

THE GHOSTS OF THE MILLENNIUM

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- 4) reality
- 5) the Real

## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the representation and function of ghosts in four contemporary ghost films: Michael Night Shyamalan's *Sixth Sense* (1999), David Koepp's *Stir of Echoes* (1999) Robert Zemeckis' *What Lies Beneath* (2000) and Alejandro Amenabar's *The Others* (2001). My emphasis is on the ways in which ghosts are represented in these four films. I believe these films bring new aspects to the ghost genre. It is striking that all these films were made between 1999-2001, during the transition period to the new millennium. Throughout my thesis, I analyze the representation of ghosts in these films in relation to cultural and social factors of our time. I develop my argument from a psychoanalytic framework, using Freudian, Lacanian and Jungian concepts. Lacanian concept of symbolic order and his differentiation between the Real and reality are especially significant. Above all, it is necessary to emphasize that this study is inspired by Zizek's readings.

## Özet

Bu tezin amacı, güncel dört hayalet filmindeki, Michael Night Shyamalan'ın yazıp yönettiği *Sixth Sense* (1999), David Koepp'in yönettiği *Stir of Echoes* (1999) Robert Zemeckis'in yönettiği *What Lies Beneath* (2000) ve Alejandro Amenabar'ın yazıp yönettiği *The Others* (2001), hayaletlerin temsili özelliklerinin ve işlevlerinin analizini yapmaktır. Çalışmanın temeli bu filmlerdeki hayaletlerin hangi şekillerde temsil edildiği üzerinedir. Hayalet türüne farklı söylemler getirdiğini düşündüğüm bu dört filmin milenyuma geçiş döneminde (1999-2001) yapılmış olması dikkat çekicidir. Çalışma boyunca bu dört filmdeki hayaletlerin nasıl temsil edildiği günümüz sosyal ve kültürel koşulları ile ilişkili olarak analiz edilmektedir. Tezimin argümanları psikanalitik bir çerçeveden, Freud, Lacan ve Jung'dan faydalanılarak, oluşturulmuştur. Lacan'ın simgesel düzen kavramı ile Gerçek ve gerçeklik arasındaki ayrımı önem teşkil etmektedir. Zizek'in bu tezin argümanları üzerindeki etkisi özellikle belirtilmelidir.

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## Introduction

### **Subject and Aim:**

In what follows, I will explore the shift both in the representation and function of ghosts in four contemporary ghost films: Michael Night Shyamalan's *Sixth Sense* (1999), David Koepp's *Stir of Echoes* (1999) Robert Zemeckis' *What Lies Beneath* (2000) and Alejandro Amenabar's *The Others* (2001). I believe these films bring new aspects to the traditional ghost films by destroying the existing and accepted boundaries between the living and the dead and building a new perspective on the subject. Strikingly, all these films are made in a short span of time (1999-2001) that is at the turn of 21<sup>st</sup> century. In his essay *Why Horror*, Andrew Tudor emphasizes the "interaction between specific textual features and distinct social circumstances." <sup>1</sup> In parallel with this view, I strongly believe that this new representation of ghosts is related with the turn of the century. The beginning of a period is at the same time ending of another period, and at these times issues of loss, grief and mourning gain importance. In the simple words, ghosts symbolize a denial of the loss. In her psychoanalytic analysis of effect of transition to the new millennium on the cultural representations, Kathy Smith explains very well the relation between the concept of ghost and the millennium:

In the moments preceding this momentary rupture in time, the dis-ease of living with the undead- in a state of impending loss- seemed pervasive. Coupled with the more explicit representations of pre-millennium anxiety manifested in media reportage ( in the form of dire warnings regarding the impending millennium bug which was going to

disable the Western world as we knew it, bringing civilization to a halt and heralding a time of civil, commercial and technological disorder) was the recurrence in theater and filmic terms of themes of loss, absence, anxiety and desire through representations of angels, ghosts fragmented subjects and spectral imagery. Ghosts have always been a popular filmic and theatric subject; but their particular presence at the end of 1999 seemed indicative of a certain zeitgeist, a spirit of the time.<sup>2</sup>

The ghosts are the embodiment of the millennium anxiety that is about the complex relation between presence and absence. Throughout history it is possible to see an increase in ghost films in the times of dramatic change, such as post war periods<sup>3</sup>. However, this project aims to focus not on why ghosts are represented at the turn of the century but how different they are represented and the reasons behind this. I believe the turn of the century offered a chance to slow down the rapid progress and to consider more about philosophic and spiritual issues. Commitment in the existing system gave way to questioning the truth and searching for explanations. The new representation of ghosts is a result of these shifting cultural and social aspects of our time.

Before going any further, it is important to emphasize that this project, as my choice of films indicate, deals with films only within supernatural horror/thriller although ghosts are popular figures among a variety of other genres such as comedy, romance and drama. This statement is necessary because the representation and function of ghosts change according to the genre. Even though it is hard to determine the boundary between horror and thriller, Angela Connolly relates horror with disgust and terror with fear.<sup>4</sup>

According to this explanation, the films chosen for this study are not horrifying but rather terrifying. So it is more appropriate to classify them as supernatural thriller films. In defining the scope of this project it is also necessary to state that, although at necessary points references are made to ghost films from Far East, this project analyzes the concept within the boundaries of Western culture. This is due to the cultural differences that are incomparable.

Two interrelated reasons inspired me to do a project on ghost films. Firstly, the impact of cinema on the spectator always fascinated me as an undergraduate of psychology. Trying to find a research topic within this area, I realized the domination of contemporary ghost films in my 'the films that affected me the most' list. The power of these films in evoking strong emotions in the spectator (and in me) triggered my interest in this project.

Secondly, the obvious popularity of ghost films since the late 90s turned this interest into decision. Related readings support this observation. In a recent article in March 2004, Nic Ransome states the popularity of supernatural horror genre, in which subgenre of ghost films belong, at the center of contemporary film narrative and he owes it to the roots of supernatural in folklore.<sup>5</sup> It is probably one of the genres that deal with our collective fears the most. Lucius Shepard calls it as the "cinematic renaissance" of the ghost stories.<sup>6</sup> An analysis of ghost films within Internet Movie Database (IMDB) shows that after a long time since mid 1980s, in

1999, ghost films became popular. Between 1990-2001 fifteen ghost films were released and eleven of them were made in the period between 1999-2001.<sup>7</sup> The popularity of ghost films continue to be a contemporary issue with remakes of classics such as *Amityville Horror* (Andrew Douglas, 2005), *The Fog* (Rupert Wainwright, 2005), *Thirteen Ghosts* (Steve Beck, 2001) and the ongoing flow of ghost films from Far East to West with *Ring* (Gore Verbinski, 2002) , the *Grudge* (Takashi Shimizu, 2004) and *Dark Water* (Walter Salles, 2005) series.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of this plenitude of ghost films, most of them follow similar characteristics. Ghost stories have familiar structures and rhythms just like fairy tales. It is necessary to state the impact of gothic motifs on the representation of ghosts. As Tom Ruffles states “a refinement to the atmosphere from the Gothic novel” is found in acclaimed ghost films such as *The Haunting* ( Robert Wise,1963).<sup>9</sup> Shadows, darkness, isolated mansions and unexplainable events are the essential elements of these films. The ghost is represented as a vengeful creature that suffered as a living and as a result returned as a threat to the living. *Ring* and *Grudge* series are the most recent examples of this classic pattern. The ghost is mainly a spooky image; its character is not emphasized. In these films, the differentiation between human and not human (ghost) is made at the beginning. The audience knows with whom she /he will identify with. This representation of ghosts is related to the concept of ghost in Western culture. In his analysis of medieval ghost stories, Bruce Gordon states “references to

ghosts as extremely negative” and “indication of demonic activity and terrorizing of locals.”<sup>10</sup> Supporting this view, the filmic ghost is the intruder that passes the invisible, but always present, border between living and the dead. It destroys the harmony in the world of the living. It usually haunts the specific area in which it suffered.

Tom Ruffles states an interesting relation between ghosts and films: similar to ghosts “powerful films can be said to “haunt us” long after the experience, suggesting that both activate similar emotional responses.”<sup>11</sup> I chose these four films because they still haunt me and they share a lot of common points. I strongly believe that they bring new aspects to the ghost genre. I will analyze these aspects within a psychoanalytic framework using Freudian, Lacanian and Jungian concepts. In the following part these concepts will be discussed. It is necessary to state that my use of Lacanian concepts is through Žižek who successfully combine them with popular culture in the way I attempt to. In fact, this study is inspired mainly by his interpretations of Lacan.

### **New Aspects of the Millennium Ghosts:**

In these films, accepted boundaries and the binary oppositions between subject and object, I and the other, living and the dead collapse. As Peter Brunette states, in each binary opposition one term is accepted as the primary, and the second term is regarded in some way inferior to it.<sup>12</sup> In the binary opposition between living and dead, the second one is the inferior.

Supporting to this view, films tell the story of the living as if the dead are not worth talking about. Even ghost films tell the stories of the living disturbed by the dead. These four films, but especially *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others*, reverse this and tell the stories of the dead. The relation with the other is extraordinary and problematic. The other should be understood as everything or everyone that we cannot relate to ourselves. It is what remains outside us. In thriller/ horror film the other is the source of threat. Unlike the common feature of ghost genre in which the ghost equals the other, in these films it becomes impossible to separate the ghost and the human. In *Stir of Echoes* and *What Lies Beneath* the main characters identify with the ghost. In *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others* main characters turn out to be ghosts. As a result of this reflective relation between human and ghost, it becomes impossible to define the ghost as the other. I believe this collapse of boundaries is closely related to the transition from the twentieth century to the twenty- first century. Referring to the coming of the millennium Smith states that it is hard to determine “on which side of the threshold is the other.” She states that the moment of transition creates a state of not belonging.<sup>13</sup> Confirming this view, not belonging is the main feeling in all these films. It is not only the ghosts who do not belong: it is also the humans. They are all beings caught in between. This reminds the Lacanian concept of ‘between two deaths’. He differentiates between physical death and symbolic death that is settling of accounts. Ghosts are between two deaths because they die without settling their accounts. That is why they come back.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand the films show the settling of

accounts as an impossible act because the life itself is an unfinished business. No one is able to die with settling accounts. This makes the living ghosts of the future. It is not possible to leave past traumas behind: it is important to learn to live with them. Kathy Smith relates this residual relation between life and death with transition from 1999 to 2000. She draws attention to the differentiation between the Freudian concepts of mourning and melancholy: melancholy is enduring the connection with the loss whereas mourning demands a closure, overcoming the loss. The ending of the century was thought as a closure. Leaving behind the familiar in the past and entering an unknown era caused anxiety. Smith states that from a retrospective point of view, it is now clear that this anxiety was unnecessary because nothing has changed in people's lives.<sup>15</sup> As a result of this, act of mourning loses its credibility. Although Freud defines melancholic as a "failed mourner",<sup>16</sup> mourning fails against melancholy in today's world. These films support this view because as Kathy Smith states "the ghost might be regarded as the physical representation of a melancholic state, the representation/ repetition of something no longer there."<sup>17</sup> The most important issue at the turn of the century, confrontation with the idea of loss, is emphasized with the representation of ghosts.

More importantly, these films are traumatic journeys from reality to the Real. Dino Felluga states that according to Lacan, one must distinguish between "reality (the fantasy world we convince ourselves is the world around us) and the real (a materiality of existence beyond language and thus

beyond expressibility)”.<sup>18</sup> Reality is better understood with the concept of the symbolic order. According to Lacan, symbolic order is a system of meanings people create in order to make sense of everyday reality. It demands a fact-based society. All the basic institutions such as religion, family, state are present to give meaning to our lives. Their absolute power is accepted. Symbolic order makes people rationalize and prevents them from questioning. Ghost films are provocative in the sense that they dig beyond the symbolic order. Ransome summarizes very well the reasons behind the power of the supernatural horror/thriller genre:

The Supernatural dwells behind, beside, above beneath; it seeps in, slips through, bursts out, rises up and drops down, it is everything that Monotheistic religion, cognitive psychology and global capitalism have pushed out to the margins. Animistic, atavistic and archaic, the spirits, ghosts, djinns and elemental drag us shaking and screaming back to quintessential selves, back to a landscape where society, culture, economics and military hardware count for nothing.<sup>19</sup>

What cannot be symbolized is gathered in the realm of the supernatural. Barbara Creed states that in horror films an encounter occurs between “symbolic order and that which threatens its stability”<sup>20</sup>. In spite of their provocative contents, she states that these films remain as the confirmation of symbolic order and patriarchal society in which the boundary between human and non-human, life and death is redefined.<sup>21</sup> Most of the ghost films fit this pattern in which otherness of the ghost is emphasized at the end. On the other hand, in the films of my choice confirmation of the existing symbolic order is not maintained at the end. Ghosts are not a threat to symbolic order but they are a part of it. Their presence is a result of human actions. The main agents of symbolic order such as religion and

science are questioned and even falsified in these films. The most sacred institutions such as family, neighborhood are damaged. The fakeness and fragility of everyday reality becomes so obvious that it is impossible to deny it. The stable image of symbolic order turns out to be just a fantasy: beneath all the rules and orders the society is corrupted. Lacanian concept of the Real is awakening from this fantasy. It is beyond the safety zone of symbolic order. Its presence is felt all the time but it is not expressed. Everyday reality dissolves within the disintegration of meaning. The Real is impossible within the limits of symbolic order. It is the end of everything. Still these films make the impossible Real in some way possible. In the classical ghost films that are under the influence of Gothic tradition, the Real shows itself as the return of the repressed. It is not a part of present setting; instead it is a disturbing memory or secret that is represented in the form of the ghost. On the other hand, these films present the Real as something that cannot be repressed but something should be faced. What is traumatic is not the presence of ghosts but to encounter with the Real in life. It is possible that our spouse can be a murderer as in *What Lies Beneath* or our neighborhood can be a crime scene as in *Stir of Echoes*. We may even be ghosts as in *The Others* and *The Sixth Sense*. In these films the existence of Real becomes visible. In their psychoanalytic analysis of famous TV series, *The X Files*, Jan Jagodzinski and Brigitte Hipfi state the series as “narratives of traumas where the Real has ripped the fabric of paramount reality.”<sup>22</sup> This statement, also true for my choice of films, reflects the most horrifying aspect of our time. All the values, rules we accepted are negated.

It would not be wrong to claim that symbolic order is seriously damaged as everything falls apart. At the end of the 1999, the fakeness of reality was so obvious that many expected for the apocalypse. Apocalypse is the Real in the sense that it is the end of everything. The journey from reality to the Real in these films is better understood with this expectancy for the apocalypse.

As another aspect of the millennium ghosts, the representation of uncanny is reversed in these films. As the ghost transforms from the uncanny image to the familiar, the family, the neighborhood or the self turns out to be the owner of concealed secrets. Freud states, “[...] to many people the acme of the uncanny is represented by anything to do with death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits and ghosts.”<sup>23</sup> It is possible to claim that the power of the supernatural horror/ thriller genre is based on this statement. Helene Cixous states ghost as “the direct figure of the uncanny.”<sup>24</sup> If the ghost is present in a horror/thriller film, it aims to horrify. Sinclair McKay summarizes this transformation of ghosts in these films from uncanny to familiar: “[...] the most striking aspect of the Others and 1999s highly acclaimed *The Sixth Sense* is the absence of evil. Up until this point, the forces of the supernatural were seen as essentially malevolent.”<sup>25</sup> The ghost is demystified and lost its status as the other whereas the self or family or neighborhood becomes the ultimate source of uncanny. In *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others* “the sense of the origin of the ‘I’ in an other or elsewhere”<sup>26</sup> provides the uncanny effect. In *The Stir of Echoes* and *What Lies Beneath*,

sinister secrets belong to 'normal and common' people that are closest to the protagonists. The other is not a threat to the symbolic order; because the evil lies within the system. This shift in the representation of uncanny, again, emphasizes lack of trust in the values and institutions of the symbolic order.

Lastly, in these four films, as a challenge to the supernatural, the ghosts are represented in the most natural way. In *Four Archetypes*, Jung states "the concept of spirit is restricted to the supernatural or anti natural and lost its substantial connection with psyche and life."<sup>27</sup> Confirming this view, most ghost films are like scary fairy tales, far from being believable. In *The Fantastic*, Todorov differentiates between fantastic and marvelous categories in which ghost stories fall into. Fantastic is based on the hesitation of an individual who faces inexplicable events within our reality. Marvelous demands the acceptance of another level of reality that we know is not reality.<sup>28</sup> In each case ghosts are represented as incredible beings. In these four films, supernatural does not equal unreal or irrational. The ghosts are presented the most realistic way. They are liberated from the chains of traditional Gothic and put in ordinary lives. The concept of ghost is not over emphasized. They are just beings. Most of the characters, especially children, accept their existence without questioning. This acceptance of ghosts reflects the integration of metaphysics in our reality. This seems a relevant view in the new millennium. Despite all the progress, Western society gets more interested in metaphysics in search for what is lacking. As a cultural protest against rationality, this reminds the rise of Gothic novel in

the 18<sup>th</sup> century just after the Enlightenment Period. In *Origins of Religion*, Freud states three chronological belief systems: animistic, religious and scientific. Although scientific is the current one, animistic is more complete because it presents a holistic view of the cosmos in which the presence of spiritual beings is accepted as natural.<sup>29</sup> These films reflect the impotence of the scientific belief system and a yearning for animistic times. As uncertainty about the existence of ghosts turns into acceptance of ghosts, they present another uncertainty: are we ghosts or not?

In the following chapters each film will be analyzed in relation to the aspects introduced above. *The Others* and *The Sixth Sense* are the melancholic stories of ghosts and livings, resembling people at the turn of the century, that are unable to leave behind as boundaries collapse and self integrates with the other. *Stir of Echoes* and *What Lies Beneath* are the traumatic encounters with the Real within our reality in which ghosts are the least uncanny figures compared to the living. Most importantly, all these four films clearly manifest how symbolic order is falling apart. I believe by analyzing these ghost films in terms of these aspects, I will solve the mystery behind their impact.

## Notes

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## The Sixth Sense

“Memento Mori”<sup>1</sup>  
(Don’t forget your death)

*The Sixth Sense* deserves to be the first film to be analyzed in terms of chronology and its wide popularity. Laurence Rickels states the film as “a cultural phenomenon that defined its time and place.” He emphasizes how the famous sentence from the film “I see dead people” became a part of everyday language.<sup>2</sup> The popularity of the film is beyond the boundaries of the Western culture. Contrary to the trendy flow of horror films from the Far East to the West, *Sixth Sense* had deep impact on Hong Kong horror cinema. In his essay on Hong Kong horror cinema in the 90s, Grady Hendrix gives examples of films that are clearly inspired by *Sixth Sense* such as *Youling Renjian* (Ann Hui, 2002) and *Yee Do Hung Gaan* (Chi-Leung Law, 2002)<sup>3</sup>. Although remembered mainly by its surprise twist at the end, the film deserves a complete textual analysis in order to understand the reasons of its impact. The following pages will indicate how *Sixth Sense* differs from other ghost films and how it brings new aspects to the ghost genre. Before going into further analysis, it is helpful to give short summary of this well known film in order to refresh memory.

### I

*A successful child psychologist, Dr. Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis) survives the attack of one of his ex patients, Vincent, who blames Malcolm and commits suicide after the attack. After some time Malcolm starts working on*

*a new case, Cole ( Haley Joel Osment), and at the same time he deals with his problems in his marriage. Cole is the socially detached son of a single mother. Behind Cole's problems lies a big secret: his ability to see ghosts. It is not clear whether he really sees them or hallucinates them. After Cole confesses his secret to Malcolm, Malcolm rejects it and tries to diagnose him with his knowledge of psychology. Only after he accidentally realizes the presence of ghost in an old session recording with Vincent, he starts to believe Cole. He helps him to overcome his fear of ghosts. Relieved by the burden, Cole learns to live with his ability of seeing ghosts. Malcolm returns home in order to focus on his marriage. Unfortunately he confronts with the traumatic and tragic truth: he has been a ghost, visible only to Cole, since he was killed by Vincent's attack.*

## II

In the film Malcolm goes through a traumatic journey from reality to the Real. At the beginning, the film introduces Malcolm's reality, which is within the comfort zone of the symbolic order, with a happy marriage and a successful career. As his relationship with Cole improves, he becomes aware that there is beyond his scope of reality. Accepting the existence of the ghosts opens a new state of being for him in which he encounters with the Real. This encounter takes a dramatic twist as he realizes that he is in fact the ghost. *The Sixth Sense* shows that the way we construct our lives is nothing more than an illusion.

Malcolm is introduced as a successful child psychologist. He is even honored for his achievements with a reward by the mayor who represents the state, the Name-of-the-Father. Name-of-the-Father represents the authority necessary for the maintenance of the symbolic order. Laws, orders and regulations determine how we communicate with other people. As Felluga states recognition by the agents by the symbolic order, in this example the state, is essential for the confirmation of our sense of reality.<sup>4</sup> The reward reinforces Malcolm's perception of reality in which he has a successful career. The reflection of the family on the reward represents the illusion of happiness within the symbolic order.

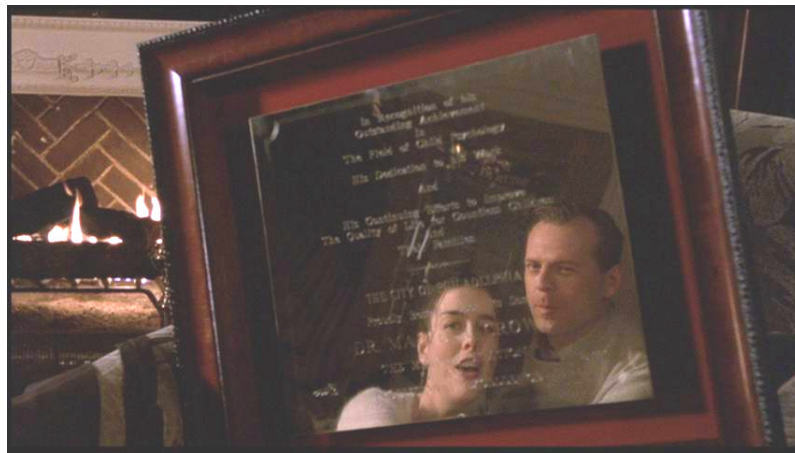


Figure 1. Reward

Malcolm's wife's words "I believe what they wrote is real" regarding the reward, becomes ironic because in the next scene his ex patient, Vincent attacks Malcolm. Vincent is the embodiment of the Real because he is the freak who is unable to communicate and enter the symbolic order. His

naked and fragile body resembles a newborn baby who according to Lacan is closest to the Real.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 2. Embodiment of the Real

He is the solid evidence for Malcolm's failure. Cheyne draws attention to the parallel relation between Vincent and Malcolm: "If Vincent is a monster because he cannot fit into the society, then Malcolm is a monster for having failed to help him."<sup>6</sup> His presence destroys Malcolm's illusion of reality. The sequel of scenes, Vincent scene just after the reward scene, is the evidence for fragility of reality.

As a psychologist, Malcolm is very rational and dependent on the facts. In his book *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, Carl Gustav Jung criticizes Western society's "enthusiasm for *facts*-mountains of facts far beyond any single individual's power to survey."<sup>7</sup> In various scenes, he is shown using books as reference, highlighting important points. Rather than to listen to him, he tries to diagnose Cole with the help of books.



Figure 3. Mountains of Facts

In one scene, he plays a mind reading game with Cole in order to get more information about him. He tries to guess things about Cole and if

he guesses right Cole comes a step closer to him, if he guesses wrong Cole moves a step back from him. Malcolm believes psychology has all the answers but he fails. When Cole

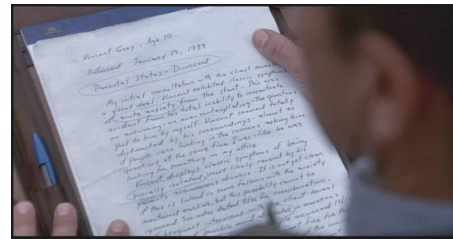


Figure 4. Taking Notes

confesses his ability to see ghosts, he diagnoses him as a schizophrenic.

According to him, there is not a slight chance that Cole is telling the truth.

This reflects lack of metaphysics in Western psychology that Jung criticizes:

Psychology accordingly treats all metaphysical claims and assertions as mental phenomena and regards them as statements about the mind and its structure that derive ultimately from certain unconscious , dispositions. It does not consider them to be absolutely valid or even capable of establishing a metaphysical truth.<sup>8</sup>

This perspective, in parallel to the points stated in the Introduction, changes throughout the film “as supernatural as unbelievable and unknowable becomes believable / known.”<sup>9</sup>

The first step in which Malcolm sees beyond his scope of reality, getting closer to the Real is when he starts to believe Cole about ghosts after he listens the tape recording of a session with Vincent. The tape recording has

been with Malcolm for years but he was unaware. In *Looking Awry*, Žizek states the omnipresence of the Real: within the everyday reality encounter with the Real occurs all the time without awareness.<sup>10</sup> For example, while doing her ordinary housework, Cole's mother notices a transparent mark besides him in all of his photos.



Figure 5. Pictures

Since she is in search of the “rational” explanation, not the “real” explanation, she does not see the concrete evidence of ghosts. There is another specific scene that exemplifies the sudden emergence of the Real. In the classroom, Cole gets angry with his teacher and starts to shout “Stuttering Stanley” addressing to his speaking disability in childhood that Cole knows by his sixth sense. The teacher, who was able to speak very fluently a minute ago loses control begins to stutter. The teacher represents the school and the school represents the symbolic order. This unexpected incident is an evidence for the Real within the symbolic.

The last step in Malcolm's journey from reality to the Real is when he realizes that he is in fact the ghost. This traumatic confrontation creates the

uncanny atmosphere in the film. In *Uncanny*, Freud gives Hoffman's story Sandman as an example. In the story, the main character, Nathaniel, falls in love with a girl named Olympia. To his surprise he finds out that she was in fact a wooden doll.<sup>11</sup> This discrepancy between the appearance and the truth provides the uncanny effect in the story. What if Nathaniel realized that he was the wooden boy? Nathaniel would become the Real in the story and the uncanny effect would be more since "the over proximity with real causes catastrophic confrontation."<sup>12</sup> This explains the impact of film's ending.

Malcolm realizes that he is dead when his wedding ring falls from his wife's hand. Wedding ring is very symbolic in the sense that it represents the main institutions of the society such as family, marriage. As the ring hits the floor, the 'symbolic reality' breaks down to pieces. Zizek in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* summarizes the fragility of everyday reality:

We all know the classical, archetypal cartoon scene: a cat approaches the edge of the precipice but she does not stop, she proceeds calmly and although she is already hanging in the air, without ground under her feet, she does not fall, -when does she fall? The moment she looks down and becomes aware of the fact that she is hanging in the air. The point of this nonsense accident is that when the cat is walking slowly in the air, it is as if the Real has for a moment forgotten its knowledge: when the cat finally looks down she remembers that she must follow the laws of nature and falls. This is basically the same logic as in already mentioned dream, reported in Freud's interpretation of Dreams, of a father who does not know that he is dead the point is again that because he does not know that he is dead, he continues to live- he must be reminded of his death or to give this situation a comical twist he is still living because he has forgotten to die.<sup>13</sup>

Similar to that father, Malcolm continues to 'live' till he is reminded of his death. The ending of the film leaves the spectator hanging in the air, afraid to look down.

### III

In *The Sixth Sense*, the boundary between living and the dead is seriously threatened. In the classical plot, the ghost is the intruder in the world of the living and at the end he/she is sent to its own world. The boundary is the guarantee of the symbolic order because ghost is a threat to the function of the system. On the other hand, film present a single life shared by the living and the dead. The omnipresence of ghosts is felt throughout the film. Even at the beginning, Malcolm's wife, Anna, shivers, a sign for the presence of ghosts, in the wine cellar. Their presence is not restricted to the haunted houses. They are in the most sacred places: in the home, in the school, even in the church.



Figure 6. Ghost in the Church

Malcolm's presence in church is provocative because church is the most solid boundary between the living and dead. In most of classic supernatural horror films there is a priest who tries to help the victims to send away the 'non human' monster and maintain the order. *Exorcist*, *Amityville Horror* can be given as examples. Malcolm, supporting this view, says to Cole that "In the old days people used to hide in churches. They would claim them to be sanctuary." Malcolm's presence in church reminds the times when dead was integral part of the society as Philpott summarizes: "In the Middle ages the dead were universally present with the living. [...]. Perhaps few would have gone quite as far as this reported remark, nonetheless, whenever medieval people went to church, for example, they found themselves surrounded by the dead."<sup>14</sup>

Cole goes to his friend's birthday party of and there is a frustrated ghost in the house. In Cole's classroom, the pictures (ghosts) of the ex presidents of United States are placed over the blackboard. The teacher, who is the figure of authority, share the same viewpoint of the presidents.



Figure 7. Dead presidents

It is possible to say that what determine the rules of society are the ancestors. It is impossible to exclude dead from the world of living, because the world of living is built on the dead. With ghosts, the events got imprinted on locations and it becomes impossible to deny them. The school that Cole attends was the courtyard in which Declaration of Independence was signed. Ironically, Cole sees the ghosts of the people who were hanged in the courtyard.



Figure. 8. Ghost of Hanged People

Ghosts present “[..] urban landscape of posthumous rage and suffering.”<sup>15</sup> This is a burden for a society who loves to forget and does not want to remember. The film shows to forget as an impossible act. Both ghosts and humans are presented as melancholic beings that are unable to leave past behind. Cole has issues with his absent father. Cole’s mother has issues with her mother who passed away. Malcolm’s wife owns an antique shop that is full of stuff that communicates. She is attached to his absence as much as he is attached to her presence. At the end of the film, it would be wrong to state that Malcolm leaves; instead his presence becomes stronger than ever

as Žižek states:

What however, is the true presence of a person? In an evocative passage towards the end of *The End of the Affair*, Graham Greene emphasizes the falsity of the standard scene in which the husband, returning home after the death of his wife, wanders nervously around the apartment, experiencing the traumatic absence of his deceased wife of which all her intact objects remind him. Quite on the contrary, the true experience of absence occurs when the wife is still alive, but not at home, and the husband is gnawed by suspicions about where she is, why she is late (is she with a lover?). Once the wife is dead and buried, however it is her overwhelming *presence* that the apartment devoid of her flaunts: 'Because she's always away, she's never away. You see she's never anywhere else. She's not having lunch with anybody, she's not at a cinema with you. There's nowhere for her to be but at home. Is this not the very logic of very logic of melancholic identification, in which the object is over present in its very unconditional and irretrievable loss?'<sup>16</sup>

The presence of Malcolm fills the house. The ending reflects the melancholic perspective I stated in the Introduction.

#### IV

The film destroys the opposition between the I and the other and living and the dead. The ghost and human becomes the reflection of each other.

The beginning of the film presents ghosts as frightening images with scars and wounds. Similarly, Malcolm is in fact wounded on the back but that is not revealed till the last scene. So it is a very slight change in the perspective which determines the distinction between the I (human) and the other (ghost). As Connolly states, the spectator along with Malcolm lives

through a “sublime experience” as “collapse of the boundaries and the terror linked to the encounter with the other and with the unknown and the unrepresentable brings about a re-negotiation and expansion of the self linked to the integration of the other.”<sup>17</sup>

The spectator who identified comfortably with Malcolm realizes traumatically that he/she in fact identified with a ghost. Rickels state when the spectator watch the film for the second time he/she is in fact watching it for the first time.<sup>18</sup> Cole’s confession about dead people “they are like regular people, they see what they want to see” becomes true for the spectator. As Rickels states, “If we can see what we precisely did not see before, then this is because we already identified with dead people.”<sup>19</sup> This leads to the uncertainty I stated at the beginning: Are we ghosts or not?

## Notes

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1. Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p 134.
  2. A. Laurence Rickels, "Recognition Values: Seeing *The Sixth Sense* Again for the First Time," *Other Voices* 2:2 (March 2002), 20 January 2005, <http://www.othervoices.org/2.2/rickels>.
  3. Grady Hendrix, *Hong Kong Horror-The 90s and Beyond*, 15 December 2004, [http://sensesofcinema.com/contents/03/29/hong\\_kong\\_horror.html](http://sensesofcinema.com/contents/03/29/hong_kong_horror.html).
  4. Felluga, *Modules on Lacan*.
  5. Ibid.
  6. Leah A. Cheyne, *The Sixth Sense: Humanizing Horror*, posting date 30 November 2003, 5 September 2005, [http://horschamp.qc.ca/new\\_offscreen/sixth\\_sense.html](http://horschamp.qc.ca/new_offscreen/sixth_sense.html).
  7. Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, Trans. R.F.C. Hull, (London: Routledge, 1958;1991), p.483.
  8. Ibid. p. 476.
  9. Cheyne, *The Sixth Sense*.
  10. Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture*.( Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: MIT Press, 1998), p.39.
  11. Freud, *The Uncanny*, pp.136-38.
  12. Joan Copjec, "Vampires, Breast Feeding and Anxiety," *Horror Reader*, Ed. K. Gelder, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 61.
  13. Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, pp.133-34.
  14. Mark, Philpott, "Haunting the Middle Ages." *Writing and Fantasy*. Ed. C. Sullivan and B. White, (New York: Addison Wesley Longman Inc, 1999), p. 48.
  15. Phillip Horne, "Martin Scorsese and the Film Between the Living and the Dead," *Raritan*: 21:1( Summer 2001), 15 January 2005, <http://0->

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search.epnet.com.library.bilgi.edu.tr:80/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=5065428.

16. Slavoj Zizek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* (London: Verso,2001), pp.143-44.

17. Angela Connolly, "Psychoanalytic Theory in Times of Terror," pp. 415-416.

18. Rickels,"Recognition Values".

19. Ibid.

## Stir of Echoes

“Love Thy Neighbor? No, Thanks”<sup>1</sup>

*Stir of Echoes* is the least known film among the films of my choice. Released in 1999 with *The Sixth Sense*, the film did not get the attention it deserved. Still, it became one of the favorites of ghost film fans. It is no surprise that in year 2000 it was awarded by International Horror Guild as the best movie.<sup>2</sup> In contrary to ghosts in big mansions, *Stir of Echoes* places the ghost in the most ordinary house and family. As the hidden traumas come to surface, ghost remains as a benign being compared to the horrifying aspects of ordinary lives. These points will be analyzed in detail after the plot summary of the film.

### I

*Tom (Kevin Bacon) is a middle class worker living with his pregnant wife and son, Jake. They spend most of their free time with their neighbors. Tom's life traumatically changes as his sister in law hypnotizes him. After that experience, pieces of visions and a ghost of a young girl begin to haunt him. He realizes his son's ability to see a ghost and they become closely bounded to each other. As time passes he becomes obsessed with the ghost and tries to solve the mystery behind her. The ghost turns out to be the ghost of a girl who used to live in their neighborhood. He learns about her disappearance sixth months ago. As he voluntarily becomes hypnotized, the ghost sends him a message: dig. He digs the backyard of their house but*

*he finds nothing. After his wife leaves the house with their son for a family funeral, he begins to dig inside the house. He finds the buried corpse in their cellar. As he touches the corpse he becomes possessed and learns what happened to the young girl: she was invited to this house sixth months ago, before Tom and his family moved in, by two sons of their close neighbors. She struggled with them as they began to sexually abuse her. As the boys panicked they killed and buried her in the house. The neighbors who sense that Tom is finding out the truth, come to kill him. At the end they got killed, the ghost is relieved and Tom and his family move out for a new home.*

## II

The ghost, instead of a source of terror, is introduced as an accepted being whose omnipresence is felt from the beginning. The film begins with Jake talking to the camera. It turns out that he is talking to the ghost because he asks if it hurts to be dead. Since he directly looks at the camera, it is possible to claim that the spectator is put in the place of the ghost. This identification with the ghost continues throughout the film. It becomes impossible to define the ghost as the other. In various scenes Tom lives through the sufferings of the girl while dying. For example, in the night of the hypnotic experience, while making love to his wife, Tom sees and feels a broken tooth, crashed nail. Tom, and the spectator, learns the pain she felt.



Figure 9. Broken tooth

The image of the ghost is less emphasized compared to the sufferings she lived through. It is interesting that the word “ghost” is used only once or twice throughout the film. The ghost is just another resident of the house. Jake enjoys the existence of the ghost in the most natural way. Tom waits persistently for her to reappear to him. Tom’s wife is the only one who is unable to communicate with her. Still, she does not show any signs of disbelief. This is new to the ghost genre because as Nicholas Rucka states that in Western culture and as a result in films, ghosts are not believable:

[...] while there are exceptions to this, one of the larger issues with horror in the West is that it is unusually logic and morality bound. Concurrent with this, is the necessity of establishing the monster/ghost/spirit’s existence of something fantastic. Think about how much time is spent in William Friedkin’s *The Exorcist* (1973) establishing the notion that demons can actually possess a person, yet alone be exorcised!<sup>3</sup>

This new representation of ghosts as accepted beings is deeply related to the West’s increasing interest in the metaphysics.



Figure 10. Waiting for the Ghost

Tom's sister in law who is devoted into psychic matters is a reflection of a society in metaphysical yearning. The obvious evidence for this yearning is the concept of ghost within popular culture. Poniewozik states that a number of TV shows in which ghosts give advice to the living<sup>4</sup>. In today's world, among all the things to be afraid of, ghosts are not listed!

### III

In *Stir of Echoes*, the journey from reality to the Real is accomplished through several ways simultaneously: while Tom encounters with the Real in him by discovering his psychic powers, the Real within his everyday reality unfolds as the sinister truth behind 'decent' neighborhood is revealed.

In 'The Plague of Fantasies', Zizek discusses the desublimation experience. A fascinating beauty from a distance can turn into a disgusting substance at a closer look<sup>5</sup>. In *Stir of Echoes*, the concept of decent

neighborhood is desublimated throughout the film. At the beginning the neighborhood is introduced as the perfect place to live. Since everyone watches over the other, it is safe. In fact it is so safe that Tom and his wife leave their little son, Jake, alone at home in order to attend a party at their neighbors. The neighbors enjoy spending their free time together. Their relationship is shallow but entertaining with jokes and gossips. The house parties and barbecues are the peak moments of this cozy atmosphere. The barbecue is safely surrounded by police barriers writing, “police line- do not cross” on them. It is ironic that the same barriers also surround crime scenes.



Figure 11. Barbecue

In the desublimation process, there are some pre signs that are contrary to this perfect picture. In one scene, Tom wears T-Shirt writing ‘social distortion’ on it. Social distortion is closely related with the desublimation process because they both suggest a change in the negative sense. As

another sign, during the barbecue, a sudden fight among the residents disturbs the cozy atmosphere.



Figure 12. The Fight

Jagodzinski and Hipfi states that “[...] social reality is nothing but a fragile membrane that can at any moment be torn apart by the intrusion of Real.” They add that this can be by a car accident or a quarrel.<sup>6</sup> Confirming this view, with the fight, The Real pops out for a few seconds. It falsifies the decent image of neighborhood that is symbolized in the previous scene with nuns, priest, children and balloons.

In another scene, Jake watches George Romero’s cult film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) on television. Angela Connolly summarizes the significant place of this film among other horror films:

If the horror genre has always been remarkable for its tendency to undermine the hierarchical binary oppositions, order and disorder, rationality and irrationality, good and evil, used for the construction of self in Western society, in *Night* these oppositions are collapsed to the

point that there is almost a complete reversal, a true enantiodromia. The source of evil lies not so much in the monstrous and alien 'other', as in the social order which had caused the process of zombification.<sup>7</sup>

The parallel relation between two films is obvious: as social order causes zombification, in *Night of the Living Dead*, society causes ghosts in *Stir of Echoes*. The critical approach of *Night of the Living Dead* is also present in this film. It becomes impossible to see the ghost as the other because it is a result of the human actions. *Stir of Echoes* illuminates the process of becoming a ghost. The film destroys the common belief of "the presence of ghosts brings social discord."<sup>8</sup> In fact, social discord brings ghosts.

The desublimation process is completed as Tom finds out that his neighbors murdered a girl in his house and they kept it as a secret in order to protect the decent image of the neighborhood. As the truth is unfolded, the neighborhood becomes the most unbearable place to live. The commonness of the neighborhood increases the terrifying aspect of the film because it underlines the fact this could be/ is your neighborhood.

In one of the scenes at the beginning of the film, one of the neighbors states that they look out each other in that neighborhood and he claims this saying to be a lot as the year 2000 approaches. In fact this line is directly related the points I discussed in the Introduction part. The belief in social values and virtues is diminishing each day. Paranoia and anxiety has replaced trust. *Stir of Echoes* does not comfort our souls but confirms this

pessimistic view of life as the owner of the statement turns out to be the father of the one of the murderers in the film. The film falsifies the moral system on which everything is based upon. The threat lies within the boundaries of the symbolic order. In fact, it is not possible to talk about an order. In today's world what is present is symbolic disorder. In *Enjoy Your Symptom*, Žizek states that “ in the famous TV series *Twin Peaks* the logic of unveiling the corruption which lurks under the idyllic surface no longer works, since corruption is already part of this idyllic everyday life.”<sup>9</sup> Similar to *Twin Peaks*, in *Stir of Echoes*, social corruption is part of everyday life. It is inevitable and unavoidable. As I stated in the Introduction, at the end of 1999 many expected the apocalypse. The feeling that we are living on the edge very close to the end is present in *Stir of Echoes*. Apocalypse did not happen but the film shows that we are already living in an apocalyptic world.

#### IV

Tom's illusion of reality is ruined once he becomes aware of what he is capable of. At the beginning of the film Tom is introduced as the most ordinary middle class man with a blue-collar work, wife and kid. He seems to have enough to be happy: a loving family, a job, and friends. When he learns that his wife is pregnant he claims himself to be happy. On the other hand there is something inside him craving for more. In the same scene he confesses his wife that he never thought that he would end up so ordinary. It

is clear that he is not satisfied within the boundaries of his reality. He senses the presence of the Real.



Figure 13. The Family Man

As Jack's arrival at Overlook Hotel triggers what is inside him, the hypnotic experience triggers the Real in Tom. He becomes receptive to his environment.

This awakening process is terrifying and fascinating at the same time. At first Tom wants to shut the flow of information and become ordinary again but the transformation from the man of rationality to the man of impulses is inevitable. Both Jack and Tom become attracted to their new selves. This leads to serious problems in the family dynamics.

Both films are conformist in the sense that they show that it is safer to live within the safety zone of the symbolic order. Those who wander beyond the limits should be punished. In *The Shining* Jack loses his sanity and dies at the end. In *Stir of Echoes*, Tom becomes obsessed with the idea

Hypnotic process opens a new world for Tom. From this perspective he resembles Jack (Jack Nicholson) in *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980).

Jack is also introduced as an ordinary



Figure 14. The 'Real' Tom

of finding the corpse. He digs his entire house following the instruction of the ghost. His neighbors almost kill him. At the end of the film, Tom seems to be integrated in the symbolic order again. His relation with symbolic order reflects our relation with the symbolic order at the turn of the century. At first he is not satisfied with his reality and is eager to go beyond the limits. As a result of his traumatic encounter with the Real, he willingly returns to his reality. Similarly, at the turn of the century, people were so bored with their reality that they hoped things to change. The new millennium was like the exotic stranger whom everyone fell in love with. Unfortunately this attraction turned into anxiety as the transition from 1999-2000 came closer. Stephen Gullatz summarizes how people avoid to encounter with the Real in reality: “One is reminded of the unbearable but nonetheless encounter with real occurs in dreams or nightmares cause the subject to wake up in order to enable him continue dreaming to preserve the comforting illusion of a stable social self.”<sup>10</sup> Confirming this view, on the first day of the year 2000, people returned to their comfortable daily realities in a way relieved that nothing changed.

## V

There is a curious twist at the ending of *Stir of Echoes*: As Tom and his family travel in their car, Jake closes his ears in order to avoid the ghostly sounds from the houses they pass. This final scene leaves the maintenance of symbolic order as an impossible act. Moving out from the haunted house is a popular ending in the ghost films, such as *Amityville Horror*, that

indicates a return to the symbolic order. This scene destroys the fantasy of a fresh start.

*Stir Of Echoes* suggests that there is no escape from ghosts. As it is stated before, social corruption creates ghosts. Since social corruption is everywhere ghosts are everywhere. This reminds a quotation from Martin Scorsese's film *Bringing Out The Dead* (1999) that tells the story of a paramedic worker haunted by the visions of people he tries to save: "[...] It was impossible to pass a building that didn't hold the ghost of something."<sup>11</sup> This coincides with the omnipresence of ghosts in the *Sixth Sense*. The film presents the melancholic approach to life that I discussed in the Introduction part. Leaving behind is an impossible act in today's world. It is possible to talk about closure with the ghost that is relieved but it is not possible to talk about closure with the ghosts that are waiting for. In today's world, it is necessary to learn to live with ghosts.

## Notes

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1. Slavoj Zizek, *Plague of Fantasies*, (New York and London: Verso, 1997), p.67.
  2. See IMDB.
  3. Nicholas Rucka, *The Death of J-Horror?* post date 22.12.2005, 27.12.2005, <http://www.midnighteye.com/features/death-of-j-horror.shtml>.
  4. James Poniewozik, "Ghosts in the Machine," *Time*, . 156:9(August 2000), 15 January 2005, <http://0-search.epnet.com.library.bilgi.edu.tr:80/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=3484648>.
  5. Zizek, *Plague of Fantasies*, pp. 64-69.
  6. Jagodzinski and Hipfi, "Youth Fantasies: Reading "The X Files" Psychoanalytically."
  7. Connolly, "Psychoanalytic Theory in Times of Terror," p.422.
  8. Bruce Gordon, "Malevolent Ghosts and Ministering Angels" , p.91.
  9. Zizek, *Enjoy Your Symptom, Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1992) p.163.
  10. Stefan Gullatz, *Exquisite Ex-timacy: Jacques Lacan vis-à-vis Contemporary Horror*, 31 March 2001, 5 September 2005 [http://www.horschamp.qa.ca/new\\_offscreen/lacan.html](http://www.horschamp.qa.ca/new_offscreen/lacan.html).
  11. Phillip Horne, "Martin Scorsese and the Film Between the Living and the Dead." *Raritan*: 21:1( Summer2001), 15 January 2005 <http://0-search.epnet.com.library.bilgi.edu.tr:80/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=5065428>.

## What Lies Beneath

“ [...] what lies beyond [beneath] is not the symbolic order but a real kernel, a traumatic core.”<sup>1</sup>

*What Lies Beneath* presents a rich text full of references concerning the points I discussed in the introduction. First of all, it presents a reverse relation between Norman (Harrison Ford) and the ghost. As Norman transfers from the familiar to the source of uncanny, the ghost transfers from the source of uncanny to the familiar. It deconstructs the symbolic order by locating evil within the most sacred institution of the society, the family. Throughout the film, it becomes impossible to classify the ghost as the other because a symbiotic and a reflective relation is built between the living and dead. These points will be discussed after the plot summary of the film.

### I

*Claire Spencer (Michelle Pfeiffer) is married to Norman Spencer (Harrison Ford), a successful scientist. Their happy marriage is interrupted when Claire begins to witness supernatural events in their new house. She suspects it to be the ghost of their neighbor whom she believes is killed by her (neighbors) husband. Her assumption is falsified as she finds out that she is alive. Her husband finds her a psychotherapist as she becomes uncertain of her sanity. Although she tries to be rational, the supernatural events continue to exist. This time clues direct to her another name for the*

*ghost, Madison. She searches the past of Madison, a young woman who has been lost for a year, in order to understand why she is trying to communicate with her. As she voluntarily becomes possessed of Madison's spirit, she remembers what has remained repressed in her unconscious after a serious car crash the year before: Madison and Norman had an affair that she witnessed. Claire questions Norman to learn whether he has anything with her disappearance. His response does not satisfy Claire and she continues to search for the truth. At the end, Claire finds out that Norman is the killer of Madison. After she shares this with Norman, he tries to kill her. Their long and cruel struggle ends with the death of Norman as Madison's ghost helps Claire.*

## II

At the beginning of the film, Norman Spencer is presented as a loving husband, a caring father and an important scientist. All these titles make him a 'decent' individual of the society. He is even honored by the Vermont society for his achievements. From this perspective he resembles



Figure 15. Front Page

Malcolm. In the picture, Norman and Claire embrace the reward together as an confirmation for their happy marriage. This reminds the reflection of Malcolm and his wife on the reward. As Norman's framed achievement breaks the hidden truth comes out. The illusion of happiness on the front page is destroyed with the news about the missing girl on the back page.



Figure 16. Back Page

This transformation provides the uncanny effect in the film explained by Connolly's quotation from Nicholas Rand and Maria Torok : "[...] What we consider to be the closest and most intimate part of our lives – our own family, our own home- is in fact at the furthest possible remove and the least familiar to us."<sup>2</sup> First, the unfaithful husband reveals itself, then the murderer. In the last scenes he becomes a man of pure drive aiming only to kill and destroy without any hesitation or compromise. Regarding Stefan Gullatz's Lacanian analysis on Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, Norman's similarities with Dorian is significant:

The original film version of Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Albert Lewin, 1945) likewise evoking the Victorian era

perfectly signifies the inherent instability of the uncanny interstices between two deaths the perception of which may easily shift from sublime beauty to terrifying monstrosity. While Dorian is embalmed in the beauty of his eternal youth, his portrait not only ages but also assumes a diseased, repulsive ugliness which materializes his mortal sins. [...] His coldness and cruelty, the hubris inherent in his cult of beauty and youth, his reckless transgressions, and his eventual murder of Basil signify a symbolic death that places him outside contemporary society while at the same time he continues to persist as a physical being.<sup>3</sup>

As Dorian shifts from sublime beauty to terrifying monstrosity, Norman shifts from a man of virtues to a terrifying monstrosity. Ironically, Dorian kills Basil, the painter, and destroys his portrait in order to maintain his place in the symbolic order. Norman kills Madison for the same reason. He becomes a murderer in order to protect his marriage. As Felluga states, symbolic order demands the acceptance of laws and restrictions over desire.<sup>4</sup> There is no place for Madison in Norman's decent life. His affair is unacceptable. Zizek in *The Plague of Fantasies*, defines exactly what Norman lives through:

A husband, for example, can maintain his marriage as just another social role and engage in adultery as the real thing, however the moment he is confronted with the choice of actually leaving his wife or not, he suddenly discovers that the social mask of marriage means more to him than intense private passion.<sup>5</sup>

His efforts to maintain his marriage, the approved social institution, in fact cause his exclusion from the society. Similar to Dorian, Norman's failure as an ethical being causes his symbolic death. Till Norman dies at the end, he wanders at the terrifying zone of 'between two deaths'.

Similar to Norman, but in the opposite way, ghost of Madison is also ‘between two deaths’. After a sudden and usually violent physical death, ghosts come back in order to settle their accounts. This coming back is a source of fear for the living. Throughout the film, the ghost shifts from a fear-evoking image to a “person with will power and agenda.”<sup>6</sup> Compared to the ghosts who wait to be communicated, Madison’s ghost is active. The scene in which Claire and her friend try to communicate with the ghost through Quija board seems parodic because the ghost communicates with Claire through computer.



Figure 17. Quija Board

She helps Claire to confront with her past trauma by guiding her combine pieces of information. Through Claire’s investigations, she becomes a familiar and accepted being. As we meet her mother and visit her room, it becomes impossible to see her as the other.

The final scene of the film is the climax of the opposite transformation between Norman and Madison. Contrary to Madison's scary ghost image, Norman is the object of abject. As Barbara Creed states "abjection occurs when the individual fails to respect the law."<sup>7</sup> He is more terrifying than the ghost, the classic source of terror.

In this scene, a contra reference to Dorian Grey is possible. At the end of the novel, Dorian stabs his portrait, which reflects his inner ugliness, in order to destroy it, but he in fact kills himself and turns into an old, sinister looking ugly man. In the film, as Norman dies, Madison becomes the young beautiful woman. In a way she achieves sublime beauty.



Figure 18. Sublime Beauty

In both the novel and the film a harmony between the appearance and soul is achieved at the end. In the final scene, Claire is shown besides Madison's grave. This scene is significant because improper burial according to Zizek's conclusion of Lacan's views and beliefs in popular culture is the

reason behind why dead return<sup>8</sup>. The proper burial of Madison signifies her symbolic death.

Through this reverse relation between Madison and Norman, the ghost loses its otherness. She becomes an active participant in the truth seeking process.

### III

*In What Lies Beneath*, ghost is not evil, it is the result of Norman's evilness. This reminds *Stir of Echoes* in which neighborhood turns out to be the source of evil. Rosemary Jackson summarizes the traditional concept of evil:

The concept of evil, which is usually attached to the other, is relative, transforming with shifts in cultural fears and values. Any social structure tends to exclude as evil anything radically different from itself or which threatens it with destruction and this conceptualization this naming of difference as evil, is a significant ideological gesture. Strangeness precedes the naming of it as evil: the other is defined as evil precisely because of his/her difference and a possible power to disturb the familiar and known.<sup>9</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the source of evil in horror cinema is mainly non-human.

Even it is a human, he is so disturbed and so different from us, as in the case of Norman of *Psycho*, that it is easy to classify him as the 'other'.

There is another perspective in which self is the source of evil is not the other. Faust is the origin of this perspective. Jackson summarizes this alternative view:

Because of this progressive internalization of the demonic, the easy polarization of good and evil which had operated in tales and supernaturalism and magic ceased to be effective. [...]. A loss of faith

in supernaturalism, a gradual skepticism and problematization of the relation of self to world, introduced a much closer otherness, something intimately related to the self.<sup>10</sup>

Parallel to this perspective, in 1960s, horror cinema began to focus on the deficiencies of the modern society. Instead of the external threats, the threat within the main institution of the society, family, became a subject of interest. In Dominique Strinati's book *Introduction to Popular Culture*, *Psycho* is regarded as the beginning of this trend<sup>11</sup>. It is probably no coincidence that protagonists of both films (*Psycho* and *What Lies Beneath*) share the same name, Norman, because *What Lies Beneath* is a contemporary follower of this trend. Another contemporary ghost film, *Gothika* (2003, Mathieu Kassovitz and Thom Olimphant) resembles *What Lies Beneath*. Miranda Grey (Halle Berry) a successful psychiatrist, wakes one morning and finds herself being accused of murdering her husband, the head psychiatrist. The trouble is she cannot remember what happened. In her search for truth, she finds out that her husband was a psychopath involved in the torture and murder of patients. Miranda remembers that she killed her husband while in the possession of the spirit who was killed by her husband. The husband shares a lot of common points with Norman Spencer: they are scientists, respected citizens and figures of authority. They seem to have good marriages. Beneath this perfect picture, they turn out to be the monsters. They contradict the stereotype of monster that Strinati summarizes:

With the horror film, social order is disrupted by a monster, who is usually, but not always nonhuman or inhuman. This monster normally engages in murder and mayhem. It threatens the community by killing

people in gruesome ways which are far from normal and which take on supernatural and incomprehensible qualities that characterize the monster itself. Eventually, usually through the acquisition of knowledge that can comprehend and combat the monster, the monster is confronted and killed.<sup>12</sup>

The possibility of evil in such a well-educated man with high reputation is contrary to our values and beliefs. He is the embodiment of the symbolic order. At the end of the film, the death of Norman seems to provide the homeostasis because the failure of the monster maintains the symbolic order. Despite of the return to the normality and reestablishment the status quo, the film hints that “the world is a far darker, scarier and ultimately less knowable place than we could ever imagine.”<sup>13</sup> The film triggers the question: Is it really possible to destroy the (monstero)us? The ordinariness of the evil is what makes the film horrifying. As it is stated in Socrates *Antigone*, “There are a lot of dreadful things in the world, but none is more dreadful than man.”<sup>14</sup> This classic quotation is true more than ever in today’s world of social anxiety in which no one can trust another. Since ordinary human is the potential evil, the social order is under continuous threat. Robin Wood defines horror film as “normality threatened by the monster.” The definition of normality is “heterosexual monogamous couple, the family, and the social institutions (police, church, armed forces) that support and defend them.”<sup>15</sup> What if the threat lies within the normality? This means disintegration of all the units of symbolic order. The classic and comforting bound between evil and other vanishes and the film presents a problematic representation of the evil that is disturbing to our

sense of reality. While Miranda and Claire confront with the trauma of their lives, the spectator is left to confront with his/her own.

#### IV

The film provides several complex relations between the subject and the object. The object and subject becomes reflection of each other. As a result of this, everyone dissolves in each other and to classify the other becomes impossible. This can be analyzed in two levels. In first level the relation between Spencers and their neighbors analyzed. In the second level, the relation between Claire and Madison is analyzed.



Figure 19. Men

both husbands are scientists (psychology and biology) at the same university. Both women are blond with colored eyes. Both men are tall and masculine looking.

The physical and social resemblance between Spencers and their neighbors is uncanny. Both families live in same type of houses;



Figure 20. Women

They are like the prototypes of the perfect American family. At the beginning of the film Claire (subject) watches her neighbors (object)

resembling Jeff (James Stewart) in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954). Claire is so undoubtedly sure of her own marriage that she questions the marriage of her neighbors. Using the classical hints that the spectator is familiar from *Rear Window*, she builds a murder scenario. At the end of the film she actually becomes object in the scenario she made up as Norman tries to kill her.

Another reflective relation occurs between living (Claire) and dead (Madison). Claire sees Madison's face several times in the mirror and in the water.



Figure 21. Reflections

This reflection turns into integration of two, as Madison voluntarily possesses Claire; they become one woman with the spirit of Madison and body of Claire. The difference between ghost and human disappear. While Claire (Madison) is kissing Norman, a woman gets in the house. It looks like the ghost of Madison but it turns out to be Claire witnessing Madison and Norman's affair. Not only the characters but past and present integrate

in that scene. The reflective relation between two women becomes symbiotic as both of them struggle together against Norman in the last scenes.



Figure 22. Claire or Madison?

These reflective relations clearly show the fragility and fakeness of everyday reality. People live the fantasy of happiness with perfect marriages; houses etc. believing that the others lack what they have. On the other hand, beneath realities, one's life is not any better or different than the others. Illusion of happiness is destroyed.

## Notes

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1. Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p.132.
  2. Connolly, "Psychoanalytic Theory in Times of Terror", p. 412.
  3. Stefan Gullatz, *Exquisite Ex-timacy: Jacques Lacan vis-à-vis Contemporary Horror*, posting date 31 March 2001, 5 September 2005  
[http://www.horschamp.qa.ca/new\\_offscreen/lacan.html](http://www.horschamp.qa.ca/new_offscreen/lacan.html).
  4. Felluga, Modules on Lacan.
  5. Zizek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, p.139.
  6. Ruffles, *Ghost Images*, p.61. Here Ruffles makes a comparison between earlier ghosts that do not have any motives and current filmic ghosts.
  7. Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous Feminine", p. 42.
  8. Zizek, *Looking Awry*, p.23.
  9. Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 1981, (London: Routledge,2000). p. 52.
  10. Ibid, p56.
  11. Dominique Strinati, *An Introduction to Studying Popular Culture*, (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 112.
  12. Ibid, p.81.
  13. Ransome, "Supernatural Horror."
  14. Zizek, *Looking Awry*, p. 26.
  15. Robin Wood, "The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s," *Horror, The Film Reader*, Ed. M. Jancovich, (London: Routledge, 2002), p.31.

## The Others

We are them and they are us <sup>1</sup>

*The Others* is usually compared to the *Sixth Sense* because of their similar twist at the end but it would be unfair to consider it as a replica of the *Sixth Sense*. The strength of *The Others* lies in making a great synthesis of old and new. Among all the films in this project, *Others* is the only one that does not take place in a contemporary setting.



Figure 23. Gothic Atmosphere

Its spooky atmosphere resembles very much its Gothic antecedents that are summarized by Sinclair McKay:

[...]The Others presents a fusion of many classic ghost story elements: a remote house (this one in Jersey) cut off from the world by thick fogs; a neurotic mother becoming convinced that her children are being targeted by supernatural forces; sinister house servants; doors that won't do a thing that anyone wants them to; and heavy footsteps heard in empty rooms above.<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to its traditional Gothic atmosphere, the film brings intriguing concepts new to the ghost films. As the title of the film clearly indicates the film deals with the complex relationship with the other. It destroys the boundary between the living and the dead. Throughout the film the meaning of the word intruder changes. *The Others* questions the reality created by the Catholic Church in the most provocative way. It presents a new realm for ghosts other than between two deaths: beyond death. All these points will be analyzed in depth after the plot summary of the film.

## I

Grace lives with her two children in a big mansion. Her husband left them to join the Second World War and although the war is over there is not any sign of him. The children are deadly allergic to daylight so the house is always kept in dark. Grace hires three servants to do the house chores. Her daughter, Anne, talks about the existence of other people in the house. Grace accuses her of lying until she witnesses inexplicable events such as strange sounds and movements in the house. As a strong Catholic in search for a rational answer she decides to go to the priest. On her way she meets her husband. Contrary to her happiness, he seems detached. After spending one day at the house he leaves them. Grace becomes extremely angry and fires the servants when all of the curtains of the house get lost all of a sudden. Anne and Grace find out that servants are in fact ghosts. As Grace and children try to hide from them, the truth comes out: Grace killed her

children and herself after she lost control of herself due to unbearable conditions and they are in fact ghosts who are frightening the present owners of the house. As the owners of the house leave, Grace and children continue to haunt the house along with the servants.

## II

*The Others* shows the distinction between self and the other, the ghost and the human, as a matter of perspective: as the point of view changes, the meaning of the other changes. This makes other an unstable concept. Rosemary Jackson summarizes this fluxional relation with the other:

Donne's famous metaphor "I am every dead thing", for example is literally realized in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and in Romero's film, *Night of the Living Dead*. It could be suggested that the movement of fantastic narrative is one of metonymical rather than metaphorical process: one object does not stand for another but literally becomes the other, slides into it, metamorphosing from one shape to another in a permanent flux and instability.<sup>3</sup>

Ghost does not have a definite shape or image like vampires. *The Others* successfully uses this ambiguity. Anyone can turn out to be a ghost. The film creates the most uncanny atmosphere in which the shift between human and ghost is sudden and unexpected. This shift challenges our understanding of the other.

At the beginning of the film, the servants are introduced as strange but they are not in the realm of the other. Although there is hierarchy between Grace and them, they are able to live together. After the servants turn out to

be ghosts, they become the other since for the living the dead is certainly in the zone of the other. As Grace and children find out that in fact they are ghost an opposite shift in their perspective of the other occurs. The present occupants of the house become the others. Servants and Grace's family become alliance.

The spectator experiences this shift of perspective with and against Grace's family at the same time. For the spectator, the inexplicable events in the house are related to the other. At the end when the truth is revealed, the spectator traumatically discovers that she/he in fact watched the film from the perspective of the other. The film shows how easy it is to identify self with the other. This unity of the self and the other is threatening to our sense of reality that is made of clear definitions and distinctions. Barbara Creed states "fearing of losing oneself and one's is made more acute in a society which values boundaries over continuity and separateness over sameness."<sup>4</sup> It creates a disturbing uncertainty: If there is no difference between the living and the dead, how do we know to which side we belong? As I stated in the Introduction, this sense of not belonging was the main source of anxiety at the turn of the century. The film's atmosphere directly reflects this.

### III

In the simplest words, *The Others* is the film of the dead. In *The Symbolic Life*, Jung states "[...] our world of consciousness and the "Beyond"

together form a single cosmos, with the result that the dead are not in a different place from the living. There is only a difference in their “frequencies.”<sup>5</sup> The film is based on this statement. The ghosts and living can share the same house without the awareness of each other. Again Jung states, “Beyond is the same cosmos beyond the limitations of space and time.”<sup>6</sup> The infinity embraces past present and future at the same time. Unfortunately, this divine harmony is not unbreakable. As in one scene the servant, Mrs. Mills, reveals to Grace, sometimes the world of the living and dead got mixed up. This overlap in the frequencies of the living and the dead disturbs the reality of each frequency.

In most of the films, there is only one reality and it is the reality of the living. The dead are the intruders in this reality. *The Others* questions this perspective and presents multiple realities. The dead have their own realities as much as the living. They have family issues and problems. There is not any slight difference among the activities of the living and the dead.

The film also shows the mystery behind the haunted house films. Whereas haunted house films suggest the existence of supernatural beings without showing, *The Others* demystifies this. The truth behind haunting is a struggle of dead against living in order to protect their sense of reality. In the world of the dead, the living is the intruder. Ruffles states that in haunted house films shadows and darkness are related with the domain of the dead whereas light is related with life<sup>7</sup>. *The Others* reverses this as

ghosts continue to stay in the house that has no curtains at the end of the film. The reverse relation between *The Others* and one of the classics of haunting house film, *Changeling* (Peter Medak, 1980) is interesting to analyze. *Changeling* tells the story of a music professor who moves to an old mansion in which he feels the presence of a ghost. He tries to communicate with the ghost through a medium. The information leads him to the horrific secret: the ghost belongs to a crippled boy that was murdered by his own father in that mansion years ago. There are some interesting common points between two films. In *The Others* the name of the gardener is Mr Tuttle whereas in *Changeling* the name of the housekeeper is Mr Tuttle. In both films the new owners of the house is a musician. In both films there is a medium that tries to communicate with the ghost(s). Since these films present two different perspectives, the perspective of living in



Figure 24. Playing the Piano

*Changeling*, we recall Grace who is disturbed by the self-playing piano. Similarly, when Grace's children make noise in the house, we recall the

*Changeling* and the perspective of dead in *The Others*, analyzing these films together paints the whole picture. For example, when the music professor plays the piano in



Figure25. Disturbed by the Piano

inexplicable sounds in the mansion in *Changeling*. *The Others* clearly shows that we are not seeing the whole picture. There is more than we see beyond our scope of reality. The film necessitates the integration of metaphysics for a holistic view and better understanding of the cosmos.

#### IV

At the beginning of the film Grace is introduced as radical believer in Catholic religion. As Ms. Mills states in the film Grace only believes in what she is taught. As a lonely woman bearing hard conditions in post war period, her reality is based on religion. She is a conformist, not a skeptic. According to her, religion should be accepted without any doubts. In *Death, Possession and Communal Memory*, Nancy Caciola states that according to theological aspects “ [...] dead spirits cross over into a new realm, a tripartite afterlife of reward and punishment that is disconnected from our present existence.”<sup>8</sup> Grace believes in this simplistic “Catholic geography of the afterlife”<sup>9</sup> in which a soul is assigned either to Hell, or Purgatory and Heaven and this is determined according to her /his sins and merits in life. Grace’s faith is put in the test when inexplicable events begin in the house since Catholic religion denies the return of the dead. She tries to find rational explanations within the frame of religion but all of them fail. She wants to communicate with the priest but she cannot. Without any guide, Grace gets lost in this encounter with the unknown.



Figure 26. Grace and Jesus

Her children's perspective of religion is different from hers although Grace raises them in the most conservative way. A passage, which they read from their text book, summarizes one of the basic rules of the symbolic order: children should never argue with their parents. This shows how obedience to authority is learned. In the Lacanian view, people enter symbolic order as they acquire language.<sup>10</sup> Still the children are not fully integrated into symbolic order. They are, especially her daughter, Anne, is skeptic and questioning. They challenge their mother with questions about religion in the most naïve but intelligent way. For example, they ask her where the dead soldiers go to. She tells them that it changes according to whether they were fighting with goodies or not. This is a reflection of the main binary opposition Catholic belief system is built upon: the conflict between go(o)d and (d)evil<sup>11</sup>. This time they ask which side are the goodies. Grace fails to provide satisfactory answers. The children make an intelligent criticism of their mother who does not believe in ghosts but who is deeply devoted to the Bible that is full of supernatural events. Anne is aware of the

existence of other beings in the house from the beginning. She accepts them in the most natural way. She does not label them as ghosts. For her, ghost is nothing more than a spooky image in white sheets. It is ironic that she (a ghost) imitates to be a ghost when her mother puts her white communion dress on her. She makes fun of his brother who is afraid of ghosts.



Figure 27. Pretending to be a Ghost

Throughout the film Grace representing the religion and Anne representing the instinctual wisdom argue with each other several time. At the end, when the truth is revealed Grace admits to her children that she does not know anything more than they do. This confrontation falsifies the reality created by the Catholic Church. It is destruction of the symbolic order that relies heavily on religion. This reflects the horrifying aspect of our time: there is a strong possibility that there is nothing under what we built our lives on.

## V

The common aim of ghosts is to complete their unfinished businesses and settle their accounts. This is why they come back. In *Looking Awry*, Zizek indicates, “The return of the living dead, then, materializes a certain symbolic debt persisting beyond physical expiration.”<sup>12</sup> If the symbolic debt is paid the ghost returns to where it belongs and rests in peace.

Patrick McCormick finds modern ghost films rather Catholic telling the stories of souls of the decent needing help of the living in order to pass into the light<sup>13</sup>. *The Others* falsifies this belief as the ghosts literally embrace light in this world at the end. They do not leave. At the end of the film Grace and children confront with the traumatic event in their past. Grace asks forgiveness of her children. Although everything is settled, Grace and children remain in the house.



Figure 28. Ghosts Forever

Instead of ‘between two deaths’ they are in a new realm that could be named as ‘beyond death’. They persist to exist in their absent state of

being. In *Plague of Fantasies*, Žižek states this relation between life and death:

In contrast to the individual caught in the standard skeptical despair- the individual who knows he will die but cannot accept it and hopes for eternal life- we have here, in the case of the sickness unto death”, the individual who desperately wants to die, to disappear forever but he knows he cannot do it: that he is condemned to eternal life.<sup>14</sup>

This condemnation to eternity is related to the melancholic perspective I discusses in the Introduction. Since there is no escape from our traumas, it is not possible to talk about closure. As Cixous states, “the impossible is to die.”<sup>15</sup>

## Notes

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1. Connolly quotes from the 1990 remake of *The Night of the Living Dead* directed by Tom Savini.
  2. McKay, *The Ghost Story Comes Back to Haunt us*.
  3. Jackson, *Fantasy*, p.41-42.
  4. Creed, "Horror and the Monstous Feminine", p:58.
  5. Jung, *The Symbolic Life*, Trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge,1977; 1993), p.315.
  6. Ibid, p.315.
  7. Ruffles, *Ghost Images*, p. 109.
  8. Nancy Caciola, "Spirits Seeking Bodies: Death, Possession and Communal Memory in the Middle Ages," *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. Ed. B. Gordon and P. Marshall. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p, 81.
  9. Peter Marshall "The Map of God's word: Geographies of the Afterlife in Tudor and Early Stuart England." *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. Ed. B. Gordon and P. Marshall, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.114.
  10. Felluga, *Modules on Lacan*.
  11. Caciola, "Spirits Seeking Bodies", p.82.
  12. Zizek, *Looking Awry*, p. 23.
  13. Patrick Mc Cormick, "Someone to Watch Over Me," *U.S. Catholic.*, 64:12 (December 1999):15 January2005, <http://0-search.epnet.com.library.bilgi.edu.tr:80/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=2509837>.
  14. Zizek, *Plague of Fantasies*, p.90.
  15. Cixous, *Fiction and Phantoms*, p. 545.

## Conclusion

The textual analysis of these films, which were made at the turn of the century, clearly indicates the impact of transition to the new millennium on the representation of ghosts. The anxiety of entering an unknown era and the fear of leaving behind all the familiar is reflected in the figure of the ghost. Although the ending of 1999 was thought as a closure, as we look back it is clear that leaving behind is not a possible act. The omnipresence of ghost supports this melancholic perspective of life in which connection with the past endures.

This study focused not on why ghost is represented, but how different it is represented. Taking into consideration the relation between text and context, this new representation of ghosts is better understood with regard to cultural and social aspects of our time.

In these films, the dead, which was pushed to the realm of the supernatural, is brought back to the natural. Ghosts do not belong only to Gothic mansions; they are a part of ordinary modern life in all films except *the Others*. This 'realistic' representation of ghosts reflects a resistance to all the technological and scientific innovations in the Western culture. Jung draws attention to the opposite relation between rationality and metaphysics:

“[...] It is a psychological rule that the brighter the light, the blacker the shadow; in other words, the more rationalistic we are in our conscious minds, the more alive becomes the spectral world of the unconscious.”<sup>1</sup> Supporting this view, after a century of scientific progress, the demand for ‘Anima Mundi’<sup>2</sup> was at its peak at the end of 1990s. Žizek summarizes this demand very well:

What we have here is a desperate endeavor to return to the pre-Enlightenment, to a world in which the split between fact and meanings has not yet taken place, to a world where a deep sense inheres to nature itself, to a world animated by an invisible soul, to a world of a preestablished harmony between man, society and cosmos [...]<sup>3</sup>

The integration of ghosts in ordinary daily lives is related to this holistic view of the cosmos.

Supporting this holistic view, in all the films the boundaries between the living and the dead, the subject and object collapses. In *Stir of Echoes* and *What Lies Beneath* the human identifies with the ghost. In *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others* human and the ghost integrate into one being. Unlike previous examples, in these films it becomes impossible to define ghost as the other. The collapse of boundaries coincides with transition to the new millennium. In transition, it is not possible to talk about binary oppositions because everything dissolves in each other. Lack of definitions and classifications is threatening to the symbolic universe of Western culture. These films introduce a new understanding of the universe in which “There are no opposites- it is the same tree above and below.”<sup>4</sup>

These four films are better understood as journeys from reality to the Real. As the truth is revealed in the films, the fakeness of everyday reality becomes obvious. The ghost is not the cause of trauma; it is an evidence for the trauma in our lives. In *Enjoy Your Symptom*, Žizek states that traumatic confrontation with the Real causes a shift in the perspective and as result reality loses its consistency.<sup>5</sup> The encounter with the Real in these films is a result of our perception of reality in today's world in which everything is falling apart.

In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žizek states that “[...] the symbolic order is striving for a homeostatic balance, but there is in its kernel, at its very center, some strange, traumatic element which cannot be symbolized, integrated into the symbolic order- the Thing.”<sup>6</sup> These films leave the spectator in the void of the Thing. Being left in the gray zone where all the meaning ends is fascinating and terrifying at the same time. It is this zone in which the boundaries between subject and the object, the living and dead, the self and the other collapses. It destroys the existing beliefs and values which create the Symbolic Order.

To sum up, these four ghost films bravely addresses to our anxieties about life that reached the peak with the transition to the new millennium. This the key to their enduring impact.

## Notes

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1. Jung, *The Symbolic Life*, p.318.
  2. Anima Mundi is the latin word for World-Soul. It is the cosmic principle uniting all the beings.
  3. Zizek, *Enjoy Your Symptom*, p. 185.
  4. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 498.
  5. Zizek, *Enjoy Your Symptom*, p.137.
  6. Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 132.

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## Filmography

### **Sixth Sense, The, 1999**

Production Company: Hollywood Pictures, Spyglass Entertainment, The Kennedy/Marshall Company  
Executive Producer: Sam Mercer  
Producer: Kathleen Kennedy, Frank Marshall, Barry Mendel  
Director: M. Night Shyamalan  
Assistant Director: John Rusk  
Script: M. Night Shyamalan  
Director of Photography: Tak Fujimoto  
Editor: Andrew Modshein  
Art Director: Phillip Messina  
Music: James Newton Howard  
Costumes: Joanna Johnston

Cast:  
Dr. Malcolm Crowe: Bruce Willis  
Cole Sear: Hale Joel Osment  
Lynn Sear: Toni Collette  
Anna Crowe: Olivia Williams  
Vincent Grey: Donnie Wahlberg

Running time: 107 minutes

**Stir of Echoes, 1999**

Production Company: Artisan Entertainment  
Executive Producer: Michele Weisler  
Producer: Judy Hofflund, Gavin Polone  
Director: David Koepp  
Assistant Director: Carla Corwin  
Script: David Koepp ( based on the novel by Richard Matheson)  
Director of Photography: Fred Murphy  
Editor: Jill Savitt  
Art Director: David V. Krummel  
Music: James Newton Howard  
Costumes: Leesa Evans

Cast:  
Tom Witzky: Kevin Bacon  
Jake Witzky: Zachary David Cope  
Maggie Witzky: Kathryn Erbe  
Lisa Weil: Illeana Douglas  
Frank McCarthy: Kevin Dunn  
Harry Damon: Conor O'Farrell

Running time: 99 minutes

**What Lies Beneath, 2000**

Production Company: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, DreamWorks SKG, ImageMovers  
 Executive Producer: Joan Bradshaw, Mark Johnson  
 Steven J. Boyd, Cherylanne Martin, Jack Rapke,  
 Producer: Steve Starkey, Robert Zemeckis  
 Director: Robert Zemeckis  
 Assistant Director: Josh McLaglen  
 Clark Gregg ( based on the story by Clark Gregg  
 and Sarah Kernochan)  
 Script: Don Burgess  
 Director of Photography: Arthur Schmidt  
 Editor: Stefan Dechant, Tony Fanning, Elizabeth Lapp  
 Art Director: Doug DeAngelis, Alan Silvestri  
 Music: Susie DeSanto, Bernie Pollack  
 Costumes:

Cast:  
 Dr. Norman Spencer: Harrison Ford  
 Claire Spencer: Michelle Pfeiffer  
 Jody: Diana Scarwid  
 Warren Feur: James Remar  
 Mary Feur: Miranda Otto  
 Madison Elizabeth Frank: Amber Valetta

Running time: 130 minutes

**Others, The, 2001**

Production Company: Cruise/Wagner Productions, Las Producciones del Escorpión S.L., Sociedad General de Cine (SOGECINE) S.A.  
 Executive Producer: Tom Cruise, Rick Schwartz, Paula Wagner, Bob Weinstein, Harvey Weinstein  
 Producer: Fernando Bovaira, José Luis Cuerda, Park Sunmin  
 Director: Alejandro Amenabar  
 Assistant Director: Javier Chinchilla  
 Script: Alejandro Amenabar  
 Director of Photography: Javier Aguirresarobe  
 Editor: Nacho Ruiz Capillas  
 Art Director: Benjamin Fernandez  
 Music: Alejandro Amenabar  
 Costumes: Sonie Grande

Cast:  
 Grace Stewart Nicole Kidman  
 Mrs. Bertha Mills Fionnula Flanagan  
 Charles Stewart Christopher Eccleston  
 Anne Stewart Alakina Mann  
 Nicholas Stewart James Bentley  
 Mr. Edmund Tuttle Eric Sykes  
 Lydia: Elaine Cassidy

Running time: 101 minutes

- Amityville Horror, The*. Dir. Andrew Douglas. 2005.
- Bringing Out of the Dead*. Dir. Martin Scorsese. 1999.
- Changeling, The*. Dir. Peter Medak. 1980.
- Dark water*. Dir. Walter Salles. 2005.
- Fog, The*. Dir. Rupert Wainwright. 2005.
- Gothika*. Dir. Matthieu Kassovitz and Thom Oliphant. 2003.
- Grudge, The*. Dir. Takashi Shimuzu. 2004.
- Haunting, The*. Dir. Robert Wise. 1969.
- Inner Senses*. Dir. Chi-Leung Law. 2002.
- Night of the Living Dead*. Dir. George Romero. 1968.
- Psycho*. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. 1960.
- Rear Window*. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. 1954.
- Ring, The*. Dir Gore Verbinski. 2002.
- Shining, The*. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. 1980.
- Thirt13en Ghosts*. Dir Steve Beck. 2001.
- Twin Peaks*. TV Series created by Mark Frost and David Lynch. 1990-91.
- Visible Secrets*. Dir. Ann Hui. 2002.
- X Files*. TV Series created by Chris Carter. 1993-2002.

## Appendix

### **List of Ghost Films (thriller/horror) between 1990-2001:**

Thirteen Ghosts (2001)  
The Others (2001)  
Believe (2000)  
What Lies Beneath (2000)  
Sleepy Hollow (1999)  
Presence of Mind (1999)  
The Sixth Sense (1999)  
Stir of Echoes (1999)  
The Haunting (1999)  
The Haunting of Hell House (1999)  
House on Haunted Hill (1999)  
Tales from the Hood (1995)  
The Turn of the Screw (1994)  
Ghost in the Machine (1993)  
The Forgotten One (1990)

### **List of Ghost Films (thriller/horror) between 1980-1989:**

Grave Secrets (1989)  
Prison (1988)  
The Wraith (1986)  
The Tomb (1986)  
Retribution (1987)  
Poltergeist II: The Other Side (1986)  
Mountaintop Motel Massacre (1986)  
Nomads (1986)  
House (1986)  
Reel Horror (1985)  
The Dark Power (1985)  
Blood Beat (1985)  
Psychophobia (1985)  
Mr Wrong (1985)  
Force of Darkness (1985)  
The Oracle (1985)

Rocktober Blood (1984)  
Carnage (1984)  
The Jar (1984)  
Bloodbath at the House of Death (1984)  
Screamtime (1983)  
Scalps (1983)  
The Returning (1983)  
Eyes of Fire (1983)  
Frightmare (1983)  
One Dark Night (1983)  
Superstition (1982)  
Next of Kin (1982)  
Satan's Mistress (1982)  
The House Where Evil Dwells (1982)  
Ghostkeeper (1981)  
Tracking (1981)  
Ghost Story (1981)  
The Haunting of M (1981)  
The Nesting (1981)  
Ghostkeeper (1981)  
The Monster Club (1980)  
The Hearse (1980)  
Beyond Evil (1980)  
The Shining (1980)  
The Watcher in the Woods (1980)  
The Fog (1980)  
The Changeling (1980)

