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CHALLENGING THE HOUSE – DOMESTICITY AND THE INTRUSION OF DARK HETEROTOPIAS

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While numerous analyses of contemporary horror narratives/films provide almost an excess in interpretations and readings, one specific issue – the concept of space – remains widely unaddressed. By limiting itself to the understanding of various cases at hand through the prism of characters and other active participants in the narrative, the mainstream theoretical approaches typically underestimate and overlook the spatial paradigm as an element that constructively and actively contributes to both the creation of a horror storyline, as well as the articulation of a social and/or cultural critique. What the article proposes is a reading of two films – James Wan’s *Insidious* (2010) and Scott Derrickson’s *Sinister* (2012) through the application of Michel Foucault’s notion of heterotopias. As proposed by the analysis, the spatial paradigm within the examined cases is premised on the simultaneous coexistence and superposition of heterotopian spaces over regular ones. Such coexistence facilitates the creation of particular contexts within which domestic anxieties and dysfunctions start to articulate themselves into a proper critical discourse.

Key words: horror, *Insidious*, *Sinister*, space, heterotopia, Foucault, domesticity.

1. Introduction

Although categorized and perceived through the prism of “genre” production, horror, as an all-encompassing term, successfully manages to satisfy and unify consumers’ needs for exploring the somewhat darker and definitely prohibited curiosities with an often poignant and well articulated critique of society and current or persistent social phenomena. In turn, theoretical works dedicated to the analysis of these narratives more often than not successfully trace various authors’ intents to reflect social complexities and preoccupations. However, one particular analytical approach remains widely unexplored and that is the issue of space within horror

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narratives, or more precisely its relevance for the articulation and expression of the above mentioned critiques and/or anxieties. Space, which in its complexity surpasses the simplistic function of a background needed for the development of a particular story, plays a particularly dominant role within horror narratives mostly due to the requirements of the genre. Castles, abandoned churches and monasteries as well as graveyards and subterranean vaults all contribute as richly symbolic settings to the articulation of the genre, simultaneously adapting to its evolutionary cycles. Following such initial 18th-century conceptualizations of space within the genre, subsequent horrific incarnations can be found in obscure or even abandoned houses or neighborhoods, strange (but always dark) cities, and in some cases even spaceships stranded on the edges of space and filled with a variety of horrors, each setting distinctly marked by a different symbolic and interpretative meaning. What this paper proposes is an analysis of one specific type of space – the setting of the house as a site that surpasses its traditional functions and interpretations and goes on to become a space of transgression, as well as a catalyst for transgressive behavior.³ By focusing on two different cases – James Wan’s film *Insidious* (2010) and Scott Derrickson’s *Sinister* (2012) the analysis aims at showing a distinct connection with and influence of Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopian spaces on the articulation of the presented spaces, as well as the creation of a socially aware filmic subconscious skillfully hidden below a veil of horrors.

As it will be shown, both examples rely on a specific process of evidencing and constructing space where reality, and the perception/construction of space usually associated to it, is paralleled and mirrored in another, different, type of space. Following Foucault’s analysis of heterotopian spaces and their unconventional and potentially chaotic nature (when opposed to regular spaces and realities), the analysis evidences the coexistence of the two types of spaces, but it goes a step further by suggesting the superimposition of heterotopian spaces over regular spaces. The proposed thesis consequently moves away from Foucault’s own paradigm defining the spatial dichotomy as “a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another.” (1986, p. 23) As it will be shown, both narratives – *Insidious* and *Sinister* – are in fact not only premised

³It is the house in fact, theoretically neglected but nevertheless visually and narratively very present, that encapsulates and further develops the values initially articulated through the imagery of the castle. As Barry Curtis elaborates, “Since the mid-eighteenth century the haunted house has incorporated elements of the feudal castle, the ruined monastery and the remote cottage and sustained fictions of illicit ownership and the ghostly resilience of rightful inheritance. Within the framework of the conventional haunted house narrative there is a trans-dimensional archetype that incorporates these themes” (2008, p. 34).

on the initial spatial polarity, but they evolve precisely upon the moments of superimposition of heterotopian spaces over the regular ones. As (inadvertently) suggested by the titles, the insidious and sinister heterotopian spaces will therefore not only provide an additional and perilous space with which various characters will interact, but they will actively function as an incursive force that destabilizes any attempt of maintaining the initially presented stability and normality of regular (domestic) spaces. It is through these heterotopian incursions that the proclaimed evil infringes on reality and the unfortunate characters, who are now lost in a relatively classic genre-defined moments of horror and insanity. Further analysis, however, will point out that the presented spatial imbalance, as well as the horrors derived from this, now broken, dichotomy, are not limited to a two-dimensional representation of uneasy and morbid situations, but instead they contribute directly to the traditional and crucial value of the horror genre, and that is its focus on relevant social and cultural issues and phenomena. Hiding beneath a patchwork made of images of domesticity and violent and morbid outbursts, complex issues such as domestic abuse, abandonment, male and female spatial coding, etc. slowly emerge and additionally play upon the viewer's fears and anxieties. The proposed analysis will therefore not only challenge the initial understanding of heterotopian spaces as perceived by Foucault, but it will further the reading of the function and symbolic value of domestic spaces within the horror genre.

2. Troubling domesticity

As can be observed from a vast number of critical and theoretical approaches, pertaining to a number of different disciplines, the concept of heterotopia is constantly being reintroduced and re-elaborated, while retaining its initial theoretical impact and value. This potentially troubling theoretical outline of a different kind of space(s) was, however, addressed by Foucault only on three occasions. An initial concept has been given in the Preface to *The Order of Things* where Foucault debates about potentially problematic spaces which "secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance" (1966, p. xix). A somewhat more elaborate analysis presented by Foucault in a 1967 piece entitled "Of Other Spaces"⁴ offers a notion of heterotopias as real sites co-existing and functioning in relation to other sites.

⁴Translated in 1998 by Robert Hurley as "Different Spaces." The third text in which Foucault discusses heterotopias was based on another 1967 lecture and published in 2005 as "Les Hétérotopies," but remains unavailable in English.

These sites, however, retain a set of rules and regulations that makes them significantly different from other (regular) sites. Existing on the notion of opposing qualities, heterotopian sites according to Foucault "have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect." (1986, p. 24) What is therefore presented through Foucault's discourse could be summarized within a notion of the coexistence of two different types of spaces – the ordinary spaces functioning as sites of regular everyday activities such as rest, work, transportation etc., and the opposing heterotopian sites, counter-sites whose function is to reflect and modify, in accordance with the principles outlined by Foucault, all those ordinary spaces.

The observance of this spatial polarity and the evidencing of the existence of heterotopian spaces within horror narratives do not, however, represent a relevant analytical step forward in the process of reading and better understanding both the horror genre and horror spatiality. As mentioned in the introductory part, gothic and horror narratives are largely premised on the notion of dangerous and forbidding spaces within which various characters, depending on the narrative, are usually forced to face and survive some type of threat, after which they are (occasionally) allowed to flee their menacing surroundings. Characteristically such narratives usually provide an almost geographic outline of the dividing line between regular spaces, and what could be defined as heterotopian ones. The characters in these narratives are forced to confront a space that could be defined in terms of Foucault's *heterotopias of deviation*⁵ – a space within which "individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed." (Foucault, 1986, p. 25). In other words, the characters are exposed to a genre-defined space filled with individuals whose abnormal behavior limits them from leaving the proposed heterotopia of deviation, while they at the same time represent a menace to the heroes or heroines of the narrative at hand. Simultaneously, these alternative spaces cannot be randomly accessed. Their existence, in relation to real spaces, is monitored by "a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable." (Foucault, 1986, p. 26) An individual is either forced into a heterotopian space⁶ or he or she becomes subject to some type of "rites" necessary to gain access. The dynamics of the proposed

⁵ As explained by Foucault the spaces that usually fall within this category are rest homes and (possibly) retirement homes, as well as psychiatric hospitals and prisons.

⁶ Using Foucault's words, "the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison" (1986, p. 26).

permission to access heterotopian spaces may be altered according to different storylines, but its existence implies a moment of actual transition from normal to a heterotopian space, as well as an even more important factor of acknowledging the existence of two separate types of spaces that are not superimposed on each other. This apparently "clear" division between two or more spaces conforms to the previously stated Foucault's idea of sites irreducible to one another and not superimposable on one another (1986, p. 23). However, is this an absolute rule in regard to the spaces present within horror narratives? And if not, in what way does this deviation from Foucault's presentation of heterotopian spaces differ in function from its initial form?

As stated in the introductory part, a number of examples could be addressed in relation to the issue of a possible evolution of Foucault's initial theoretical premise. However, two recent narratives emerge as relevant and adequate examples of the proposed theoretical elaboration and these are James Wan's film *Insidious* (2010) and Scott Derrickson's *Sinister* (2012). The presented plot within both storylines is fairly simple and conforming to their numerous genre predecessors. Both films are focused on a domestic setting by telling a story about families moving into a new house. Wan's film tells a story about the Lambert family, Josh and Renai together with their three children. Soon after moving in one of the sons, Dalton, decides to explore the attic, and while attempting to turn on the light by climbing a ladder he falls to the floor, while the camera focuses on his stare into the darkness, frightened as if something was staring back at him. The fall, supposedly, causes Dalton to lose consciousness and slip into a coma that will force him to stay in a hospital for the next three months. After his return home, while still in an unexplained coma, a series of unnatural events start to occur culminating with a confrontation within the house between a mysterious dark figure and Renai. This causes them to move again, but the supernatural events continue to follow, manifesting on an increasingly menacing and dangerous pace. A possible resolution of the haunting appears with the introduction of the character of Elise Reiner, an investigator of the supernatural, who explains to the Lambert family that their son Dalton has the astral projection abilities, much like his father, and that while doing that in his sleep he became lost in a parallel dimension named "the Further," a space where the tormented and vengeful souls of the dead reside. As Elise explains, the dead want to use the living to attempt to gain life again, or, in the case of the demon appearing within the Lamberts' new household, to consume the body of the boy Dalton. The only chance to save the boy is for Josh to use his (now suppressed)

ability of astral projection and venture into the Further to look for his son and confront whatever lies beyond the threshold of their own reality.

A similar setting can be observed in Derrickson's *Sinister*. The Oswald family moves into a new household, with the father Ellison Oswald, a once famous true crime writer, being the only one aware of the fact that the house was previously a crime scene. As presented to the viewers immediately at the beginning through the somewhat abstract prism of an 8 millimeter film role projection, the family of four that previously lived in the house was brutally hanged by an apparently unseen presence. Ellison, hoping to write a new book about the recent murders and to reclaim his brief popularity as a writer, starts by searching the house, more precisely the attic, and by doing so initiates a chain of events much in a way as narrated in *Insidious*. What he finds in the attic is a box of 8 millimeter rolls of film, each roll having a different title such as *Sleepy Time '98*, *Pool Party '66*, as well as the role showing the introductory execution ironically entitled *Family Hanging Out '11*. What Ellison soon discovers while watching in horror the brutal murders of a number of families is the presence of a strange figure almost hidden within each of short films. The figure, tentatively named "Mr. Boogie," is accompanied by a strange symbol and a number of crude drawings of either the murders or the demonic figure itself. As the narrative progresses, Ellison finds out that each family was murdered by one of the children, who in turn would disappear after being possessed and taken away by the demon, a destiny that in the end he would share with the other families.

3. Dark heterotopias

The emphasis in both *Insidious* and *Sinister*, as already stated, is therefore ostentatiously placed on the domestic spaces of family houses. Following Gaston Bachelard's *topoanalysis* presented in *The Poetics of Space*, or "the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives" (1994, p. 8), such places of domesticity, intimacy, and comfort provide a repository for one's memories and daydreams, remaining permanently with the person though the person may no longer physically occupy this homely space. Heterotopian spaces, on the other hand, do not evoke pleasure and comfort but perhaps rather anxiety, which is suggested by Foucault's description of the mirror as the perfect example of heterotopia: the person looking at themselves in the mirror discover their absence from the place they physically occupy – because they see themselves clearly in the mirror, therefore at a different place – which might raise questions as to the nature and (un)reality of their

position (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). Foucault's use of the mirror as exemplary of the nature of heterotopias is what perhaps best recommends these other spaces for any analysis of spatiality within the horror genre: creating a sense of anxiety, as well as disorientation, the possibility to experience one's presence at two different spaces at the same moment is accompanied by the feeling of the uncanny⁷, which shall be discussed later in more detail. Foucault's explanation of heterotopian spaces through the use of the mirror image also serves as the model on which heterotopias in both films are based. In *Sinister*, the mythological and/or occult place where the demon Bughuul resides, his own netherworld into which the children taken away "from the physical world" are transferred is reportedly located in the very images which depict this deity and the rituals related to his worship (Blum & Derrickson, 2012). As one of the characters Professor Jonas states in the film, "Bughuul lives in images, they are gateways into his realm" (Blum & Derrickson, 2012), which he also states as the reason why not much evidence remains of his cult, since most of the images – frescoes or engravings – have been destroyed over time by those people who believed that the destruction of images would also bring ruin upon his realm. Images – such as the drawings made by Ashley on the walls of the house, children's drawings left after the family murders, or tapes of the murders themselves – operate in pretty much the same way as the mirror in their heterotopian function: what is seen in these images is located right in the physical space of the image itself, while it also exists independently outside it. The fact that the destruction of images does not bring about the destruction of the other space is already indicative of the shattered binarism between the ordinary and other spaces, as it shows that this other space has a fully autonomous existence of its own, which cannot be reduced solely to a relationship of dependence on the ordinary physical reality. Elise's description of the Further in *Insidious* provides yet another elaboration of Foucault's concept of the heterotopia: "The Further is a world far beyond our own. Yet it's all around us, a place without time as we know it. It's a dark realm filled with the tortured souls of the dead. A place not meant for the living." (Blum & Wan, 2010) The description of the Further – being *far beyond* and *not meant for the living* – emphatically reinforces Foucault's idea of heterotopias as places that are clearly delineated from the ordinary sites of everyday reality and not

⁷ Interesting additional readings of the relevance of the uncanny in relation to the analysis of (potentially genre bound) spaces and places can be found in works such as Richard Martin's *The Architecture of David Lynch* (2014), as well *The Film Paintings of David Lynch: Challenging Film Theory* written by Allister Mactaggart (2010). Although both texts are primarily focused on the mechanisms of esthetics in Lynch's work, they both extensively explored the intricate relation between Freud's uncanny and the articulation and representation of space as well as the characters inhabiting it.

superimposable upon them. Additionally, the Further operates on Foucault's principle according to which "[t]he heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time." (Foucault, 1986, p. 26) As a place endowed with supernatural qualities – inhabited by malevolent spirits – the Further is easily identified as one of the tropes of gothic fiction, as what might be referred to as a *dark heterotopia*, whose significance for the genre lies primarily in its ability to subvert the traditional notions of spatial polarity, pervasively imposing itself over intimate homely places and thus indicating certain problems in the family.

The disruption of the spatial paradigm based on polarity is implied in both films from the very beginning by the fact that the Lambert and Oswalt families are moving house. This causes a certain lack of orientation which reflects on the relationships within the family. For instance, the opening scene of *Insidious* shows Renai waking up in the new house, still quiet at the early morning hours, and reaching for the family album. This act of recollecting past family moments is indicative of the necessity to create, in terms of Bachelard's descriptions of the house, a homely place filled with memories in a completely new spatial context. The difficulties that the Lamberts immediately experience in adjusting to the new surroundings are accompanied by a misbalance in family life, with Renai making various arrangements on the phone, preparing meals, and trying to compose her music but failing because she has to keep an eye on the baby, while Josh spends his whole day at work, not even finding enough time to take the children to school or pick them up. Furthermore, Renai expresses her concern about whether *things* – which she leaves emphatically unnamed – will be different in the new house, thus indicating certain problems underlying her marriage to Josh. Whatever the nature of the problems, they seem to deepen as they at the same time become more firmly contextualized within the space of the family house. The fact that Renai and Josh are experiencing problems (heightened and/or symbolically represented by their moving house) arguably leaves the children unattended for at least some of the time; it is on one such occasion during the very first days of their lives in the new house that Dalton reaches the attic and subsequently falls into an inexplicable coma. Family problems are even more elaborately explicated and therefore more obvious in *Sinister*: the viewer becomes privy from the start to the fact that there are secrets in the family, since Ellison Oswalt conceals from his wife that the house they are moving into is actually the scene of a brutal unsolved crime he intends to write about. He therefore lies to his wife and puts the entire family in danger, while also putting his obsession with crime and crime writing in the first place.

The Oswald children have difficulties in adapting to the new school: the girl Ashley openly states that she does not want to be there, while the son Trevor suffers from serious sleeping problems – nightmares accompanied by somnambulism, of which he never has any recollections. Though the family appears on the surface as a happy one, with the mother devoted to her children, and the father who works hard only to provide for their future, the underlying problems are revealed through issues such as Trevor's "night terrors" (Blum & Derrickson, 2012), and that these problems have been in the family for quite a while is suggested by Tracy's words: "If this [moving house] goes sour like last time, I'll take Trevor and Ashley and go back home to my sister's" (Blum & Derrickson, 2012).

While moving houses is a psychologically stressful step, with the potential of bringing certain deeper family problems to the surface, it is also used in both *Insidious* and *Sinister* as a motif which implies the crucial breakup of traditional spatial polarities. Both the Lamberts and the Oswalds are neither *there* – in their previous homes – nor quite completely settled *here* in the new houses, which suggests that their position is undefined and they are rendered vulnerable in terms of what Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1984) described as a marginal state of placelessness which can be both empowering and dangerous. When the focus is shifted on spatiality instead of the individual experience, such a marginal position suggests a possibility of spatial transgressions or the existence of overlapping spatial paradigms. In *Insidious*, Dalton's climb to the attic is a crucial moment in representing the disruption of the spatial dichotomy that takes place in horror narratives. Following Yi Fu Tuan's theoretical premise on the anthropocentric quality of spatial prepositions (2001), one might observe Dalton in the attic as an individual lost and disoriented in a dark forest. On entering the attic room, Dalton is carrying a torch to light his way, but soon he drops it and, unable to see anything, falls from a ladder. Once even a flickering light appears in the darkness, according to Tuan, space dramatically changes its structure, with the light establishing a goal (2001, p. 36). In accordance with this goal, spatial polarities such as left and right, or front and back, resume their meaning and the position of the individual becomes clearly defined in relation to the goal. It is the goal (light) that disappears in Dalton's case and the boy is left disoriented and unaware of his location; at the same time, any possibility of re-establishing the spatial polarity is lost, which implies that the borderline between the domestic space and, in this case, heterotopian reaches of the Further becomes blurred.

This in turn allows for the incursion of heterotopia upon the ordinary spatial reality of the household.

This heterotopian incursion is in a similar way, or perhaps even more obviously, represented in *Sinister*. While still unpacking boxes on their first day in the new house, Ellison visits the attic without carrying any kind of light with him, and finds a single box there, full of video tapes. Following Tuan's reference to the significance of light for spatial orientation, this would imply that Bughuul's dark heterotopian realm is already present in the house even prior to the Oswalds' arrival – and, indeed, bearing in mind the later revealed belief that Bughuul lives in images (films), it seems that the attic is the location of his realm. However, as the tapes are carried down to Ellison's study, heterotopia gradually spreads its influence to the rest of the house, breaking the initial vertical paradigm of upper and lower spaces.⁸ This is literally embodied in the scene in which Ellison falls through the attic floor, thus leaving a hole in the ceiling and creating an easily reachable passageway between the two spatial realities.

4. The spatial uncanny

Both films immediately provide images which exemplify the gradual advance of heterotopia upon the houses. After Ellison plays the tapes he has found in the attic, he starts believing that there is something "odd or inexplicable about the house" (Blum & Derrickson, 2012) as the tapes get repeatedly played apparently by themselves, while no one else is present. At one point, surrounded by photographs, screenshots, articles, and other material in his study, Ellison sees on the computer a video of himself falling through the attic floor. While the question of who made the video is immediately posed – and could also be immediately dismissed and the video explained away as a hallucination, since Ellison starts drinking heavily as soon as he watches the first tape – what the video reveals is even more horrifying: Ellison being pulled through the floor by several small and deathly pale hands. The advance of heterotopia in *Sinister* culminates in the moment when he actually sees five children watching one of the films in the attic.

In *Insidious*, Renai first hears a voice on the baby monitor. Second, someone is heard knocking on the front door in the middle of the night. When Josh tries to turn the lights on, the bulb explodes, leaving him in the dark in pretty much the same way as Dalton. As he gropes his way around the dark house, the burglar alarm goes off

⁸ What can be read from Ellison's curiosity about the tapes and his subsequent obsession with them – as well as his general obsession with crime – is crucial to this analysis. By neglecting his family for the sake of his work, Ellison himself helps in brining the dark heterotopian influence onto his home.

and Josh realizes that the front door is now open; immediately following this is the scene in which Renai actually sees a person standing right behind baby Cali's crib. It becomes clear at this point that the house has been broken into, and hinted that some kind of alien presence has invaded and imposed itself over the Lambert household – the presence, as it will later become obvious, of the heterotopian Further.⁹As Renai acknowledges that she is "scared of this house" and that "there is something wrong with this place," (Blum & Wan, 2010) believing that the house is haunted, she manages to garner Josh's support and convinces him to move house yet again. However, on the very first day in their new home, Renai is visited by a young boy – yet another spirit from the Further. The fact that these creatures and the place they come from are not connected with the first house and can appear regardless of the particular spatial context, as long as this context is domestic, speaks of the autonomy they possess. In the second Lambert household, souls inhabiting the Further appear in broad daylight; their appearance is no longer limited to the upper (attic) or private (bedrooms) parts of the house but rather shifted towards the first floor and living room, normally used for family gatherings and meals; they have the power to act in the everyday household reality – so the young boy Renai sees, for example, changes the music on the gramophone, while other inhabitants of the Further later ransack Dalton's room.

Events such as these indicate that the heterotopian Further or Bughuul's netherworld have completely transposed themselves onto the ordinary places of everyday life: these two spatial polarities are no longer, as suggested by Foucault, irreducible to one another as the domestic place becomes suffused with dark heterotopian influences. Contesting the idea of irreducibility of different spaces and challenging the boundary that supposedly exists between them is presented as a twofold process in *Insidious* and *Sinister*: first, heterotopia transgresses this boundary making incursions into the domestic space by means of the spatial uncanny; second, the domestic space is transformed into or revealed as a heterotopia.

The spatial uncanny in both films should be not be observed per se, but rather as a prelude to the incursion of heterotopia. Following Freud's description of the uncanny as something that "belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread" (2003, p. 123), Anthony Vidler in *The Architectural Uncanny – Essays in the Modern Unhomely* moved on to locate the uncanny in domestic spaces. Vidler's

⁹ This becomes even more fully explained in the sequel, *Insidious: Chapter 2*, where the viewer comes to realize that the person who breaks into the house is Josh himself, entering from The Further. Thus The Further invades the house, also confirming once again Foucault's thesis that heterotopian spaces open up when some sort of disruption in the traditional concept of time occurs: Josh in this scene enters his house from the future, breaking the expected temporal sequence (Blum & Wan, 2013).

observation that the uncanny derives its force from "its sense of lurking unease, rather than from any clearly defined source of fear – an uncontrollable sense of haunting rather than a present apparition" (1992, p. 23) fits well into the description of certain experiences the inhabitants of the family houses have in *Insidious* and *Sinister* immediately prior to the actual incursion of dark heterotopian realities. For example, before Renai sees the spirit of the young boy, she hears that the music on the gramophone has changed and this instantly causes anxiety; it will later transpire that the same music the ghost boy plays on the gramophone is also constantly played in the Further where Dalton is entrapped (Blum & Wan, 2010). Similarly in *Insidious: Chapter 2*, Renai hears from the second floor that someone in the drawing room is playing the music she composed for Josh on the piano; as it later turns out, the music is played by Josh himself, also entrapped in the Further (Blum & Wan, 2013). The sense of haunting is clearly depicted in *Sinister* in the scene showing Ellison walking around the house with a baseball bat, certain of the presence of something, though unable to see anything – as he walks around the dark house, the viewer is aware of the five children keeping constantly near him, though never making themselves visible. As Vidler has further explained, the uncanny is on a psychological level manifested as the play of doubling, "where the other is, strangely enough, experienced as a replica of the self, all the more fearsome because apparently the same" (1992, p. 3), while the most common motif in terms of spatial designation applied in the context of the uncanny is "precisely the contrast between a secure and homely interior and the fearful invasion of an alien presence" (Vidler, 1992, p. 3). Although the play of doubling is reflected on many levels – Renai's identification of the ghost boy with Dalton or, in the context of the sequel movie, the numerous mirrored (and problematic) parent-child relationships – it is certainly best captured in *Insidious: Chapter 2*, with the actual existence of two Joshes, one of whom is a creature from the Further. As for the tension between homely places and alien presence, yet another specific example of the uncanny is found in *Insidious* in the drawings made by Dalton. Though they are hung on the walls of the boy's room, Josh seems surprised when he sees these strange images of a red door or a unicorn. While his surprise might be indicative of his lack of interest in his son's activities (because he has apparently never seen the drawings before),¹⁰ the drawings at the same time urge him to ask Elise for help and later serve

¹⁰ Josh's perceived absence from his children's everyday activities reveals, in the context of his own ability to project himself into The Further, an equally serious problem underlying his childhood. His father is literally absent: he is never even mentioned in either *Insidious* or *Insidious: Chapter 2*. The possibly traumatic parent-child relationship is given an even more significant development in the sequel, where the spirit of Parker Crane who haunts Josh is presented as a malignant creature precisely due to the traumas he suffered

as guidelines in his journey into the Further where he actually sees, while experiencing a series of flashbacks, the *other* red door and the unicorn. The drawings thus form a connection between the private space of Dalton's bedroom and the heterotopian Further, and at the same time embody the terrifying play of doubling. These drawings have the same revelatory function as a number of drawings in *Sinister*. While Ellison is terrified by the appearance of various animals – the scorpion, the snake, and the dog – in and around the house, he is finally terrorized to find these same animals in the scanned images of the engravings that Professor Jonas sends him, supposedly showing the cult of Bughuul (Blum & Derrickson, 2012). The engravings also show rituals similar to the committed murders, thus indicating the overlapping between two spatially and temporally distant dimensions, the connection between which is still revealed through, however slight, disturbances of the domestic space, such as the intrusion of a potentially venomous snake or fierce dog.

While in the above listed examples the spatial uncanny precedes and indicates the subsequent heterotopian incursion on and alterations to the place of domesticity – Renai, for example, actually sees the ghost boy, who starts running freely around the house, opening and closing doors at his own will; she is hit and rendered unconscious by the ghost of Parker Crane's mother; Bughuul actually appears inside the Oswalds' home at the end of *Sinister*– it still fails to reveal the crucial point in the spatial analysis of the genre: that the homely space of the house *is* at the same time the other space of the dark heterotopia. In *Insidious*, the confrontation between Josh and the spirits from the Further represents this final elimination of the boundary between domestic and heterotopian spaces. As Josh is sent into the Further to find Dalton and as he leaves his physical body, he takes a torch and opens a door which leads him into the dark unknown. There he meets, in yet another play of doubling, his younger self who shows him the way, pointing the finger in the direction of the Lamberts' (first) house. The same image of the house enveloped in darkness reappears throughout the film, and at this point the viewer can finally grasp its meaning: the place called the Further, the place towards which the young Josh directs his older counterpart, is actually the family house. While Josh opens the door to his home, Elise remarks, sitting next to his physical body – within the spatial framework of the ordinary – that "he is in." (Blum & Wan, 2010) Josh finds Dalton in the attic, the appearance of which is now completely altered, and tries to re-establish the significance of clearly defined spatial polarities by

as a child from his disturbed mother. The presence of the heterotopian Further is, in other words, made possible in the Lambert household because of the trauma caused by domestic abuse.

making sure to grab a lamp and use the light to guide him back. These polarities, however, prove to be terminally destroyed, which becomes obvious from the fact that Josh himself returns from the Further altered and transformed, thus perpetuating the invasive influence of the dark heterotopia on the house.

Sinister, as previously mentioned, immediately identifies heterotopia with images/films, and locates these in the attic of the family house. While Foucault listed the cinema as a standard example of heterotopia, due to its ability to juxtapose several spaces of different kinds within a single real place – that of the screen or, in the case of the theatre, stage (Foucault, 1986, p. 25), a deeper connection between films and the house is revealed progressively, as Ellison watches the home videos. The first three of these are made on various occasions of family gatherings, but always outside – in the back yard, on a picnic site, or by a swimming pool. The fourth video is filmed *inside* a house, and in this way the house is made part of the heterotopia and its compilation of juxtaposed incongruities. The very fact that the Oswalds, once they move, actually go back to their initial home only to get killed, implies that the dark heterotopia has all along been their house – or Bachelard's oneiric house, transformed within the horror genre into a generator of nightmares and memories not one's own, but belonging to some other space and time.

5. Conclusion

As this analysis has shown, both *Insidious* and *Sinister* exemplify the importance of the spatial factor for interpreting contemporary horror, more precisely, the inevitably shattered spatial paradigm that operates within the genre. Moving house is merely the initial impulse which shows the placelessness of the family in question, but also allows for a movement towards the introduction of dark heterotopias, embodied in some kind of a threatening and dangerous realm, such as the Further or Bughuul's netherworld in the two examined cases. While Foucauldian concept of heterotopias – and heterotopias of deviation in particular – is rendered particularly useful for any interpretation of spatiality in horror narratives, the here presented analysis has shown that contemporary products of the genre transcend Foucault's traditional conception by depicting the capability of (dark) heterotopias to superimpose themselves on the ordinary places of domesticity. The family houses in both *Insidious* and *Sinister* become permeated with their influence as the Further and netherworld start affecting and appearing in the attics, bedrooms, and living rooms of the Lamberts' and Oswalds' homes. The proposed and observed permeation, however, necessitates the

introduction of the uncanny elements/factors, whose function now becomes not only to opportunely articulate and present moments of suspense and/or outright horror, but to facilitate the dissolution of the initially proposed Foucauldian polarized spaces, once irreducible to one another, and now bound in a newly constructed space of horror.

This space of horror, initially conceived as a dark heterotopia somewhere beyond the ordinary, now finds its precise location inside the family house. As stated in the introductory segment, however, the house and the family, as well as the entire domesticity factor, serve not only as a prolific setting and background for the creation of suspenseful and sometimes horrific narratives. Due to its symbolic complexity, the house directly complies with the traditional aim of the genre, and that is the formation of some type of socially relevant critical discourse. Once transformed into the heterotopian other, which provides the context for the horrors to occur, the domestic space also immediately acts as a projection of family anxieties and dysfunctions. Thus the fear of the supernatural reveals those more common fears hidden beneath a patina of normality – fears generated by troubled marriages, neglectful parents, and the stress of growing up in the ever-changing surroundings. And as the here presented analysis of *Insidious* and *Sinister* has suggested, the complex fluid relationship between the spaces of domesticity and otherness provides specific genre-bound contextualization for unearthing both common and uncommon fears.

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