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Ghostface Needs a Hug – Self-care and the Return of the Repressed in *Scream* (2022)

Abstract. How does the combination of remake and sequel (requel) affect narrations of trauma and grief in the 2022 movie *Scream*? The film's positioning as an inter-generational transition with the goal of targeting new horror audiences highlights the need for developing complex and yet gripping story arcs in a media climate marked by serialization. In my analysis, I examine how the 2022 instalment revolves around explorations of an unresolved past that re-erupts in violent ways. In particular, I focus on the movie's investment in a modified cyclical narrative, which offers detailed insights into how the requel formula builds on the engagement with traumatic memory and combines it with strategies aimed at reviewing and reframing the past. Robin Wood's concept of the "return of the repressed" offers key anchoring points for this analysis through its focus on the mutually reinforcing dynamic between social oppression and deadly energy. By highlighting the personal dramas visited upon the key protagonist of the film, Sam Carpenter, I embed her struggles with the past in a broader societal context, thereby illustrating how engaging traumatic memory is also nested within a larger communal consciousness. The strategies employed by the protagonist connect with the requel format in significant ways, as they offer avenues for modulating and emulating the past. Through this analysis, it is shown that the repressed can itself be channeled toward self-affirming strategies, which revolve around the renegotiation of gendered concepts of authority and agency. A further takeaway are the limitations of neoliberal self-care, which is shown to be an inadequate approach in the film, as the monstrous resides in the communal and cannot be fully evaded through strategies aimed at individualization.

Keywords: horror, trauma, grief, repressed, motherhood, remake, film franchise, self-care, fandom

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1. Introduction

The 2022 meta-slasher horror film *Scream* represents the fifth installment in the *Scream* film series. Like its predecessors, the film focuses on relationships between characters and their past, the location of the film itself within the horror genre, and the relationship between film franchises and real-life fandoms. These layers are interwoven through meta-narratives addressing personal traumata, which can only be revisited, but never overcome. The "requel" format, which combines elements of the remake and the sequel, permeates the principal storyline of the film, and allows for a distinctive engagement with identity-shattering crises on individual and collective levels.

In my analysis, I trace how *Scream* combines tales of reckoning with a traumatic past with questions of identity formation. Through the requel format, a cyclical configuration furnishes a setting in which personal and collective traumata can be illuminated and addressed in more open-ended ways – taking emphasis away from more conventional and neoliberal understandings of "self-care" as a gendered self-optimization process. This relates in particular to the complex family tale in *Scream*, which details how the main protagonist Sam Carpenter needs to reckon with the fact that her biological father, Billy Loomis, was a serial killer. This reckoning produces ripple effects for her younger sister and the community in the fictional town of Woodsboro.

Drawing from the observations of Robin Wood on "the return of the repressed", I dissect how *Scream* presents a society in "perpetual crisis mode"; gripped by complex and intensifying rifts and a constant push toward returning to familiar structures of interpretation and narration. This constellation is shown to provide fertile ground for specific types of narcissistic fandom, which are based on the "manipulation of the past" and the drive to create cathartic spectacles. It is concluded that this combination generates a cyclical dynamic through which the revisitation of grief and trauma acquires particular potency – especially through the requel format, which allows not only for a conscious play with genre conventions, but also for a more malleable sense of audience and fan participation in "making sense of the past".

2. It Ain't Over Till It's Warmed-Over Fan Fiction

Like most of its predecessors, *Scream* is set in the fictional Californian small town of Woodsboro, which has served as the main site for the franchise since the first film came out in 1996.[1] The movie starts with a recurrent opening trope: a phone call from a menacing stranger, who psychologically torments a seemingly random person and forces them to participate in a round of horror-film related trivia. In this case, it is high school student Tara Carpenter who is harassed on the phone and then severely wounded dur-

[1] The 2022 instalment is referred to as *Scream* in this essay. The original 1996 movie (also entitled *Scream*) will be specified by its release year.

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ing a subsequent home invasion by an intruder wearing a Ghostface mask. During the phone call, Tara is asked to name her favorite scary movie. Tara replies with *The Babadook*, a 2014 Australian psychological-horror movie, which she describes as an "amazing meditation on motherhood and grief".

This reference hints at the social configuration of much of the trauma which is to be addressed in *Scream*. The family as a social unit, but also as a stand-in for a wider suburban collective, occupies a central place in the manifestation of repressed fears. In this context, I draw from Robin Wood's reading of the monstrous as "return of the repressed", which Naja Later describes as "an avatar of marginalisation which, unless annihilated or assimilated, promises an apocalyptic end to the status quo" (2018, 336). Similar to the original notion of the "return of the repressed" as postulated by Sigmund Freud, Wood posits that the repressed is a perpetual reality in human psyche (Freud 1932, 74; Wood 2003, 72).[2] What is repressed can never be extinguished or forgotten, and it will repeatedly and inevitably return. Wood differs from Freud by incorporating Herbet Marcuse's distinction between "basic" and "surplus repression", writing that "basic repression makes us distinctively human, capable of directing our own lives and co-existing with others; surplus repression makes us into monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists" (2003, 64). Wood thereby maintains that there is a continuity between surplus repression and oppression, which ties in with mechanisms which reproduce "alienated labor and the patriarchal family" (2003, 64). His idea of the return of the repressed therefore provides an explicit link to material and gendered power configurations in society, which allows for an exploration of mental health strategies on the personal and political level. [3]

From this perspective, the repressed is embedded in the communal, since inescapable social bonds create an environment in which submerged anxieties need to be constantly negotiated on both the collective and the individual levels. Especially the question of "motherhood" is of importance, as it signals a form of feminized empathy through which self-care strategies can be imparted. To a certain extent, "motherhood and grief" also permeate the entire personal journey of protagonist Sam Carpenter in this film. Sam is Tara's older and estranged sister, who barely kept contact with her family after the father suddenly abandoned their daughters years ago. Sam avoided any serious engagement with the hidden skeletons of her family's past. She moved to the nearby town of Modesto in the hope that she can resolve the trauma by avoiding any engagement with it.

The scene in which Sam is introduced to the film contains several markers which underline how her social and psychological status is shaped by a stress-inducing neo-

[2] Freud suggests in his *New Introductory Lectures* that "impressions, … which have been sunk into the id by repression, are virtually immortal" (1933, 74).

[3] Wood lays out how repression precludes healthiness on a psychological and wider societal level: "It is repression, in other words, that makes impossible the healthy alternative—the full recognition and acceptance of the Other's autonomy and right to exist" (2003, 66).

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liberal environment, which takes a cognitive and emotional toll on her. In this scene, which directly follows the attack on Tara, Sam is shown sitting in front of the parking lot belonging to the bowling alley at which she works as an employee. Her sitting on a curb all by herself underlines her de-socialized status – disconnected from her family and the world. Her bright yellow employee uniform codes her as an interchangeable member of the front personnel in the service/entertainment industry. The bright color emphasizes the performative character of her work as supposedly cheerful, but it hides the demanding high levels of self-management and the constant production of "economically valuable feelings" (Baym 2015, 19) that go with this type of job. Sam attempts to manage her emotional state by taking a handful of pills and consuming an energy drink out of a can.

Already before being informed of the attack on Tara, it is established that she is not at ease with her own life. The camera slowly zooms in on her through a medium-long American shot, making visible how she is nervously and anxiously looking out into the empty parking lot. Her attempt to manage her inner state mirrors "the neoliberal imperative for patients to self-regulate" and "manage alone, whether through the use of medication or self-transformative practices" (Brijnath and Antoniades 2016, 2). Visually establishing Sam's solitude at the beginning of the narrative appears to reflect her own personal problem-solving strategies, which are predicated on the idea that she must navigate psychological and emotional challenges by herself. Bianca Brijnath and Josefine Antoniades note with regard to neoliberal self-care strategies that "[s]uch practices are highly problematic because locating depression as an individual problem requiring individual solutions negates the contribution of wider socio-structural factors such as poverty, class, work inequities and violence in the experiences of depression" (2016, 2). Sam's experience of stress and anxiety can therefore be interlinked with an internalized strategy to evade wider engagements with social dimensions of both her present and past.

However, the assault on Tara makes it clear to Sam that repressing the past has repercussions on her family. It becomes apparent that the unresolved issues of her past are connected to the violence visited upon Tara. Sam decides to look up her younger sister in a hospital where she confides to her that her biological father is Billy Loomis, the serial killer who kicked off the recurrent cycles of murderous carnage in Woodsboro. Sam's discovery of this fact led to her parents' divorce and her estrangement from the family. The tense and tearful exchange between the two highlights how dealing with trauma is intricately interwoven with questions surrounding personal identity:

> Sam Carpenter: "I just couldn't be around you anymore, Tara. Not only because I destroyed our family
> that night, but because those diaries told me who my real father was. It was Billy Loomis, and somebody knows. And I think that's why you got hurt. And I'm so fucking sorry that I never told you and that I ran away. I'm so sorry."
> Tara Carpenter: "Get out."

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> Sam Carpenter: "Tara."
> Tara Carpenter: "You're gone for five years…five whole years…and then I get stabbed and you wanna
> come back and you wanna drop all this shit on me?"
> Sam Carpenter: "No, I swear I thought I was protecting you."
> Tara Carpenter: "Protecting me from what?! The truth?"
> Sam Carpenter: "No, no…I…please Tara." [She starts stuttering and crying]
> Tara Carpenter: "Sam, I need you to get the fuck out. Sam! Get the fuck out!"

Themes of loss, silence and disconnect come to the forefront in this dramatic episode in which two sisters struggle with making sense of the disruption caused by the sudden intrusion of the Ghostface killer into their own lives. Painful explorations of the past are set into motion. The complete shattering of previously-held assumptions about one's own safe necessitates the development of strategies to defend and protect the self. These strategies aim at clutching back a modicum of authorial power in one own's narrative and recalibrating mental and emotional balance within newly-found realities. Reading Ghostface as an allegorical expression of unresolved trauma offers avenues through which the exchange between Tara and Sam reveals how a repressed past will re-erupt in violent ways. In the essay *Horror Films and Grief*, Becky Millar and Jonny Lee offer the following insights into the narrative dimensions of grief in horror films:

> "(…) disruption to assumptive worlds is a core feature of horror narratives. (…) horror films (..) use an unexpected monster as an effective way to represent the experience of grief; there is a parallel between the experience of grief for the bereaved and the disruptive effect of a monster's entry into the protagonist's life" (2021, 174).

From this perspective, the sudden entrance of the "unexpected monster" in horror film exposes the existence of grief. Feelings of having one's own familiar frameworks severely disturbed coalesce into profound anxieties, which threaten the very core of personal identity. Sam's confession that "she destroyed the family that night" exemplifies the linkages between her assumptive world and the family that she feels a part of. Her traumatic memory is inseparable from the fates of those close to her ("And I think that's why you got hurt"), which places her experience of grief into an interpersonal context – despite her previous attempts at alienation and seclusion.[4] Through sharing her tales of crises, a new form of interpersonal memory is created, even though Tara initially rejects it. This opens up possibilities through which both the past (the family break-up) and the present (the arrival of Ghostface killer) can be re-addressed on new terms.

[4] In *Presence in Absence. The Ambiguous Phenomenology of Grief*, Thomas Fuchs writes that "the bereaved seclude themselves more and more from the world which for them has lost its previously shared meanings" (2017, 48).

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The acknowledgment of grief wields very significant disruptive potential in terms of narration, since the Ghostface killer also serves as an intermediary between the past and the present. Throughout the *Scream* franchise, the antagonists are generally linked to an unresolved issue in the past. Their dressing up as Ghostface and perpetuating this particular persona often mirrors their investment in the cinematic conventions of the slasher genre. From a narratological perspective, this is frequently fortified with a self-aware meta-commentary on the constitutive elements of fame and celebrity in contemporary mass media. In this sense, Ghostface killers enjoy designing and orchestrating spectacles, which is evident in the fact that they usually taunt their victims over the phone.[5] Sam hiding a family secret therefore offers a ripe opportunity for staging a violent spectacle, as this lends itself to the shattering of assumptive worlds. The unaddressed trauma is invested with a symbolic form through which spectacle can be created. The fact that the killer in *Scream* must be in the know about this secret, adds further dramatic weight to this, since this means that the killer must belong to her inner circles. As Robin Wood argues in *An Introduction to the American Horror Film*, "the repressed can never be totally Othered as this is precisely what gives it the potential to expose and resist repressive power" (Later 2018, 337; Wood, 1984, 167). The Ghostface killers thereby engage in a form of fan fiction through which they effectively challenge a status quo of which they are part of. In this sense, the repressed continues to reproduce the conditions in which it violently erupts. All these threads interweave into Sam's realization that she cannot protect herself or her sister anymore by repressing memory. Finding new ways of re-stabilizing the self and the mental conditions of the wider family becomes critical for the protagonists' survival.

3. Take Care – Take Five

Throughout the film, survival is predicated on the formulation of strategies which aim at protecting one's own mental, emotional, and physical health. The wider framework of self-care is of relevance in this context, as it entails a form of conscious self-management designed "to promote broad positive outcomes, specifically, to maintain or enhance well-being and overall functioning" (Butler et al. 2019, 107–108). This is illustrated in the first scene in which Sidney Prescott, the target of the previous Woodsboro murderers, is shown. Sidney is jogging down a path alongside a riverfront in a faraway town while simultaneously pushing a baby stroller. Her sports top and sneakers indicate that this is part of a regular exercise routine – one that she performs while also doing parental work. She confirms her multitasking when she answers a phone

[5] At the end of *Scream III*, movie director Roman Bridger reveals himself to be the Ghostface killer. He gleefully tells his would-be victim Sidney Prescott that he set into the motion the chain of events that led to the first Woodsboro murders. He underlines this by saying: "I'm a director, Sid. I direct."

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call from her old friend and fellow Woodsboro murder spree survivor Dewey Riley. She tells him that she is trying to get a run in before she takes the girls to school. It appears that Sidney has cultivated a set of gendered neoliberal self-care practices in the aftermath of her experiences in her hometown. Her focus on physical fitness coupled with her performance as an involved and present mother for her young children seem to suggest that – on the surface – she has acquired a firm grasp in terms self-care in the face of the traumata she previously endured. However, this notion is reflective of a highly gendered understanding of parenting in the neoliberal age. As Katherine Wardi-Zonna and Anissa Wardi write "[f]or mothers, the demands of negotiating multiple life spaces and tasks represent a significant form of gender inequality" (2020, 101). The appearance of individualized strength and collectedness in the face of trauma – as demanded by neoliberal logic – is intertwined with a performance of maternal health and well-being.[6] But like Sam, who has her world disrupted, Sidney also has to find out that the stability she personally carved out for her life is an illusion. Dewey informs her of the return of the Ghostface killer and asks her whether she possesses gun. Sidney responds by saying "of course I have a gun", which further underlines that she has been seeking individualized solutions to the Ghostface problem. Subsequently, the main question for the protagonists becomes whether pursuing self-care on an individual level is sufficient for dealing with the past.

In this context, it is worth noting that the entire film constantly reminds its viewers that the tale of Sam confronting her past and fending off Ghostface is also a "health narrative". This is reflected in extended scenes detailing Sam's use of anti-psychotic medication and the fact that much of film takes place in a hospital setting where the two sisters need to find ways to heal from physical and psychological wounds. As Gaston Franssen notes in the essay *The Celebritization of Self-care*, there is an ideological function to these narratives, as "they supply us with images and ideas about how we should interpret, manage and value mental illness as well as the identities of those who suffer from it" (2020, 91). The health-related trials, troubles and tribulations of Sam and Tara take a symbolic shape, which both undermines and cements neoliberal subjectivity. Anita Harris describes this type of subjectivity as a "'can-do' individual who is 'flexible, individualized, resilient, self-driven, and self-made and […] easily follows nonlinear trajectories to fulfillment and success'" (2004, 16). This is also highly gendered in numerous ways, as the imperative toward self-management is amplified in key sectors such as health care and social work, where self-care is strongly coupled with feminized care for others (Gill & Orgad 2021, 3). Sam Carpenter not having achieved the right kind of motherly/sisterly care for her younger sister is thereby also reflective of a disconnect with the governing reality of neoliberal subjectivity and the pressures

[6] Katherine Wardi-Zonna and Anissa Wardi take aim at the practice of multitasking, writing that "[a]lthough some regard multitasking as a sign of cognitive strength, it is a misguided presumption. People—regardless of gender—can only effectively process and manage one task at a time" (2020, 102).

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it places on women – in particular those who find themselves in precarious situations. Sam's strategy to "protect her sister" does not aspire to the levels of (entrepreneurial) resilience, flexibility, and dedication that the current situation requires of her.

From the perspective of fan-created fiction, Sam makes for a particularly easy target, who can be taunted and ultimately eradicated in a staged spectacle. Within the *Scream* franchise, the Ghostface killers like to direct, and as Denise Bielby and C. Lee Harrington note, "fans' enjoyment and pleasures" can also derive from antipathy (2017, 205). Sam's perceived weaknesses from the standpoint of neoliberal subjectivity are, however, also a result of larger structural oppressive mechanisms, which reside outside the personal and thereby open spaces for a deconstruction of neoliberal conceptions of self-care. The apparent effectiveness of self-care is ideologically constituted through a set of discursive regimes which conceive of bodies, temporalities, spaces as malleable entities subject to individual will. However, understanding horror as the disruption of assumptive worlds allows for a different set of body/spatial/temporal politics to be articulated in which the sudden appearance of grief and terror reconfigures the assumptive world of the protagonist(s) also in terms of how the individual relates to the extrapersonal world.

In this sense, the individual appears at the mercy of wider societal forces which coalesce in unseen ways and wreak havoc on the experience of bodies, space, and temporality. Erin Y. Huang notes in the context of urban horror in a neoliberal context that horror can serve as an "elusive sensory communicative channel, where the excessiveness and incomprehensibility of the global systems that shape the conditions of everyday life emerge as sights and sounds that overwhelm the senses and the capacity to think" (2020, 5). From this vantage point, the terror experienced by the protagonists, who witness the total collapse of their own self-care strategies, overlaps with one of the key genre conventions of Gothic literature, which – according to Jerrold E. Hogle – forces characters and readers to "confront what is psychologically buried in individuals and groups" (2002, 3) and also deals with the "conflicted positions" of characters, who are "haunted by deep-seated social and historical dilemmas" (2002, 3). The psychological exhaustion and stress inflicted upon Sam, Tara and Sidney appear therefore as symptoms of a wider societal "system overload" in which larger social conflicts have not been resolved and are instead made more invisible by a cultural regime of self-optimization.

4. Suburban Gothic and Carnage Carnival

A closer look at the setting of the *Scream* franchise reveals that trauma is nested within a larger, societal unconscious – making the disruption of assumptive worlds a political and not just a personal matter (Gill & Orgad, 2021: 4). The pre-personal dimension of the constant revisitation of trauma and violence in Woodsboro can be described as a form of "suburban gothic". Similar to Robin Wood, Valdine Clemens writes that the "return of the repressed" provides a "fundamental dynamism of Gothic narratives" (1994, 3). Clemens adds that

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> "Something - some entity, knowledge, emotion, or feeling-which has been submerged or held at bay because it threatens the established order of things, develops a cumulative energy which demands its release and forces it to the realm of visibility where it must be acknowledged. The approach and the appearance of the repressed create an aura of menace and 'uncanniness,'" (1994, 3).

This cumulative energy is generally expressed through narcissistic desires to gain fame and recognition. Throughout the *Scream* franchise, the antagonists seek to kill the perennial "final girl" Sidney Prescott and either frame her for the Woodsboro murders or siphon off star power from her. What surfaces in these dynamics is a visceral drive to upend the status quo and to reframe the past – not only for the individuals who are directly involved, but for the whole town of Woodsboro, which itself is a stand-in for the small-town/suburban middle class in the U.S.

Sidney repeatedly defeating her would-be murderers can be read as her having cultivated the "flexible, individualized, resilient, self-driven and self-made" ways, which make up the neoliberal subject (Harris 2004, 16). However, her successful survival also threatens the established order of things because it represents the perseverance of an unrestored family unit. Sidney's mother was murdered prior to the events of the first *Scream* film and her father is practically non-existent in subsequent movies. The franchise protagonist is therefore someone who exists outside the confines of the heteronormative family unit, which disturbs patriarchal and gendered neoliberal subjectivity. Her being a constant target echoes Robin Wood's writings on the "return of the repressed". In the book *Hollywood…from Vietnam to Reagan…and Beyond* he details that "in a society built on monogamy and family there will be an enormous surplus of repressed sexual energy, and that what is repressed must always strive to return" (2003, 72).

Drawing from psychoanalysis, Wood posits that the repressed is in a dialogic and mutually reinforcing mode with the forces of social oppression. Oppressive social structures feed a form of repression, which builds up in a societal unconscious and becomes internalized by individuals. This vicious cycle explains why Ghostface must return as long as there are unresolved traumata and repressive mechanisms at play in the suburban world of Woodsboro. Sam Carpenter finds herself at the centrifuge of these forces now that she has become the target of this repressed energy. This is made clear in a discussion Sam has together with Tara's friends, when they try to make sense of the most recent string of murders. Horror film enthusiast Mindy Meeks-Martin imbibes on Sam that she has been chosen to play the leading role in a re-run of past events:

> Mindy Meeks-Martin: "It sounds like our killer is writing his own version of *Stab 8*, but doing it as a requel."[7]

[7] The *Stab* series is a film-within-film movie franchise, which closely mirrors the events in Woodsboro.

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> (….)
> Sam Carpenter: "Are you telling me I'm caught in the middle of fan fucking fiction?"
> Mindy Meeks-Martin: "Not just in the middle. You're the star."

Much like Sidney, she is at the center of an unresolved family project; one in which paternal authority has seemingly vanished and maternal authority still needs to be negotiated (Kristeva 1982, 71–72). The resulting ambiguity is interlinked with multiple biographies in the town and thereby offers a gateway through which collective repression can easily be channeled into new narrative forms. This provides fertile ground for the staging of violent spectacles to narcissistic ends – another self-care strategy of sorts.

The cyclical nature of this copycat violence connects the psychosocial aspects of the repressed with contemporary neoliberal subjectivity in that "pastiche" emerges as the overriding principle through which the "self" is now constituted. After revealing himself as one of the killers, Richie Kirsch (Sam's boyfriend) expresses his motive by loudly declaring that "someone has to save the franchise! No one has made a great *Stab* movie since the first one." These exclamations are evocative of Frederic Jameson's observations on how "pastiche eclipses parody" (1984, 64) in a postmodern context. The combination of pastiche and nostalgia undergirds a sense of temporality in which the quest for reconstituting a mythical past repeatedly fails and instead generates even more desperate spin-off pursuits of said past (1984, 66).[8] Akin to the neoliberal mantra of self-optimization, no level of genuine personal or collective contentment can be attained as individuals remain within a "continuous present" (Rodowick 2007, 171).[9] This present is devoid of a collective project for the future (James 1984, 171) and immersed in the pursuit of "restoration" (including the recovery of perceived mental and/or bodily fitness, personal safety or the viewing pleasures associated with a movie franchise). Richie's quixotic desire to reboot the franchise exemplifies the temporal logic which privileges the individually driven pursuit to constitute the self by referencing the past and seeking to improve on it.

The much-coveted authorial power, which the antagonists crave, aligns with the governing reality of neoliberal subjectivity in other significant ways, as it signals the villains' investment in capitalizing on issues within the collective unconscious in order to pursue individualistic projects. In light of the participatory aspects of modern fandom, in which fans act as "active producers and manipulators of meaning" (Jenkins

[8] Jameson writes in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* that this pastiche is projected "onto a collective and social level, where the desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past is now refracted through the iron law of fashion change and the emergent ideology of the 'generation'" (1984, 66).

[9] Richie's and Amber's desires align smoothly with what Daniel Nehring and Anja Röcke describe as the "basic orientation of self-optimisation processes" which rely "on two principles: on the 'improvability' or 'perfectibility' of one's own person, on the one hand, which, on the other hand, means that the given situation is unsatisfactory, deficient or sub-optimal. If everything can always be done better, no state and no result are permanently satisfactory" (2023, 9).

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1992, 32), Sam's and Tara's location within the Woodsboro universe offers a fitting setting for a fan-created "requel".

The interconnectedness of personal destinies also underlines the importance of shared meanings and symbolisms when authoring a "return to the past", which evidences how the repressed is embedded in a collective unconscious – unspoken but understood by all. The use of Jungian archetypes (Mcleod 2023) in the film illustrates many of the semiotic mechanisms which give shape to Woodsboro's veneer of small-town respectability and white middle-class normativity. According to Jung, a key feature of the collective unconscious is the use of personas, or masks, which are of critical importance to the *Scream* franchise. For instance, the mask worn by the Ghostface killer assumes both a symbolic and self-referential quality. The mask functions as a harbinger of terror and simultaneously as the manifest reaction to said terror. While personas/masks are generally used to fulfill the conformity archetype, the mask worn by the killer serves the opposite: to maintain conformity when it is not worn. In this sense, the mask assumes a self-therapeutic function in that it serves as a valve for repressed energy while not impinging on the everyday performativity of the villain.

Another example is how the Jungian archetype of the shadow (Mcleod 2023) is represented by the apparitions of Billy Loomis. Throughout the film, Billy follows Tara around, but he usually appears in reflections and in mirrors – never appearing as an independent entity. He is therefore intricately attached to Sam and acts as a symbolic force and a reflection of what has been repressed in her life and her surroundings. In terms of dealing with the Jungian shadow, Saul Mcleod writes that "this process, which can involve recognizing and integrating these 'dark' elements into our conscious self, aids in fostering a well-rounded personality" (2023). The violent past of the town is thereby inscribed into formative experiences – akin to exposure therapy - which can serve to find a way toward resolution.

5. What's the Irre-Solution?

Mindy's meta-commentary about the requel-like qualities of Sam's situation prompts intradiegetic characters as well as viewers to contemplate, how the violence is ultimately going to be resolved. The combined elements of the remake and the sequel complicate the search for answers, as it is unclear in which ways the new story will be modulated or remade. As Sven Lütticken notes in the essay *Planet of the Remakes*: "(…) the remake has a specific historical source: the 'Original film'. This can be regarded as a historicization of the mythical, archetypical model. (…) enjoyment comes at least as much from the reproduction of what is familiar as from its modulation by what is new" (2004, 106).

This key component of the remake logic is expanded in *Scream* through the involvement of "legacy cast" from earlier movies, which also forms a critical element

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for the sequel aspect. The two principal questions ("Who dun it?" and "Who will survive?") are wide open at the start of the film and involve characters and events from different periods of time. This multi-dimensional ambiguity not only amplifies the element of suspense, but it harkens back to the connection between grief and the uncanny. In an essay on the phenomenology of grief, Thomas Fuchs notes that

> "Bereaved individuals experience a fundamental ambiguity between presence and absence, between the present and the past, indeed between two worlds they live in (…): The anxious person in an uncanny environment experiences a menacing presence of something which yet remains invisible in the background" (2017, 44).

In the film, it is particularly Sam's grief which spans multiple time periods. She experienced the loss of her family, is still confronted with the troubling reality of who her biological father is, and now must fend off a new killer. It becomes clear that any resolution to these issues will need to be channeled through her character and must bring about a new balance addressing both the past and the present.

For the antagonists, killing Sam and her sister carries a similar weight in terms of the requel logic. By eliminating the daughter of Billy Loomis. the new villains can install themselves as launching points for a new story arc and also – symbolically – displace the film series' original serial killers; all while still emulating them.[10] However, this project turns out be more difficult than imagined by the two killers: Richie and Amber Freeman, who is a friend of Tara's. The dialogic relationship between repression and violence signals that the repressed is symbolically "unkillable" and sustained by the infliction and revisitation of trauma and grief. Given Billy Loomis' status as a manifestation of the repressed, his hallucinated appearance in Sam's mind takes on a specific narrative dimension. Despite his villain status, he acts as a guide to his biological daughter and drops hints on how to engage with these new realities. During one of her hallucinations, she is confronted by Billy, who fervently insists that there is no running from the past – and that the deadly energy once represented by him is also present in her:

> Billy Loomis: "Sam, Sam, Sam., There is a killer on the loose. He's threatening you. He's threatening your sister. Are you gonna run away from who you are like you always do or are you gonna use it?"
> Sam Carpenter: "I'm not like you."
> Billy Loomis: "Really? How else are you gonna survive? I say accept who you are. Let's get out there. Find out who's doing this and cut some fucking throat!"

Billy's effort to inscribe himself into Sam's consciousness and his angry call for violence reflect not only the repressed memory of the taboo past, but also give narra-

[10] The first instalment of *Scream* (1996) had two serial killers as main antagonists, Billy Loomis and his high school friend Stu Macher.

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tive shape to a reconfigured sense of self for Sam. She is to break out of this cycle by channeling the irreducible and atavistic energy represented by her father and direct it against the new killers. In this sense, the inevitable recurrence of traumatic memory takes an on identity-affirming quality, which Sam can direct toward new self-care strategies. An opportunity emerges for modulating the newly launched story arc by selectively choosing in what ways she wants to follow in her father's footsteps.

The absence of the mother of Sam and Tara also plays into this, as neither one of the sisters can draw from a direct maternal influence but are left to negotiate the meanings of motherhood by themselves. Sam is the only of the two sisters who is shown to engage with a parental interlocutor in the form of the hallucinated Billy Loomis. This narrows the scope for her identity formation in the context of normative family coordinates. Much like for Sidney Prescott, whose mother was murdered by Billy Loomis, Sam has no other choice than to face the absence of maternal authority and instead be confronted with a relationship with a killer. While Sidney found herself in a romanticized relationship with Billy, Sam is biologically tied to him. The absence of the mother is thereby intertwined with the sudden appearance of repressed energy embodied through a male killer. This reveals a further parallel between the past and the present. In both cases, the lack of a maternal figure facilitates the engagement with repressed energy in unmitigated ways. Sidney, Sam, and Tara have all "lost" their mothers to the violent eruptions of said energy and therefore need to learn to fight against it. This echoes Marilyn Francus' claim that in cultural imagination absent mothers frequently "enable the autonomy and agency of children—they make it possible for children to develop and grow" (2017, 31). The hallucinated apparitions of Billy thereby facilitate the intergenerational transfer of cathartic aggression and open confrontation with traumatic family memory – something which Sam's and Tara's mother sought to avoid.

Even though Sam is initially reluctant to associate herself with Billy Loomis' legacy, the subsequent plot charts a course for her in which the repressed energy expressed by her father selectively merges with the maternal authority she wants to cultivate in order to protect her sister (Basili 2021, 85).[11] After another string of murders in Woodsboro, Sam has a second heart-to-heart with Tara in the hospital. The younger sister articulates that she is not blaming Sam for her origins, but for leaving her. Rapprochement ensues when Sam vows Tara that this will never happen again. Tara, in turn, assures her older sister that she could never be like her biological father. The affirmation of the sisterly bond goes in hand with a new self-care strategy in which traumatic memory undergoes a reevaluation. The uncanny environment is partially mitigated through mutual emotional support and a redefined sense of identity. As Zhaohui Xiong writes in *To Live - The Survival Philosophy of the Traumatized*, "[h]istory is made when the pain of the past is both remembered and forgotten" (2008, 213).

[11] In *Final Girls and 'Mother': Representations of Women in the Horror Film from the 1970s to the Present*, Tiffany Basili argues that "[t]he Scream films demonstrate that mothers, and indeed women in general, can be, and are, more than one thing" (2021, 85)

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Bio-social continuity does not have to become a deterministic identity trajectory for the Carpenter sisters, which offers a modified sense to deal with traumatic paralysis (Kaplan and Wang 2008, 3–8).

However, the monstrous/repressed also resides within the communal, which is evident in the fact that the Ghostface killer is still on the loose. Sam concludes that the only proper way to protect her and herself is by leaving town altogether. While this might seem like another strategy aimed at avoidance, it can also be seen as step toward meta-slasher maturity. Sam confidently states that this is "what no one ever does in this situation", hinting at her familiarity with the previous horror tales in Woodsboro. Becky Millar and Jonny Lee note in this respect that horror films

> "seem to be effective in providing a temporary narrative structure to one's emotional experience. While grief may often be characterized as involving a lack of narrative coherence, films provide a narrative structure, and this may help to shape our emotional experience" (2021, 178–179).

Therefore, by realizing that she is part of a "wicked game", Sam can begin to articulate more forward-looking and confident strategies. However, Sam's proposal is immediately challenged by two Woodsboro murders veterans, who are already waiting for her outside the hospital. TV journalist Gale Weathers and the "original final girl" Sidney Prescott attempt to convince Sam to stay in Woodsboro, track down and kill the new Ghostface murderer (much in line with what Billy proposed). The cyclicality of the reboot is interwoven into the conversation when Sidney impresses on Sam that she tried running too, but it doesn't work and that the killer will always follow their intended target. Sidney emphasizes that "this is your life now" and that "whoever this is is gonna keep coming for you". Reckoning with trauma and with the repressed is therefore not specifically tied to physical space but assumes a much more pervasive dimension. This cements the argument that the monstrous in the *Scream* franchise is nurtured by more abstract socio-psychological intricacies nested within the collective.

From this perspective, the filmic narrative is enveloped in a sense of "perpetual crisis" which repeatedly grips the town of Woodsboro. Borrowing from Steven James Venette's understanding of crisis as a "a process of transformation where the old system can no longer be maintained" (2003, 43), the ongoing murder cycle can be read as a process of transformation in which communal life comes to a certain halt. For instance, Woodsboro responds to unexpected eruptions of violence with securitization (e.g. increased security detail for Tara in the hospital), the cancellation of mass entertainment events (e.g. the abrupt ending of the house party at Amber's place due to fears that killer might strike there), and with the constant mutual suspicion and denunciatory gossip which repeatedly seep into everyday conversations (e.g. within Tara's high school clique). These examples demonstrate how violent and chaotic disruptions have shaken up the social life to a significant extent. This is amplified by Sidney's admonishments which serve as a reminder that these radical transformations are recurrent

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("whoever this is is gonna keep coming for you") and have their origins in both the past and the present. In order to forge a different future, Sidney proposes to Sam to work together with her and Gale to put an end to the killer. Sam effectively dismisses the advice and joins her boyfriend Richie, who cheerfully supports the plan to get out of town. Richie drives her to Amber's house party with the ultimate goal of trapping Sam in a murderous showdown there.

The nefarious scheme underlines that, for the protagonists, reclaiming authorial power cannot be fully achieved through individualization. The way in which traumatic inscriptions are connected to a collective unconscious also affects the way these are resolved. The two killers actively orchestrate a cinematic narrative, which reinserts traumatic wounds into the public sphere. Michael Elm, Kobi Kabalek and Julia B. Köhne note in this context that "[f]ilm can render otherwise hidden traumatic wounds visible and perceptible, and therefore debatable and negotiable." The cinematic format itself serves as a collective trauma negotiation strategy (2014, 9). In this sense, the words of Billy Loomis, who asks "Are you gonna run away from who you are like you always do or are you gonna use it", echo the "circular structure" (Elm, Kabalek, and Köhne 2014, 4) of trauma visualization which lends itself to an easily reproducible cinematic script.

However, a key question is what Billy might mean by "use it". As previously stated, it is possible to read Billy's interventions as an effort to pass on "unkillable" repressed energy to Sam. The implicit patriarchic layer to this story dynamic mirrors some of the characteristics of the "Final Girl" trope, as described by Carol Clover in *Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film*:

> "The Final Girl is boyish, (…). Just as the killer is not fully masculine, she is not fully feminine (…). Her smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls and ally her, ironically, with the very boys she fears or rejects, not to speak of the killer himself" (1987, 204).

This gendered identity-building process in slasher films privileges a narrative structure in which the victim/killer dichotomy is routinely dissolved and then reinstated – stripping agency from and reinvesting it into the final girl in an effort to "re-masculinize the audience". While it is important to acknowledge that the *Scream* series has repeatedly and consciously subverted the "Final Girl" trope (Basili 2021, 80–85), the ambivalent nature of the trope in gendered terms takes on a new dimension in the dynamic between Sam and Billy. Unlike Sidney, Sam "inherits" at least some of the ferocity needed to defeat the killers. Her recurrent hallucinatory episodes encourage her to embrace a form of deadly energy, which is coded as masculine (since embodied by Billy). The cyclicality in this requel is thereby also informed by a re-blending of gendered performativity in which dominant conceptions of "motherly care" are infused with a patrilinear sense of cathartic force. The themes of "motherhood and grief", which Tara ascribed to *The Babadook*, become highly concentrated within the

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character of Sam. As the new focal point for both the legacy cast and the new characters in the franchise, her inscription into gendered politics contains both continuations and disruptions of the formula represented by Sidney. While just as resourceful and tenacious as her predecessor, Sam also incorporates conventional notions of maternal authority and an express acknowledgement of her troubled identity, which is affected by destructive, repressed energy.

This is made explicit in one of the of the final scenes. Right before she kills Richie in a bloody and hard-fought battle, Sam introduces a new horror film rule saying, "never fuck with the daughter of a serial killer". Accepting the serial killer genealogy in her own identity allows her to confidently inscribe herself in this cyclical story arch in an affirmative way. The repressed energy, which has wrought so much havoc on Woodsboro, is now directed against the killers itself, which both modifies and perpetuates the narrative cyclicality of the franchise.

6. Conclusions

The analyses in this chapter highlight how the complex tales surrounding family bonds and trauma in *Scream* are informed by a cyclical dynamic in which "motherhood and grief" are strongly interwoven with the "return of the repressed". The emotionally impactful format of cinematic horror serves to complement a narratology in which the shattering of personal and collective identities assumes a recurrent quality – all while offering material for suspenseful and surprising twists embedded in self-aware meta-commentary.

The actions of Sam and Tara were shown to be reflective of several self-care strategies designed to reclaim authorial power in an orchestrated spectacle. Their tale underlines that addressing horror and violence in Woodsboro is inseparably tied to probing explorations of the collective unconscious. While the antagonists seek to make a spectacle out of violence, for the protagonists it becomes crucial to learn how to handle trauma and maintain emotional and mental stability within the inexpressible chaos visited upon them. Silence, suppression, and avoidance emerged as launching pads for renewed violence. This aligns with Robin Wood's notion of the "return of the repressed", which "must always strive to return". The connection between the uncanny and the submerged offers particular food for thought in this context, as it was shown to be a key narrative driver for serialized horror. Further research could shed light on how and to what degree non-horror franchises also make use of these psycho-social subtexts.

A further conclusion is that neoliberal conceptions of self-management and self-optimization are both deconstructed and perpetuated to differing degrees. The neoliberal self is, among others, negotiated through the character of Sam. Her resorting to medication leads her to hallucinatory episodes. On the one hand, this calls into question whether she has the "competitive fitness" to deal with the situation. On the other hand, her hallucinations confront her with the unkillable energy represented by her biologi-

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cal father Billy Loomis. Sam's not living up to conventional neoliberal understandings of self-management allows her to channel paternal "repressed energy" into something that she can use to bolster the maternal authority she seeks to cultivate. Further research on the gendered aspects of neoliberal subjectivity in horror films can build and develop this thread by dissecting e.g. motherhood narratives in conjunction with the monstrous and exploring to what degree gendered binaries are modified when confronting the monstrous.

Neoliberal subjectivity can also be traced through some of the narrative functions embedded in the requel format, such as the antagonists' quixotic pursuit of a "better reboot and sequel" to their favorite horror film franchise. The implicit neoliberal mandate toward constant improvement and growth were shown to align with Fredric Jameson's concept of time and pastiche in a postmodern context. These observations are conversant with the psychological and physical constitution of Sam and Sidney at the beginning of the film, who were shown to seek individualized solutions toward self-care – predicated on the idea that alteration of the body (e.g. through medication and physical fitness) can produce the desirable outward appearance of sufficient fitness to deal with ever-growing (gendered) stress.

Instead of conventional self-optimization, the film sets the female protagonists on a different narrative path toward maturation, which was shown to be amplified by the absence of the mother. The loss of maternal authority paves the way for the unmitigated transfer of a cathartic violent energy coded as masculine. This has also ramifications for how the trope of the "final girl" is re-constituted in *Scream* in novel ways. For Sam, a seemingly inescapable mix of bio-social continuity, maternal performativity and the requel logic enforced by the killers, coalesce into a blend which allows for personal growth on terms which somewhat depart from neoliberal subjectivity and lead to a confrontation with what has been collectively repressed.

A principal takeaway from this analysis is that the monstrous in *Scream* is also nested in the communal and must be addressed and "neutralized" through acknowledging collective trauma. The orchestrated nature of the violence in Woodsboro in itself represents a form of communicative strategy effected by individuals, who desire to resolve trauma through manipulating the present and past. In this context, the "repressed" offers a recurrent and accessible entry point for self-aggrandizing narratives for individuals who seek to upend the social order of Woodsboro. From this angle, the blend of audience-generated fan fiction and the trope of the "final girl" generates a mutually reinforcing dynamic in which the victim/killer dichotomy is constantly replayed – until the past is both forgotten and remembered. *Scream* thereby serves as multi-faceted prism, which illuminates how, in times of social polarization and a social-media-based attention economy, the personal and the collective remain interlinked when addressing what is "unaddressed".

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