where horror is introduced into an otherwise stable world, *Hereditary* posits that the horror was always already there. The film constructs its horror not through disruption, but through realization—the slow, dawning awareness that

everything has been orchestrated from the beginning, which emerges “not because of the transformative events of plot, but from a fuller understanding of the situation” (Schantz 3).

To answer the central question: what happens when horror is layered on top of an already harrowing situation of grief? My analysis of *Hereditary* expands on the affordances that reveal how grief functions as a lived-in, inescapable force. Rather than treating the supernatural elements as mere plot devices, I explore how grief is not just an emotion experienced by the characters but a structuring force that informs their world. The first sub-section traces grief through time, showing how the film distorts temporality to trap its characters in cycles of mourning, inheritance, and supernatural inevitability. In the second sub-section, I turn to grief in space, examining how the home—both physically and symbolically—becomes a site of containment, where grief is staged, suppressed, and ultimately weaponized. Following this, my third sub-section explores grief in the body, arguing that the film renders mourning as a visceral, transformative process, where bodies become extensions of trauma and possession literalizes the dissolution of self. Finally, I bring these threads together to show how *Hereditary* situates grief at the intersection of space, time, and flesh, culminating in a climactic moment where familial tragedy and supernatural horror collapse into one. Through this analysis, I argue that *Hereditary* does not merely depict grief—it situates it as an uncanny condition, structuring the film’s narrative and unsettling its characters’ sense of reality.

Bound by Blood: The Temporal Trap of Mourning

One of the uncanny situational tensions that emerges in *Hereditary* is the fact that time shifts dynamically in the narrative whereas characters do not. It is imperative to note as well that time does not progress naturally—as a steady, linear force— in our film; it is something warped, broken, and cyclical, trapping the characters in a temporal loop where grief is not just felt, but

structurally inescapable. Rather than moving toward resolution, time folds in on itself, suffocating its victims in a recursive nightmare where the past refuses to stay buried. Thus, the narrative situation the film's characters navigate has an uncanny effect that is produced by their temporal dislocation. The latter is an element that inhibits their schematic thinking and renders them unable to distinguish between cause and effect, agency and inevitability (Schantz 2).

Seeing as the past controls the present, Annie's losses are not simply isolated tragedies, but pieces of a grander, predetermined design, in which grief itself is hereditary— passed down like an heirloom, a possession before possession. When she speaks at the grief support group, her monologue does more than recount personal trauma—it maps a genealogy of suffering and reveals how her family's past exerts a force on the present. She affirms that her mother

> "had DID, which became extreme at the end. And dementia. And [her] father died when [she] was a baby... because he had psychotic depression and he starved himself, which [she's] sure was just as pleasant as it sounds… [her] older brother had schizophrenia, and when he was 16, he hanged himself in [her] mother's bedroom and of course his suicide note blamed her [mother], accusing her of putting people inside him." (20:42-211:10)

Each statement becomes more than a reflection—it is a repetition, a sequence, and a structure. I contend that this is not just mourning; it is the formal articulation of a trap. The moment Annie speaks these words aloud, they solidify into a prophecy. Since time in the film is not linear but ritualistic, as I will demonstrate momentarily, Annie becomes the next vessel in an ancestral horror she can neither comprehend nor resist.

Immediately after the car accident that kills Charlie and serves as what Baran calls the "catalyst death," we witness an unnatural freeze caused by trauma, as Peter does not react—not immediately. He does not scream, he does not cry, and he does not move to check on his sister. Instead, he sits frozen in the driver's seat, unable to turn his head, staring forward into the dark void of the road ahead. The catalyst death, "being more or less accidental…must be markedly traumatic, unanticipated, and shocking to the protagonist" (Baran 40), Peter drives home in absolute silence, his expression vacant, dissociated. The house is still, time seemingly suspended. He gets into bed without waking his parents—without allowing himself the space to acknowledge what has happened. When morning comes, we do not see Peter's reaction—we hear Annie's heart-wrenching wailing instead, which reverberates across multiple scenes leading to the one where Charlie's grave is being lowered into the ground. Peter's inertia highlights how the situation propelling the film forward does not allow time for characters to register the trauma organically. Instead, it jumps from psychological stasis to absolute rupture, skipping the transition entirely, and making it feel as though time itself is inhospitable to processing grief. Time does not allow for reaction, though both the general and the specific conditions of the situation warrant it—it moves past the characters while keeping them frozen. Peter cannot mourn because mourning would require time to be experienced normally, and *Hereditary* denies its characters that privilege. His refusal to acknowledge the accident he caused sets the tension in motion, and implicates the audience in an ironic way, since "the viewer not only knows that it happened, but they witnessed it, too (Baran 340). Time's passage is not a path toward healing, but a mechanism that ensures trauma remains suspended in an unresolved state.

Moreover, there appears to be a fracture between time and perception where reality no longer aligns with experience. To begin with, the film repeatedly cuts from night to morning

with no transitions, no sunrises, and no gradual shifts—just a sudden, unnatural cut from dark to light. This is disorienting since it erases the sensation of time moving gradually forward, and it gives the impression that events are happening at random, but only from the family's perspective. From the audience's viewpoint, this feels disturbingly mechanical, as if the characters are being forcibly moved forward through predetermined increments of horror. Annie's miniatures become relevant here as well. Annie tries to meticulously recreate the past in her dollhouse-like miniatures, trapping events inside frozen dioramas, but this is futile. As Dollery states, a kind of pleasure is derived from the "act of attempting" but "entering the temporal river for the first time twice is impossible" (qtd. in Nichols 74). The family thinks they are living in real, linear time, but they are actually inside ritual time, where everything is already set in place. The past is not something they can move beyond—it is something that has been carefully arranged to lead them exactly where they are going. In addition, as his own reflection smirks at him in the glass door, it is not just a supernatural event—it is a temporal fracture. The moment warps time itself and defamiliarizes us with its contiguity, creating a split between Peter's perception and reality. He is both inside and outside his body—even experiencing himself "as a foreign body" (Royle 2), and the film does not use a cut or distortion effect to explain this. Instead, the moment is treated as though time has diverged into two simultaneous but incompatible realities—one where Peter is sitting in class, and one where his body and mind have already been claimed. The uncanny is launched as time is no longer something one experiences—it is something acting upon the individual as it shifts him through pre-set stages of horror without his consent.

Time's non-linearity is also prevalent in the way that it loops as a result of the endurance of grief, and as a result, it ensnares the family in a fate set before they were even aware of it. Here, there emerges a tension between inherited grief and situation as a category of immediate

experience which must be addressed (Frank et al 666). Situation, as an experiential category, unfolds "amid the usual activity of life" (Berlant 5)—it is something characters inhabit, respond to, and are shaped by in real-time. Yet, in *Hereditary*, I find that the immediate experience of grief is never truly immediate; it is always the result of a larger orchestration. Ellen's manipulations ensure that each moment of suffering is not a spontaneous emotional rupture, but part of a long-unfolding situation designed to entrap the family. This tension reveals how *Hereditary* constructs the uncanny through the collapse of temporal boundaries and to create a 'layered' horror: While the characters are overcome grief as something raw, unpredictable, and immediate, the audience comes to realize sooner that these moments are structured, predetermined, and part of a grander scheme. By bringing into play the "discrepancies between character and audience awareness" (Frank et al 660), the film further complicates the nature of situation by showing how an encompassing structure—one that spans generations—can manifest in the present as a force that feels inescapable, pressing, and immediate. Against the Grahams' incognizance, our affect and our bodily empathy are engaged. Indeed, though we are not "sutured" into the cinematic reality of the Graham family: "we are "in on the joke" but only intellectually, not bodily "inside" it" (Barker 70). As we witness the characters not merely reacting to loss but enacting their own roles within a situation that has already been written for them, their grief resounds to become profoundly personal and terrifyingly impersonal at once.

The séance in *Hereditary* also operates as a site of temporal rupture, wherein the past is not merely recollected but violently reasserts itself into the present. Unlike a conventional act of mourning, which negotiates loss through symbolic or memorial structures, Annie's séance collapses temporal boundaries, rendering the past an active, disruptive force. Charlie's presence does not return as a spectral trace or psychological residue; rather, it materializes through

uncanny automatisms—the unfinished drawings completing themselves, the glass moving without human intervention—suggesting a past that resists containment within memory and instead insists upon its own ongoing agency. This dynamic corresponds to what Dollery, citing Nichols, describes as the attempt to "reanimate [the past] with the force of desire" (qtd. in Nichols 88), which is a process with profound affective implications. The séance does not merely evoke Charlie's absence; it renders her absence paradoxically present, generating an affective disorientation that extends beyond grief into a broader destabilization of temporal and spatial continuity. The characters, in turn, do not simply bear witness to an event; they find themselves enmeshed in a situation in which the distinctions between presence and absence, agency and automatism, human and inhuman are no longer secure. This affective destabilization is integral to the film's articulation of the situational uncanny. Rather than a haunting in the traditional sense, where the spectral intrudes upon the living from a discernible elsewhere, *Hereditary* constructs a scenario in which the domestic space itself becomes an engine of ontological uncertainty. The séance does not summon an external entity so much as reveal that the past has always already structured the present in ways beyond the characters' control. The séance also distorts time's structure within the film itself—Charlie's presence does not return with a clear boundary, but bleeds into every subsequent event, making it impossible to tell where one moment ends and another begins. The key situational tension here lies in that Annie believes the séance gives her agency over time, allowing her to reconnect with the past—but in reality, she is surrendering to a predetermined situation, which is not being bent to her will no matter how hard she tries to manipulate time—it is bending her into the shape it needs her to be.

Thus, throughout *Hereditary*, time is neither an ally nor a neutral force—it is an instrument of inevitability, designed to strip the characters of agency and bind them to a

preordained fate. The film's structure itself mirrors this entrapment through three temporal affordances of the situation: One, trauma does not move forward—it freezes and ruptures. Two, the family does not make choices—they play out a script. Three, time does not guide them—it pushes them. What makes *Hereditary* so deeply unsettling is that the horror does not simply emerge from supernatural forces or familial dysfunction—it comes from the slow, dawning realization that time itself is against them. The past does not fade, the present does not belong to them, and the future has already been written.

Rooms of Ruin: Domestic Spaces as a Stage for Suffering

In *Hereditary*, the house should function as a space of comfort, retreat, and family unity—but as "home becomes a foreign country, the uncanny undermines all confidence" (Schantz 3), and the domestic space morphs into as a site of entrapment, confrontation, and decay. Each room embodies a different manifestation of grief, turning the domestic into a psychological and supernatural battleground. Thus, the horror of the film is not just about ghosts or demonic possession—it is about a house that holds onto grief as if it were part of its architecture, refusing to let its inhabitants move forward.

To begin with, the Grahams' labyrinthine house manifests as a minefield in which grief is woven. It is at once too large for intimacy yet too small for shelter, highlighting how domestic horror "manifests in intensive spatial arrangements that no one can keep track of" (Schantz 8). Wide shots emphasize empty space between family members, making the home feel vast and isolating. At the same time, the hallways and rooms feel claustrophobic—whenever characters try to be alone, the house itself seems to press in on them. There is no space that allows for genuine comfort. The camera frequently locks characters into frames within frames—doorways, window reflections, even the dollhouse miniatures—reinforcing the idea that they are trapped

inside a constructed nightmare they cannot leave. This is a negative affordance of the situation at hand: the house becomes a paradox where it is both too large to foster closeness and too small to provide an escape, forcing the family into a cycle of grief that festers within the walls. The living room is one of the structures where much of the uncanny subversions occur. It is, as we established, where Annie tries to force supernatural resolution onto her grief. The distinctiveness of a situation of grief is in the way it shrouds sound judgement, for her desperation to retrieve what was lost inhibits Annie's recognition of the danger of demanding that the past return. This demand invites deeper horror, since it simply "overlays" a past situation on a present situation "that has its own rules, norms, and perhaps most importantly, stakes" (Dollery 9).

Consequently, as the séance backfires, it reverses the home's function—what should be a place of warmth and safety becomes a threshold to the unknown, exposing the family to forces that permit gratuitous suffering. The uncanny reverberates to reach the audience who normally perceive living rooms as places that brings families together and thereby should facilitate healing and connection. However, the specific conditions forced by Annie in her attempt to control the situation inadvertently make it "easily prone to uncanny returns" (Schantz 3), which makes it amplify division in the domestic. Living rooms are spaces where family bonds should be reinforced and trauma bonds should be addressed, but *Hereditary's* situational dynamics revolts against all that is recognizable.

I posit the dinner scene in *Hereditary* as the most affectively charged scene in the film, for it denotes not just an emotional confrontation but the culmination of a slow-burning, inescapable situation of repressed grief, misdirected blame, and unbearable silence. When the latter occurs prior to a cathartic scream, it articulates "a language of trauma" (Caruth 9). The situation that precedes it is indeed traumatic, but also one of mounting tension, where every

unspoken word festers, turning the Graham household into a pressure cooker of unresolved emotions. When the family finally sits down to eat, the scene is already drenched in an unbearable stillness. The scraping of utensils against plates, the rhythmic clinking of silverware, and the silence that is punctured by mere chit chat between Peter and his father all create an atmosphere that is not neutral but charged. Silence in this situation is not a lack of communication; it is a loaded presence, thick with resentment and unspoken recriminations. The spatial arrangement is also noteworthy; the way Annie and Peter sit across from each other, with Steve as a silent intermediary, visually reinforces the emotional impasse. The wide shot emphasizes the distance between them, making the space feel cavernous and isolating despite their close proximity. Peter, unable to endure the weight of his mother's glares any longer, finally breaks the silence: "Mom, is there something on your mind?" The question itself is a provocation wrapped in faux innocence. It is not just an inquiry—it is an invitation to detonate the situation that has been brewing since Charlie's death. Annie's response comes like a crack in a dam, and what erupts is not just an argument—it is a breakdown of the very fabric of the family. Annie's fury is not only about Charlie's death, though that is its immediate trigger. It is about the years of simmering resentment between her and Peter, the feeling that her life has been dictated by forces beyond her control, and the overwhelming realization that the horror in their lives is not random, but structural, inevitable.

It is important to note as well that her demeanour during the fight—towering over Peter, screaming loudly— not only adds a new emotional register of explosive anger to the film's already heavy situation of grief, proving how "horrific, internalized manifestations of grief and mourning require externalized, audible resolutions in order to purge the agonizing excesses of pain and sorrow" (Baran 337), but also implies power and even control. Although the scream in

horror is seen in feminist interpretations of horror narratives as a "suggestion of aggression" (Christensen 281), Annie's claim: "I wish I could shield you from the knowledge that you did what you did, but your sister is dead!" divulges her impotence in the situation. Indeed, while Frank et al. argue that "situation, in its minimal form, neither produces nor depends upon character" (665), this scene suggests something more: that the situation exerts its own momentum, one that renders characters unable to intervene. To illustrate further, Annie's assertion that "nobody admits anything they've done" turns into a moment where blame ricochets between them. By the time Annie reaches the peak of her outburst, screaming, "I am your mother!" the scene has transcended anger; it transforms into something uncanny, which feels inevitable yet unbearable, a script written long before any of them sat down to dinner. The outburst does not resolve anything; instead, it marks the point of no return—an escalation that ensures the Graham family will not emerge from their grief intact. This new situation does not resolve—it merely plunges back into an eerie silence, only now, it is heavier and more unbearable. This return to quiet marks "the silence of [trauma's] mute repetition of suffering" (Caruth 9) and solidifies the inescapability of the cycle where the trapping the family in dysfunction—the situation has only grown more volatile.

In turn, the characters often attempt to find solace away from the living room, often in a bedroom, but horror renders the bedroom a chamber of psychological and supernatural violation. bedrooms are often the epicenter of demonic invasion, as seen in films such as *The Exorcist* and *The Babadook*. This plays on the vulnerability of sleep, the illusion of safety, and the uncanny fear of unseen presences lurking in familiar spaces. In *Hereditary*, Peter's bedroom, in particular, is not just haunted—it is where he is being prepared for transformation, and his unease in there drives him away from its threat. Accordingly, in his final escape from his possessed mother,

Peter knows better than to seek the living room or the bedroom, so he runs to the attic. I use the latter to build on Schantz' assertion that narrative situations are often "nested within each other in overwhelming complications" (2); my reading of the attic complicates this 'nesting' not just narratively but materially—housing Ellen's decaying body above the family long before it is discovered. This transforms the space into a literal storage space for the unresolved past, positioned above their heads. Annie's initial discovery of the body is uncanny because it represents something that, literally and figuratively, should have remained hidden but has come to light (Royle 2). By the end, the attic is no longer just a hidden space—it becomes Peter's final threshold into the inevitable. Peter's attempt to escape from his possessed mother fails—not because the attic traps him physically, but because it is the space where his own transformation must occur. There is quite literally nowhere else to go. A situational tension rises to the surface as a result: The attic is both a grave and a birthplace—it holds the rotting remains of the past, but it is also where Peter's fate is fully realized. The uncanny as well as the horror, therefore, is not just that something is dead up there—it is that something is waiting to be born.

Furthermore, the film presents Annie's miniatures, particularly the one that depicts Charlie's accident, as a visual metaphor for her need to control grief, despite her claim that it is but "a neutral view of the accident" (55:44). By meticulously recreating traumatic events in miniature form, she attempts to gain a god-like perspective over her family's suffering. There is a sharp contrast between first-person experiences (where one is immersed in a situation) versus a top-down, board-game-like perspective, where the observer gains distance and control. Annie's miniatures place her family in scenes of horror, suffering, and death, suggesting that she can manipulate events by reducing them to art objects. I refer to the miniatures as a fabricated space that contrives staged situations to further my situational analysis in light of the uncanny

effect produced by the presence of this motif. My argument is twofold: First, the miniatures mirror the inevitability of the situation of grief; they are not just artistic expressions of grief but portents of the scripted doom that the family cannot escape. Second, and even more interestingly, Annie's attempt to impose control through these miniatures is not only illusory but counterproductive, as it plays a key role in realizing her and her family's tragic fate.

Annie believes that by miniaturizing trauma, she can gain mastery over it, but in reality, her creations only reinforce her powerlessness. These structures are "at once unsettling in their precision and evocative in their suggestion of something deeper at work" (Diniz 80). The film actually begins with a shot with zoom into a room into the dollhouse that subtly becomes Peter's real bedroom. The shift in the first instance which implies that the house itself is a constructed space—one where fate is already determined, turning the characters into figures merely playing out a preordained scenario. Annie believes she is observing and reconstructing reality, but in fact, she is mirroring the film's own structure—where her family is also a miniature, controlled by an unseen hand. The uncanny quality of the miniatures lies in their static nature: they freeze moments in time, whereas grief is chaotic, fluid, and uncontainable. Her failure embodies the nature of situation itself: an unstable intersection of the abstract and the concrete, where recurrence never guarantees sameness, and the past can never be perfectly reconstituted in the present (Frank et al 671). Thus, the more Annie tries to organize her trauma into a fixed tableau, the more reality resists. Her miniatures do not exorcise her grief; they stage it situationally, forcing her to relive it in controlled repetition. The aforementioned distinction between first-person immersion (being inside a situation) and the bird's-eye perspective (observing it from above) is crucial to this; Annie's miniatures mimic the detached "god's-eye" view, but is the artist shaping her reality, or is she just a figure trapped inside a larger, inescapable structure? We

eventually realize that Annie herself is in a miniature—the camera's god-like tracking shots make the Graham house feel like one of her dollhouses, revealing that she, too, is a piece in a larger, predetermined situation. Unlike a true omniscient perspective, she is not the master of this world—she is merely a set designer. Moreover, though Annie admits that the situation of false triangulation[11] that emerged when she befriended Joan is what caused the cult to have access to her family ("Peter is in danger, and I started it") she overlooks other components of her complicity: the miniatures themselves. In fact, it is clear that the cult of Paimon operates through situational engineering, that is, arranging events to lead Peter to his destined possession. In a way, Annie's miniatures mirror this ritualistic prefiguration by setting the stage for inevitable doom. The film subtly suggests that Annie's art is not hers alone—her drive to recreate these moments seems eerily compelled, almost as if she is enacting a ritual of her own. The unsettling realization is that Annie does not just document situations—she may be unknowingly participating in their construction, a pawn in a design she cannot see.

To conclude, the Graham house emerges as a living monument to grief. Every space within the house is weaponized by the intensity of mourning and the inevitability of occult forces at play. The living room forces confrontations, transforming rituals of togetherness into scenes of division; Peter's bedroom offers no shelter—only a slow descent into possession; the attic is not just a storage space—it is a trap set long before the family realized they were caught in it; and the miniatures give Annie a false sense of control, mirroring the family's inescapable descent into predestined horror. In this way, the audience is not passive but actively implicated in the

[11] In his paper "The House of Horror and the (Un)Mapped Situation", Schantz defines this as a "classic situation… where the heroine, seeking an outside perspective to assuage or confirm her fears, unwittingly consults with someone who is part of the conspiracy against her" (3).

film's emotional narrative. *Hereditary* makes us complicit in the characters' suffering, manipulating their own emotional responses through the film's use of space, sound, and visual motifs. By the time the film reaches its unsettling conclusion, the audience is emotionally exhausted and disoriented, having been drawn into a shared affective experience that mirrors the characters' sense of being trapped in a house—and a life—that is both haunted and inescapable. The film's skillful construction of affective spaces ultimately renders the audience not just witnesses but participants in the horror, blurring the line between the characters' emotional turmoil and their own.

The Maternal Maelstrom: Flesh, Femininity, and the Failure to Contain Loss

Aster's approach to horror is situationally immersive, forcing the audience not just to witness grief but to inhabit it. Mourning is not just emotional but bodily, transforming characters physically, structurally, and narratively. The film renders grief as a visceral, transformative process, where bodies become extensions of trauma, and possession literalizes the dissolution of self. As such, in *Hereditary*, grief is not a passive experience—it is a force that actively reshapes the body, turning it against itself.

Annie's grief is too large to be contained within her physical form, and thus manifests in violent breakdowns that blur the line between mourning and possession. She claws at her face, throws herself against walls, and contorts in agony, as though trying to expel something that cannot be removed. At Charlie's funeral, her hyperventilating wails sound inhuman, almost as if an external force has already entered. At the dinner table, grief erupts as a physical event—her hands tremble, her voice cracks, and her body shakes with barely contained rage. By the time she becomes possessed, her body has already become an extension of trauma—her grief has eroded her personhood, making room for something else to take over. Annie's grief is also gendered to

an extent. As a mother and daughter, she is denied control over both her maternal legacy and her own mourning process. Her emotional breakdowns, outbursts, and artistic attempts to make sense of tragedy are all ineffective against the larger, unseen forces manipulating her. If Annie's grief is an outward spectacle, epitomizing how "the body spectacle is featured most sensationally … in horror's portrayal of violence and terror" (Williams 4), Peter's is a form of paralysis, a stillness so absolute it becomes its own kind of horror. After Charlie's death, he does not scream or cry—he simply stares into the void, unable to react. This lack of response is more unsettling than any expected horror-movie breakdown, as though his body has already begun to shut down. His eventual collapse in class—where he sobs uncontrollably, his muscles convulsing—is the moment grief finally forces its way out, breaking his physical shell. However, his final possession reveals that this breakdown was not a moment of catharsis—it was the beginning of his erasure. In the end, Peter's body is no longer his own, just as his grief was never truly his to process. In contrast to Annie and Peter, Steve represents repression—he absorbs grief rather than expressing it. Throughout the film, he remains unnervingly still, attempting to maintain normalcy in a house that is unraveling. Yet, grief cannot be ignored indefinitely, and his passive role ultimately leads to his fiery death; he does not wail or collapse—he simply combusts, consumed by the very grief he refused to acknowledge. The situational irony is striking: the one character who resists mourning is the one who burns alive within a house that did not let him escape its sorrow.

In *Hereditary*, possession is also not a sudden supernatural event—it is the logical conclusion of grief's total takeover. When the body becomes consumed by grief, it ceases to be its own, highlighting how in grief horror, "the ability to assert absolute dominance over emotion is not universally within one's control" (Baran 351). Annie's transformation from grieving

mother to possessed figure is disturbingly seamless. Her body shifts from writhing in agony to clinging to ceilings like an insect, as if she has become something no longer bound by human limitation. The film does not treat possession as a separate horror element, but as an extension of her grief—her body is simply continuing its breakdown, crossing the threshold from mourning into something monstrous. Peter's possession, however, is the most complete act of situational horror. The entire film constructs his loss of agency moment by moment, revealing that every interaction and every space he moves through have been engineered to break him down. He is not haunted—he is actively being prepared. His grief, his paralysis, his final collapse—these are not random emotional responses, but the final steps in a process designed to make him the perfect vessel for Paimon. When he is finally possessed, it does not feel like a shocking twist; it feels inevitable. The film's final shot crystallizes this: Peter is no longer a person but a figure in a diorama, an object placed into a situation long before he understood what was happening to him.

The true horror of *Hereditary* is that grief is not just an emotional state—it is an engineered condition that manipulated and weaponized by external forces. Ellen, though largely absent from the film's present timeline, is the architect of its horror, constructing a situation in which grief is not just experienced but strategically deployed. Even as new elements come into play and new affordances infiltrate the situation, the latter remains intact (Frank et al 669). Ellen, in fact, does not simply summon Paimon—she builds the circumstances that will make possession inevitable by grooming him. Her influence is not direct is enacted with a situational logic that unfold across time. Ellen's grooming of Peter is not done through direct intervention, but through a long-term process of conditioning. She ensures that Annie's grief is cultivated—that it festers rather than heals in order to make her susceptible to possession. She creates an environment where Peter's vulnerability will reach a breaking point, ensuring that the house

itself becomes a space of despair and inevitability. Their fate is not sealed through supernatural means alone but through the careful situational manipulation of grief as an all-consuming force. In the end, Ellen's monstrosity is not that she was an evil grandmother, nor that she was a cult leader, but that she was an architect of horror whose true power lay in controlling the conditions of her family's suffering.

In this way, it is worthwhile to re-visit Creed's 'Monstrous Feminine' and reimagine it as a situational architect—not a visible antagonist, but a designer of circumstances which ensures that grief itself becomes a trap from which there is no escape. Creed's concept describes the maternal figure—the "archaic mother"—in horror as excessive, consuming, and inescapable (30). Ellen's influence is exactly that: not just a haunting presence, but an inherited condition, a structure of inevitability that turns the home into a predestined site of horror. Her monstrosity is redefined by this project's situational approach is through the careful arrangement of grief-inducing conditions. Her plan pre-exists the beginning of narrative (Frank et al 660) and unfolds long before the characters realize they are participants in something much larger than themselves. She does not act upon the family; she places them within a situation where their own suffering will complete the work for her. The very distinct natures of their grief— Annie's breakdowns, Peter's paralysis, Steve's suppression—are necessary steps in a progression that Ellen has orchestrated from beyond the grave. Furthermore, while Creed asserts that the horror film often explores mother-son relationships, with *Psycho* being her prototype, *Hereditary* chooses to survey a troubled mother daughter relationship instead (139). Hence, Ellen's unique embodiment of Creed's maternal monstrous feminine is what makes her trap uniquely situational; she does not enact horror—she curates it as she is "both the source of life and the abyss" (Creed 26).

In these ways, Aster reorients horror from fear to mourning, making grief not just a thematic element but a situational force that dominates characters physically. The horror of *Hereditary* is not just that possession happens, but that it follows the situational logic of grief—a force that consumes, transforms, and ultimately erases selfhood. The film's terror lies in the realization in characters and viewers alike that once grief fully takes over, there is no one left inside the body to resist possession.

Affect and/as Agency

As this chapter has demonstrated, Aster's horror is not merely concerned with individual grief but with how grief is embedded within an inescapable structure—one that operates across spatial, temporal, and corporeal dimensions. Grief is, in Frank et al's terms, a "situation that can be recognizably maintained while altering every element but the repetition itself" (669). This loss of agency extends beyond the psychological, manifesting in the characters' very bodies. Annie, no longer autonomous, moves with an unnatural detachment until she enacts her own death. Peter, once a passive observer of suffering, is ultimately displaced from his own body, hollowed out by grief until he becomes an empty conduit for possession. In *Hereditary*, the body itself is subsumed into grief's structure, reinforcing the notion that grief is not merely an internalized emotion but an external force that actively shapes and determines flesh.

Aster's film does not merely represent grief but compels the viewer to engage with it on a profoundly affective level. It mobilizes Barker's assertion that "if the film has a body, it must have a body language," eliciting visceral, embodied responses from the audience (Barker 69). The car accident sequence exemplifies this affective strategy: Charlie's sudden, violent death is not merely a shocking narrative event, but a physically jarring moment conveyed through movement, sound, and the sheer abruptness of its execution. Peter's frantic driving and Charlie's

gasping desperation induce a corporeal reaction in the viewer—an involuntary flinch, a moment of breathlessness—engendering a form of bodily empathy. After the accident happens, even the release audiences feel is mixed with a sense of dread linked to Williams' conception of temporality in melodramatic narratives: Peter is "too late" ("Melodrama" 69). Yet, as Barker warns, to suggest that the film simply "mirrors" the viewer's bodily responses is both "correct and overly simple" (69). *Hereditary* not only draws the viewer in but also repels them, producing moments of simultaneous immersion and detachment. The séance scene exemplifies this oscillation: as Annie attempts to commune with her deceased daughter, the atmosphere is charged with both emotional catharsis and escalating horror. The audience, like Annie, is caught between a desire for revelation and an instinct to recoil. The film's final moments further complicate this dynamic, as Peter's possession induces both empathy for his bewilderment and horror at his absolute erasure. In this way, *Hereditary* establishes a relational dynamic between film and audience—one that is constantly shifting between identification and estrangement.

Crucially, the film's conclusion does not mark a generic rupture but an inevitable culmination. Its tragedy is twofold: not only is the Graham family extinguished, but their suffering is revealed to have been instrumental to a larger design. The cult does not merely triumph—it perpetuates itself. As Schantz observes, "the ability to replicate" is a key "affordance of situations relevant for murderous cults" (5). Furthermore, *Hereditary* employs what Royle describes as the uncanny's capacity to destabilize the authenticity of experience (16), blurring the boundary between psychological and supernatural horror. Grief and possession become indistinguishable, their convergence reinforcing the film's broader meditation on powerlessness. Annie's transformation into an inhuman entity is not a sudden genre twist but the culmination of her prolonged and violent mourning. Peter's possession is not merely supernatural but the final

stage of his psychic collapse—his despair so absolute that it renders him absent from himself. His final expression, an affectless slackness, marks grief's totalizing force: an emotion that does not dissipate but possesses, erases, and ultimately replaces its victims.

More broadly, *Hereditary* invites reflection on the intersection of genre, affect, and narrative form. The film situates grief not as an individual affliction but as a structurally embedded experience, entangled with family dynamics, gender roles, and power structures. While discussions on female agency in *Hereditary* vary with relation to the film's "attention to matriarch Ellen" (Bicakci 14), they tend to be in accord with the ascension of Paimon into Peter's body as a perverse enactment of patriarchal succession, wherein Charlie's body serves as a temporary host before the "rightful" male heir is claimed. In this sense, the personal is inextricably political: The ways in which grief is navigated reflect the constraints imposed by broader social structures. Moreover, by framing grief as a situation—what I argue to be a central narrative engine—*Hereditary* acquires a political dimension. The film does not merely portray personal tragedy; it articulates how grief, when situated within a larger framework, can function as a metaphor for systemic entrapment. The Grahams' suffering is not a closed loop but a reflection of broader socio-political conditions—an affective structure that resonates far beyond the confines of the film.

However, *Hereditary* does not merely depict grief as an inexorable fate. By foregrounding grief as a narrative situation, the film implicitly gestures toward the possibility of its containment. Frank et al. advocate for an "exploration of the narrative possibilities of the situations themselves" (675), and *Hereditary* demonstrates how situational entrapment, though seemingly inescapable, is not devoid of agency. Indeed, I contend that the Grahams' ultimate failure lies in their inability to recognize grief as a structure that can be confronted rather than

merely endured. The situation does not inherently render them powerless; rather, it is their suppression of grief, their avoidance of confrontation, and their misdirected attempts at resistance that seal their fate. Annie's realization of the cult's influence comes too late, by which point the interwoven situations of loss, secrecy, and manipulation have already ensnared the family. Thus, while grief is framed as a structuring force, its narrative containment—or lack thereof—is contingent upon the characters' engagement with it.

In this way, my analysis of *Hereditary* is less concerned with plot resolution—often conservative in horror—than with the complex affective structures that emerge within the genre. Aster's intervention in horror is not merely aesthetic but affective. Indeed, he does not contribute necessarily through a politics of representation (although the framework of possession is modulated by gender, for *Hereditary* instrumentalizes the maternal line as a conduit for possession), but by articulating a politics of feeling where he introduces emotions typically not associated with horror to expand the genre's emotional range beyond fear—to encompass guilt, grief, and outrage. In conventional slasher films, characters are frequently disposable, their deaths serving as fleeting shocks rather than sites of sustained affective engagement. *Hereditary*, by contrast, refuses this neglect of emotion, compelling the viewer to inhabit grief rather than merely witness it. While Schantz notes that horror's domestic settings can yield "a broad palette of feeling that includes grief, resentment and shame" (8), I extend this observation by showing how *Hereditary* leverages these feelings not only to unsettle genre expectations but to transform them into structuring affects.

Conclusion: The Situation's Grip

This thesis has explored how the situational uncanny functions as a critical narrative engine in contemporary horror cinema, with in-depth analyses of *Parasite* (2019), *Hereditary* (2018), and *Get Out*! (2017). Reading for situation in these films has revealed complementary aspects of the narrative concept, as well as idiosyncrasies that evince how "the most interesting aspects of the narratives they produce is not the genre of plot and resolution but rather the exploration of the narrative possibilities of the situations themselves" (Frank et al 675). Indeed, the significance of these films' narratives does not lie in their resolutions but in how they construct and sustain uncanny situations, using them as engines of affect, suspense, and ideological critique.

Uncanny Valleys and Narrative Peaks

By foregrounding situation as a central mechanism in horror storytelling, this thesis contributes to narrative studies by underscoring a shift from traditional plot-driven or character-centric storytelling toward a more dynamic understanding of how events unfold within constrained but mutable conditions. Traditional narrative theories often prioritize causality, character agency, or structural paradigms; my approach reconfigures these priorities by showing how situations themselves can exert narrative pressure, creating momentum and affective engagement without necessarily requiring conventional narrative progression. Moreover, the domestic space is itself a microcosm of broader contextual orders. However, as Frank et al. explain, to "employ the word context is already to court dryness [since] no one has ever gotten caught up in an exciting context" (668). In this vein, my project has distinguished situation, a "category of immediate experience," from context, a "category of remote understanding" (Frank et al. 666). Context, when emphasized, attempts to contain or explain events within an

overarching framework. However, the crises in these films are unstable and their stakes are too urgent to be contained or explained by context. Frank et al. argue that framing them as situations challenges the complacency of contextualization (qtd. in Martin 63); rather than relying on retrospective interpretation, it demands attention to unfolding structures and immersive experiences. This thesis extends that framework by theorizing the situational uncanny as a central narrative mechanism in contemporary horror. In doing so, the project offers a model for reading horror as a mode of situated engagement—where meaning arises from affective entrapment, temporal disorientation, and spatial constraint.

Still Waters Run Uncanny

What makes situations so compelling is the fact that they are akin to invisible hands that guide viewers through stories where anything might happen at any moment, which I argue is integral to the creation of any narrative and the consolidation of its affective impact. In this project, I have exposed the latent fragility of seemingly stable realities and offered an alternative approach to navigating the destabilizing forces of disruption to which most familiar constructs—whether social, psychological, or cinematic—remain vulnerable. Existing scholarship often foregrounds affect, atmosphere, or symbolic meaning, yet, contrary to popular belief, horror's capacity to evoke affective engagement is not assured, as audiences are often well-versed in the genre and thus resistant to predictable formulas (Reyes 133). As an alternative to the latter, this study has established the situational uncanny as an effective framework for a more productive, enduring audience engagement, for it "confronts us with our own will to narrative and demands thinking of it differently" (Frank et al 665). In doing so, this research builds on the growing body of work on affect theory in cinema by framing situations as affective ecologies that heighten immersion and create visceral responses. In this regard, in his book, *Horror Film and its*

Affect (2016), Xavier Aldana Reyes outlines a corporeal-affective model of horror reception, focusing on how horror films generate emotional and physical responses in viewers through the explicit depiction of violence. He suggests that post-millennial horror, with its increasingly realistic portrayal of violence, has become particularly adept at fulfilling the genre's affective expectations through moments where the victim's body is under threat or attacked (194). In the context of contemporary horror cinema, I propose a critical rethinking of the corporeal-affective model that has dominated scholarly discourse on horror. The viewer's bodily response to graphic violence—be it somatic, emotional, or cognitive—and presents a narrow framework for understanding the genre. While physical violence undoubtedly plays a role in certain subgenres of horror, such a model overlooks the broader, more subtle mechanisms through which horror operates in film. In contrast, my research shifts the focus away from corporeal harm toward the apparatus of the situational uncanny—a framework that does not rely solely on explicit bodily violence to generate affective engagement, instead mediating it through the situational structures that shape narrative development. Indeed, the horror in the films under study does not emanate solely from open wounds or severed limbs, but from the intricate dynamics and precise affordances that disrupt the familiar. Thus, this thesis highlights how the horror genre can expand its impact by adopting the situation as the central engineer of its narrative structures.

Beyond the Current Situation

At last, the cumulative effect of my analysis has revealed that the situational uncanny offers a compelling model for understanding contemporary horror's political resonance. By foregrounding situation as a critical framework, this dissertation not only rethinks horror's capacity to 'frighten' but also renders it a medium that reframes political urgency—demonstrating how the most terrifying aspect of horror is not what lurks in the shadows, but the

structures that dictate who can move, who must remain trapped, and who can never truly escape. By positioning situations as sites of constraint, tension, and potential rupture, horror films engage with broader structures of power, oppression, and resistance. My study of the selected films demonstrates how horror can illuminate and critique systemic injustices through a vacillation between the stable and the unfamiliar. Situational horror, then, becomes not just a mode of aesthetic disturbance but a means of political engagement, prompting viewers to reconsider their own embeddedness in precarious situations. In fact, the domestic space, traditionally viewed as a site of sanctuary, intimacy, and safety, is reconfigured in these films as a space of potential violence and psychological rupture, exposing the fragility of the boundaries between the private and the public, the personal and the political. As such, the genre's enduring popularity reflects its rich repertoire of situations (Schantz 8); it persists and continues to evolve because it taps into a universally recognizable yet diverse array of situations that invite viewers to explore the complexities of human nature, societal norms, or existential questions. These situations are not only disruptive but generative engines; just by turning the domestic spaces into an uncanny arena of confrontation, the same spirit of intervention can lead to mobilization. Indeed, by shifting gears from only visceral terror to a wider appeal to structural anxieties, the situational framework expands how we understand horror's psychological and political impact.

Future research could extend this model across genres, exploring where the situational uncanny—and by extension, the situation itself—intersects with other contemporary crises, such as climate change, global migration, and political polarization, which themselves attract the concept of situation when the objective is to foreground their high stakes, their immediacy, and the "ways that they are getting out of hand" (Frank et al 667). Such an exploration could interrogate how these crises manifest not only in overtly political or disaster-driven narratives

but also in more subtle, everyday contexts that evoke an uncanny sense of unease. By analyzing the uncanny across a diverse range of genres, scholars could consider how different narrative forms—the speculative, the dystopian, and the realist—present situations that disrupt the stability of the familiar and bring forth uncomfortable confrontations with the present and future. Furthermore, this thesis paves the way for future research that could investigate the way in which these uncanny situations are heightened through emerging modes of storytelling, such as participatory media, immersive virtual reality, or transmedia narratives, which allow for more fluid interaction between the audience and the situation itself. The situational uncanny, in this context, has the potential to become an even more dynamic means of destabilizing traditional distinctions between audience and content, reality and fiction, agency and passivity.

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