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Dead Ends: Ruin, Redundancy, and the Horrors of Precarity in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *It Follows*

Emily Round

While Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) and David Robert Mitchell's *It Follows* (2014) ostensibly focalise their films' narratives upon the imminent threat of bodily violence which endangers their respective protagonists' lives, a deeper analysis of both films illuminates the terror at the heart of the narratives: economic precarity and immobility. Both Hooper and Mitchell deliberately situate their horror films within settings that are haunted by the past hope of prosperity and which have corroded into ruins, left to rust and rot under the hostile conditions of post-industrial capitalism. These rents in the socio-economic fabric are intimately registered on a corporeal level, as the bodies of both *Chain Saw* protagonist Sally Hardesty and *It Follows* protagonist Jay Height become the sites onto which the capitalist horrors of unequal prosperity and labour redundancy are violently enacted. In Hooper's film, the rural backwoods of Texas play host to a brutal confrontation between a working-class family—made redundant by the rise of automation and thus embodying the industrial atrophy of the American South—and a group of drifting, unfettered young people, represented by Sally and her friends. This encounter signifies a catastrophic friction between outsiders and locals, and between mobility and stagnation. Similarly, in *It Follows*, the territorial tension between the urban ruins of Detroit and its surrounding suburbs haunts the central conceit of the narrative. The suburbs are dislocated as a site of stability and invulnerability, and are instead *followed* by the threat of precarity, by the economic disintegration and social stagnation which the city signifies. In both films, these crises are crystallised through the motif of mobility; the car is imbued with promise of escape, as the means by which one may mitigate the perils of precarity. Yet, in *Chain Saw* and *It Follows*, this promise of unrestricted movement is swiftly substituted with dead ends, abruptly undermining the illusion of control over one's social and bodily security. Rather than individual tales of terror, Hooper and Mitchell's films present the collective crisis of capitalism as the ultimate horror, as an economic system predicated on precarity, requiring a constant process of deferring disaster by sacrificing the stability of some to guarantee the security of others. It is precisely this process which Sally and Jay exemplify, as they become the latest bodies in a chain of sacrificial substitutions. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *It Follows* convey the same capitalist logic: the debt must be paid by *somebody*.

Inherent to the the concept of precarity is the impossibility of extricating the body from the external conditions within which the body exists. As Judith Butler contends, 'it is not possible first to define the ontology of the body and then to refer to the social significations the body assumes. Rather, to be a body is to be exposed to social crafting and form, and that is what makes the ontology of the body a social ontology'.[1] Precarity thus articulates how corporeal vulnerability is necessarily entwined with uneven and disparate socio-economic positioning: precarity 'designates that politically induced condition in which

[1] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2016), p. 23.

certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death'.[2] This is perhaps most powerfully expressed in *It Follows* through the deliberate mapping of violence onto spaces of precarity. Crucially, Mitchell locates the catalysing scene in which Jay acquires and then learns of her new vulnerable condition in the ruins of Detroit's urban centre. As the camera pans downwards from the exterior of Detroit's notorious abandoned Packard Automotive Plant to Jay and Hugh having sex in the backseat of his car in the desolate parking lot, Mitchell is 'visually cementing the link between the horrific and Detroit's urban decay'.[3] Despite Jay residing in the suburbs, it is within the crumbling, rusting, and graffitied structure of the abandoned plant that *It Follows* reveals its disturbing premise. Hugh informs her that she is now the host of a sexually transmitted curse, and as a result will be perpetually followed by a slow yet inexorable, shape-shifting monster. As he explains: 'This thing, it's gonna follow you. Somebody gave it to me. And I passed it to you'.[4] Mitchell thus inextricably connects the film's monstrous entity with its aesthetic of postindustrial decay, bearing witness to a legacy of economic stagnation and unemployment.

Once a hopeful symbol of the rapid expansion and growth promised by the automobile industry, the Packard Automotive Plant has instead become a microcosmic site of Detroit's post-industrial landscape, a haunting 'icon of post-Fordist, post-Golden Age, Rust Belt decline'.[5] Jay's corporeal precarity and enhanced vulnerability in this scene, immobilised and bound to a wheelchair as the monster creeps closer and closer, therefore becomes a bodily registration of a social wounding. As the mise-en-scène reverberates with the 'slow yet steady intensification of vulnerability in postindustrial America'[6], Jay's terrorisation by the monster becomes a manifestation of the encroaching peril of precarity, of the 'unstoppable forces of decay' which threaten to metastasise from Detroit's metropolis to its suburbs .[7] It is significant, then, that as the danger of the monster becomes apparent, Jay and her friends flee north to Greg's lake house attempting to find some site of safety. This movement echoes Jay's earlier nostalgic recollection of her childhood daydreams: 'I had this image of myself holding hands with a really cute guy […] driving along some pretty road, up north maybe […] just having some sort of freedom'.[8] This comment evokes Detroit's history of 'white flight' wherein 'white residents in the urban areas began

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[2] Butler, p. 23.

[3] David Church, 'Queer Ethics and the Urban Ruin-Porn Landscape: The Horrors of Monogamy in *It* Follows', in *Post-Horror: Art, Genre and Cultural Elevation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), pp. 181-212 (p. 199).

[4] *It Follows*, dir. by David Robert Michell (Radius-TWC, 2014) in Amazon Prime Video <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Follows-Maika-Monroe/dp/B00ZPFBCCU> [accessed 24 April 2023].

[5] Sianne Ngai, 'It Follows, or Financial Imps', in *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), 145-174 (p. 153).

[6] Casey Ryan Kelly, '*It Follows*: Precarity, Thanatopolitics, and the Ambient Horror Film', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 34.3 (2017), 234-249 (p. 235) <doi:10.1080/15295036.2016.1268699>.

[7] Mark Binelli, 'How It Follows Uses Detroit to Explore the Horror of Urban Decay', *Slate*, 1 April 2015, <https://slate.com/culture/2015/04/it-follows-how-the-new-movie-uses-detroit-to-explore-the-horror-of-urban-decay.html> [accessed 23 April 2023].

[8] *It Follows*.

moving north'[9] during the 1940s, contributing to the city's crisis of depopulation. As Bill McGraw writes of the city's recent history, 'emptiness is a major part of Detroit's contemporary condition'.[10] Of course, Jay's northern migration proves futile and—as the film's title mandates—the entity follows her nonetheless, irrespective of the illusory borders which demarcate class divisions. The monster of *It Follows* exceeds an individual threat of bodily violence, manifesting instead the feeling that 'everyone who grew up in the shadows of a city left for dead knows in their bones: that all things must pass, and that your city (or town, or suburb) is next'.[11] Just as the curse itself represents a collective, rather than individual, crisis in its reliance upon perpetual transference, the monster—as the physical manifestation of the curse—further resists the fixed identity of a singular threat. The entity continuously shapeshifts, sometimes appearing as people known to the victim it is following, therefore dispersing the danger that it poses. At all moments, anyone could be carrying the curse, and anyone could be the entity following you, destabilising the illusion of individual protection and socio-economic immunity. Indeed, Jay's attempt to mitigate her precarious condition through a drive up north to an ostensibly 'safer' region meets an abrupt dead end, as she crashes the car while attempting to flee the monster yet again. Thus, just as Detroit's population and urban landscape is haunted by the decaying corpse of its automobile industry, mobility again becomes a deceptive fantasy of escape from the terror of precarity.

This same sentiment is perceptible from the outset of Hooper's *Chain Saw*, found in the opening crawl which falsely frames the film as a representation of true events, proclaiming that 'the film which you are about to see is an account of the tragedy which befell a group of five youths' when 'an idyllic summer afternoon drive became a nightmare'.[12] This prologue subtly introduces the film's undercurrent of class confrontation, an encounter between locals and outsiders, between 'people who are tied to one place and those who are "just passing through"'.[13] The five youths are enjoying a leisurely drive in their van through rural Texas, evoking a 'naïve, drifting, hedonistic lifestyle'— the antithesis of Leatherface's rooted and stagnant working-class family.[14] As Sally and her brother Franklin visit the old family home, Hooper establishes the Hardestys as a family who have ostensibly attained some level of upward mobility, now removed from that desolate region of Texas to which Leatherface and his family remain tied. The friction of this familial 'economic breach'[15] is made immediately clear as the young travellers retch as the stench of 'the old slaughterhouse'— where, as Franklin explains, 'Grandpa used to sell his cattle'—

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[9] Stacy Rusnak, 'The Slasher Film and the Final Girl Get Makeovers: *It Follows* and the Politics of Fourth Wave Feminism', in *Final Girls, Feminism and Popular Culture*, ed. by Katarzyna Paszkiewicz and Stacy Rusnak (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 115-133 (p. 121).

[10] Bill McGraw, 'Life in the Ruins of Detroit', *History Workshop Journal*, 63 (2007), 288–302 (p. 293).

[11] Binelli, 'How It Follows'.

[12] *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, dir. by Tobe Hooper (Bryanston Distributing Company, 1974) in BFI Player, https://player.bfi.org.uk/subscription/film/watch-the-texas-chain-saw-massacre-1974-online [accessed 24 April 2023].

[13] B.M Murphy, 'Backwoods Nightmares: The Rural Poor as Monstrous Other', in *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.133-177 (p. 142).

[14] Naomi Merritt, 'Cannibalistic Capitalism and other American Delicacies: A Bataillean Taste of The Texas Chain Saw Massacre', *Film-Philosophy*, 14.1 (2010), 202-231 (p. 212).

[15] John Kenneth Muir, *Eaten Alive at a Chainsaw Massacre: The Films of Tobe Hooper* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2002), p. 64.

infiltrates the van. [16] Sally in particular attempts to distance herself from the family's former profession, remarking 'I like meat, please change the subject'.[17] However, a hitchhiker they pick up (later revealed to be Leatherface's brother) reveals the economic fate of those who remained—a dead end of redundancy and impoverishment. As he goes on to explain, 'my brother worked there. My grandfather too. My family's always been in meat.' The hitchhiker emphasises the working-class family's singular dependence upon the industry for economic security, a security revealed to be intensely precarious.[18] Refining a singular set of skills for generations only to be abruptly rendered obsolete, the hitchhiker bemoans the forces of mechanisation – 'that gun's no good. The old way with a sledge. See, that was better [...] with the new way, people are put out of jobs'.[19] Redundancy therefore becomes a crucial impetus for the horror of *Chain Saw*, as Leatherface's family comes to represent 'an exploited and degraded proletariat' adapting their labour skills towards new, cannibalistic enterprises.[20]

The central horror of *Chain Saw* depicts a desperate attempt to postpone inevitable crisis and maintain the fantasy of security by violently transferring one's precarity onto a sacrificial body. The portrayal of Leatherface and his family repeatedly emphasises their delusional refusal to accept their precarious condition, instead remaining in a nostalgic fantasy of 'the good old days […] before the economic slowdown of the 1970s and the threat of automation destroyed livelihoods'.[21] This is most clearly epitomised through the family's attempts to recapitulate their redundant labour in the form of cannibalistic commerce – the flesh of the young tourists becomes the sacrificial substitution for the animal flesh which once offered the family a sense of economic security. Pam's body, hanging from a meat hook, becomes 'helplessly embroiled in the transgressive excesses of capitalism', a monetizable commodity to be sold.[22] Confronted with the precarious terror of unemployment, Leatherface's family simply re-enact the capitalist compulsion of relentless and unceasing productivity in the belief that this will restore some semblance of security from the horrors of economic stagnation, averting the crisis of redundancy by shifting their looming vulnerability onto naïve outsiders who seemingly represent a social and economic mobility which they have not attained. Furthermore, by converting the bodies of their targets into the commodity which once ensured their livelihood—meat—Leatherface and his family unwittingly demonstrate the blindness of capital, whereby all bodies can be substituted or exchanged in the pursuit of profit. This sentiment is further highlighted in the mise-en-scène of the Leatherface family home where the floor is lined with both animal feathers and human skulls, while from the ceiling hang both caged chickens and the meat hooks which the family use to hold human bodies. Animal and human flesh therefore become equated and commercially interchangeable; when the former no longer offers the family protection from economic precarity, the latter is substituted in its place.

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[16] *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Robin Wood, *Robin Wood on the Horror Film: Collected Essays and Reviews*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018), p. 70.

[21] Muir, p. 64.

[22] Merritt, p. 225.

Significantly, the mobility of the Hardestys in relation to the stagnation of Leatherface's family is undermined by the very forces of desiccation and degeneration which they initially evaded. Forced to stop at the gas station by their depleting tank, the group are told by the attendant 'I got no gas'[23], further solidifying the depiction of rural Texas as a barren wasteland. Hooper highlights oil (or, more precisely, the *lack* of oil) as a principal signifier of socio-economic precarity from the film's opening: as the credits roll, the car radio reports that 'oil storage units continue to burn out of control at the huge Texaco refinery', while violence has erupted from the 'continuing squabble of South American governments over oil rich regions'.[24] These depleting and diminishing reserves point to the 'material presence of a national energy crisis [which] haunts *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*'.[25] Indeed, it is this scarcity which disrupts their travels, destroys their means for escape, and incites the group's demise: Kirk, the first member of the group to enter the Leatherface family home, does so from the hope that he can purchase oil from them, shouting 'Gasoline!' as he hears the fateful whirrs of the generator.[26] Therefore, in *Chain Saw*, just as in *It Follows*, cars and the mobility they signify are positioned as a fragile illusion of freedom which ultimately fail to protect one from and actively places one in the grasp of precarity. The predicament the young people find themselves in strongly resonates with Butler's observation that 'no amount of will or wealth can eliminate the possibilities of illness or accident for a living body, although both can be mobilized in the service of such an illusion'.[27]

It Follows engages with this notion rather explicitly, through the chain of bodily exchange and the perpetual deferral of crisis which underpins the mechanism of the film's titular monster, as well as through the illusion of security afforded by cars, fueling the notion that one can 'outrun' their precarity. As Hugh plainly explains to Jay: 'if you drive far enough, you can buy yourself some time to think'.[28] Importantly, Hugh's phrasing here extends beyond its idiomatic meaning. Attempting to physically outrun the threat does not mitigate, but merely prolongs it, though the extent to which one is able to temporarily evade the entity is of course dependent upon one's monetary access to the means of travel. However, as Hugh goes on to establish, the logic of the curse dictates that the only way to rid oneself of the constantly encroaching peril is to 'pass it along', sexually deferring one's bodily precarity onto another.[29] Yet, even this is a temporary assurance, as the death of the host triggers a reversal, the monster following the chain upstream for its next victim. As Hugh explains, 'if it kills her, it gets me, and goes straight down the line to whoever started it'.[30] Therefore, *It Follows* becomes an allegorical embodiment of the entrapping mechanisms of capitalism which produce a state of anxiety and perpetual vulnerability. The curse articulates the unstable conditions of credit which, like the film's narrative and actions of

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[23] *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Chuck Jackson, 'Blood for Oil: Crude Metonymies and Tobe Hooper's Texas Chain Saw Massacre (1974)', *Gothic Studies*, 10 (2008), 48-60 (p. 51).

[26] *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.

[27] Butler, p. 23.

[28] *It Follows*.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

those within it, become merely 'an effort to hold crisis off'.[31] The conceit of the film distinctly mirrors Annie McClanahan's observation that 'when credit works, it lives only in the future, transfixing in its seemingly magical power to move itself ever forward. But when it fails, credit is pulled back into its own uncanny past […] confronted with the material limits it thought it had overcome'.[32] The threat induced by the monster embodies this very logic, the unstable illusion of 'endlessly transferrable deferrals' which at any moment threaten to collapse in on itself and return in a catastrophic reckoning.[33] As Hugh explains to Jay: 'It's very slow but it's not dumb'.[34] The debt may be temporarily evaded, but not deceived or escaped. The act of *passing* the curse, furthermore, as a form of 'sacrificial exchange in which someone else temporarily takes on the corporeal burden of another's precarity', enacts the mechanisms by which capitalism necessarily renders some bodies more vulnerable in order to protect others, wherein mitigating one's own precarity merely bestows this condition onto another.[35] Thus, in both *It Follows* and *Chain Saw*, when economic stability is undermined and the mechanisms of capitalism fail to provide support or safety, the result is a crisis in which 'humanity has begun literally to "prey upon itself"'.[36]

The delusion of averted crisis is also perceptible in *Chain Saw* through the figure of the Grandpa—the macabre, cadaverous patriarch of Leatherface's family. Hooper highlights the misguided faith that the family maintains in his viability as a patriarchal breadwinner, as Leatherface's father declares the grandfather's previous glory and proficiency as a slaughterer: 'Grandpa is the best killer there ever was', he says, honouring him with the task of butchering Sally.[37] Yet, in a pitiful display of frailty, Grandpa repeatedly drops the hammer and fails to perform the killing, a failure which ultimately enables Sally's escape. The grandpa thus embodies a perversion of the myths and institutions in which those in the American South invested their faith, and which now threaten to disintegrate. The patriarch is depicted as 'a living corpse who is kept around as a reminder of the old days before the new transformation of labor',[38] an embalmed relic of the past who has decayed into an impotent representation of 'the aridity and degeneration of postindustrial civilization'.[39] He shatters the notion that hard work alone can guarantee social security, and the rural family of *Chain Saw* have therefore attempted to hold off crisis by mummifying the figure which once embodied solidity and economic potency. This is subtly reinforced by the earlier totemic image of a watch with a nail driven through the face which hangs from a tree on the family's property. Hooper lingers on this loaded symbol, denoting the family's desire not merely to suspend time, but to avert crisis by entering an illusory state of atemporality. Further, the

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[31] Ngai, p. 166.

[32] Annie McClanahan, *Dead Pledges: Debt, Crisis, and Twenty-First-Century Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), p. 133.

[33] Ngai, p. 160.

[34] *It Follows*.

[35] Tyler Bradway, 'Slow Burn: Dreadful Kinship and the Weirdness of Heteronormativity in It Follows', *Studies in the Fantastic,* 9.1 (2020), 122-144 (p. 128).

[36] Wood, p. 99.

[37] *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.

[38] Christopher Sharrett, 'The Idea of Apocalypse in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*' in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant and Christopher Sharrett (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2004), p. 317.

[39] Sharrett, p. 205.

punctured, broken clock forms an image of a perpetual present which contains within itself the dissolution of a different future. The family can seemingly do nothing but endlessly perform their cannibalistic labour, unlike the Hardestys who experience the suspension of time in its inverse form – through the luxury of 'free time'. Similarly, the 'car graveyard' which Kirk discovers on the property signifies the stagnation and immobility that befell the populations of the rural South, entrapped in the dead end of economic decline. [40] The image also gestures towards a certain resentment: by violently arresting the mobility of naïve outsiders such as the Hardestys, Leatherface and his family enact a form of revenge, imposing their own immobilised condition onto those visiting populations. The graveyard of rusting cars in *Chain Saw* is thus 'a monument to the fixity and arrested development' of post-industrial rural Texas, just as the Packard Automotive Plant in *It Follows* is a monument to Detroit's urban decay.[41] Both films are ultimately, therefore, a 'statement about the dead end of American experience', a pessimistic vision of encroaching and perpetual precarity.[42]

It Follows clearly intertwines the geography of precarity with the body, as the film's characters are frequently depicted *passing across* spatial borders whilst attempting to expel their corporeal burden. Significantly, as Jay and her friends attempt to track down Hugh to discover more about the curse, Mitchell delineates the 'zones of security and sacrifice' perceptible in Detroit's landscape.[43] As they leave the boundary of the suburb and drive into the city, the camera lingers on images of deindustrialisation, urban abandonment, and erosion. The group pass the rusting remnants of Detroit's once gleaming past as the Motor City —'the centre of America's industrial heartland'.[44] The abandoned factories and dilapidated houses with boarded-up windows confront the suburbanites with the proximate threat of the city, 'and all it had come to represent: unplanned obsolescence, crime, and, of course, unchecked blackness'.[45] This journey into the city is in fact one of the few scenes in the film in which the black population of Detroit is visible. It is revealed that Hugh was merely squatting in a derelict abandoned house, presumably with the hopes of passing on the curse anonymously to enable a 'return to his extraordinarily privileged life in the opulent outer suburbs'.[46] This further highlights the film's depiction of the discarded inner city as a 'sacrifice zone' excessively exposed to risk, against which the illusion of (predominantly white) suburban security is maintained.[47] Mitchell subtly reinforces this notion later on in the film: after Jay's friend Paul willingly takes on the curse to alleviate her burden, he is shown driving into the city, passing two women implied to be sex workers. While Mitchell does not reveal the outcome of this interaction, the scene tacitly suggests that Paul is contemplating passing his new vulnerable condition onto those he deems sexually accessible and socio-economically vulnerable, thus representing to him an 'easy'

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[40] Murphy, p. 172.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Sharrett, p. 318.

[43] Kelly, p. 242.

[44] Katherine Lizza, 'It Follows and the Uncertainties of the Middle Class', in *Dark Forces at Work: Essays on Social Dynamics and Cinematic Horrors*, ed. by Cynthia J. Miller and A. Bowdoin Van Riper (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019), p. 294.

[45] Binelli.

[46] Kelly, p. 239.

[47] Steve Lerner, *Sacrifice Zones: The Front Lines of Toxic Chemical Exposure in the United States* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), p. 7.

escape from his peril. This moment articulates the conditions of capitalism in which the restoration of 'the fantasy of invulnerability requires classes of disposable persons to take on the burden of precarious life'.[48] As the characters of *It Follows* transgress the spatial borders which segregate the suburbs and the city, Mitchell stages a confrontation 'between sacred and disposable populations',[49] reproducing the horror of capitalist precarity in which 'certain lives are deemed worth living, protecting, and grieving and others not'.[50] The mechanism of bodily exchange upon which the film's plot is predicated enacts the destructive effects of neoliberal capitalism upon those most harmed by Detroit's industrial decay. Indeed, as David Church contends, 'because neoliberalism emphasizes individual responsibility instead of public interest, Detroit's most vulnerable citizens (not its outsourced corporations) shoulder the blame for the city's postindustrial decline'[51]. Essentially, the premise of sacrifice is essential to maintaining the apparent stability of supposedly sacred lives, populations, and spaces—'one way or another, someone must suffer'.[52] Yet, in *It Follows*, Mitchell systematically disrupts the notion of the suburbs as a sacred space, as the threat is never *truly* transferred, the deferred crisis always threatening to return and demand repayment and shatter the fantasy of invulnerability.

Significantly, the fear of 'urban contamination', in which the same forces of precarity which doomed the city begin to infect the suburbs, is epitomised within the film by the 8 Mile Road.[53] The road which 'famously demarcates racialized and economic segregation in Detroit' is employed in *It Follows* to highlight the solidification of geographic divisions as a barrier against vulnerability.[54] As Jay's friend Yara explains: 'When I was a little girl, my parents wouldn't allow me to go South of 8 Mile. And I didn't even know what that meant until I got a little older, and I started realising that that's where the city started and the suburbs ended'.[55] This subtle moment establishes the myth of suburban invulnerability; the suburbs as a utopian safe space formed in opposition to the city's danger. Yet, Mitchell unsettles this myth, depicting Jay's home and suburb as an entropic site of dissolution. *It Follows* presents the force of deterioration which seems to be drawing the residential peripheries back into Detroit's ruined urban centre, in a kind of retributive reversal of the 'white flight' which accelerated the city's decline. The opening shot of the film initially situates the encroaching threat of the monster within a pristine, clearly affluent suburban neighbourhood, before relocating to the suburbs where Jay and her friends reside which is marked, by contrast, with a comparative degree of disorder. Roaming over the cracks in the pavement, the camera fixates upon detritus, the litter and cigarettes which lie in the streets, while Jay's house also exhibits evidence of disorder and structural deterioration. As the film once more relocates to the inner city to unveil its horrific premise, *It Follows* maps a journey of increasing precarity, moving steadily inwards, inching closer to the epicentre of economic crisis.

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[48] Kelly, p. 241.

[49] Ibid., p. 238.

[50] Butler, p. 111.

[51] Church, p. 206.

[52] Bradway, p. 128.

[53] Kelly, p. 242.

[54] Bradway, p. 130.

[55] *It Follows*.

Importantly, the endings of both *It Follows* and *Chain Saw* refuse to re-establish or smooth over the conditions of precarity, and instead reinforce the fears which emanate from their respective sites of economic vulnerability. In the case of *It Follows*, the final shot is one of profound uncertainty and paranoia, as it remains unclear whether the group's plan to destroy the entity is successful. As the foreground of the frame displays Jay and Paul walking along the suburban streets hand in hand, a figure walks slowly behind the couple. The couple have returned to the suburbs, but no sense of safety has been restored. Similarly, *Chain Saw*'s ending 'recuperates little or nothing […] the chainsaw maniac remains free, his tool still active, raging in psychotic frustration'.[56] Indeed, although Sally—the sole survivor—manages to escape in a passing truck, the mechanical whirrs of Leatherface's weapon overwhelm the final shot of *Chain Saw*. Sally has regained the means of mobility, whilst Leatherface's movement is compromised by his injured leg, desperately limping after the fleeing truck. However, the concluding image of the chainsaw thrashing against the desolate rural landscape as the sun rises is one of dread. It remains the film's resounding, haunting impression, a reminder of the threat lurking in the socio-economically desiccated peripheries of the American landscape.

These final shots gesture towards a kind of broader, imaginative dead end which haunts both films: the 'dead end' of what Mark Fisher terms 'capitalist realism', wherein capitalism has 'seamlessly occupied the horizons of the thinkable' that therefore 'it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it'.[57] This sense of imaginative impotence, the occlusion of alternative possibilities constitutes the narrative impasse of both *It Follows* and *Chain Saw*, as their protagonists continue, bloodied and bruised, unable to escape the bind of precarity which perpetually pursues them. The figure looming behind Jay, and Leatherface's raging chainsaw, respectively dispel the possibility of salvation, and the vulnerable bodies which have been relentlessly imperilled throughout both films are replaced by a disturbing vision of capitalism's *invulnerability*, which seems to continue undeterred, reproducing precarity without itself being rendered precarious. In neither film is the originating horror of precarity stabilised; rather, Mitchell and Hooper extend this threat onto populations who naively perceive themselves as immune from it. Both directors produce narratives in which, as Butler writes of precarity's certitude, 'there are no invulnerable bodies', and their endings leave us only with defunct dreams and dead ends.[58]

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[56] Wood, p. 61.

[57] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), pp. 2, 8.

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