

-Research Article-

## Transforming Bodies, Transforming Genres: A Biocapitalistic Representation of Aging in Old (2021)

Fatma Karaaslan Özgü\*

### **Abstract**

*M. Night Shyamalan's Old (2021) narrates the story of a group of people who realize that the isolated beach they are taken to by the holiday resort they are staying at causes alarmingly rapid aging. Old depicts a clinical trial of a pharmaceutical company, Warren & Warren, testing medicines for chronic illnesses and clarifies that the peculiarity of the beach is used to test medicines within hours instead of a lifetime. The characters, hence, are chosen as test subjects because of their illnesses. This study displays how Old, through hyper-accelerated aging, transforms what is conventionally categorised as supernatural horror into body horror scrutinising the theme of aging in terms of the generic qualities of body horror. This paper is an explicit attempt to inspect, in terms of Foucauldian biopolitics and Rajan's understanding of biocapital, how human health is converted into commodified data; together with the relationship between capitalism and biotechnology/ medicine. This study provides a general overview of body horror as a genre displaying how bodies that get old at an accelerated pace function as the primary source of horror analysing the setting and how it is used as a panoptic space wherein certain disciplinary tools are used. This study finally examines the film's narrative discourse and peculiar cinematic language, by means of which workings of biocapital are shown.*

**Keywords:** Old (2021), biocapital, commodification of health, body horror, aging.

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-Araştırma Makalesi-

**Değişen Bedenler, Değişen Türler: Zamanda Tutsak (2021)**

**Filminde Yaşlanmanın Biyokapitalist Temsili**

Fatma Karaaslan Özgü\*

**Özet**

M. Night Shyamalan'ın *Zamanda Tutsak* (2021) filmi, kaldıkları lüks otel tarafından götürüldükleri izole plajın kendilerini çok hızlı bir biçimde yaşlandırdığını fark eden bir grup insanı anlatır. Film, karakterlerin gizemli bir biçimde yaşlanmasının sebebini açıkça dile getirmese de filmin sonlarına doğru yönetmen, kronik hastalıklar için ilaç üreten Warren & Warren isimli bir ilaç şirketinin deney laboratuvarını ve mezkûr şirketin, plajın bu doğüstü özelliğini kullanarak ilaçlarını insanlar üzerinde çok kısa bir zamanda deneyebildiklerini gösterir. Böylelikle karakterlerin, kendi hastalıklarına göre takip edilip özellikle seçilmiş olan denekler olduğu anlaşılır. Bu çalışma, genel olarak psikolojik korku-gerilim türünde sınıflandırılan *Zamanda Tutsak* (2021) filminin, hızlandırılmış yaşlanma fenomeni kullanılarak nasıl bedensel korku türüne evrildiğini, bu türün jenerik özellikleri bağlamında incelemektedir. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda insan yaşamı ve sağlığının metalaştırılabilir bilgiye dönüşümü ile bu oluşumun *Zamanda Tutsak* (2021) filminde nasıl resmedildiğini, kapitalizm ve biyoteknoloji arasındaki ilişkiyi biyokapital ve Foucaultcu biyopolitika bağlamında incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, karakterlerin hızlandırılmış bir şekilde yaşlanmasını korkunun ana kaynağı olarak ele alarak beden korkusu türünü kısaca tasvir etmekte ve filmin geçtiği mekânı ve bu mekânın, bazı disiplinci mekanizmaların işe koşulduğu panoptik bir uzam olarak nasıl kullanıldığını inceler. Son olarak bu çalışma, filmin anlatısal diskurunu ve biyokapitalin işleyişini gösteren kendine has sinematik dilini araştırır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Zamanda Tutsak* (2021), biyopolitika, biyokapital, beden korkusu, yaşlılık.

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## Introduction

M. Night Shyamalan's penultimate film, *Old* (2021), is based on the graphic novel, *Sandcastle* (2010) written by French documentarian Pierre Oscar Levy and illustrated by Swiss comic artist [Frederik Peeters](#). The film recounts the story of a group of people who discover that the secluded beach they are taken to by the luxury resort (Anamika Resort) they are staying at mysteriously causes them to age at an accelerated pace. While both *Sandcastle* (2010) and *Old* (2021) are vague and cryptic about the reason for this hyper-accelerated aging that takes place on the beach, *Old* (2021) uses this supernatural phenomenon through the context of pharmaceutical experiments. Shyamalan (2021) maintains the sense of mystery around the beach's temporal and spatial quality yet adds further depth to the original plot by means of the introduction of a pharmaceutical company and its machinations. M. Night Shyamalan's *Old* (2021) provides an explanation for this mysterious phenomenon as a stringent setup, that is, the characters are unknowingly the subjects of an experiment which is conducted to test medicines for chronic illnesses. They are indeed selected on purpose based on their illnesses, as one of the characters, Prisca Cappa, states towards the end of the film: "GUY. How did you first hear about this place? / PRISCA. I don't know. I-I fell upon it. A random sweepstakes. It came with a receipt at the pharmacy. I just followed it up online, started getting e-mails" (Shyamalan, 2021, 00:57:15- 00:57:23). So, they realize that what is known to be 'a random sweepstakes' is indeed not random at all as Guy Cappa states after realising how and why they might have been chosen: "They know our medical condition. They chose us" (Shyamalan, 2021, 00:57:24- 00:57:26). The beach and the precipitated aging it causes, hence, fit the interests of the pharmaceutical company perfectly since it saves them money, and more importantly, time to test their medicines and to rapidly acquire precious human trial phase data. The film, thus, portrays the enigmatic aging as the primary factor that triggers existential fear of aging, which is also what intensifies the effect of body horror. That is, even though *Old* is categorically listed as psychological or supernatural, and partly cosmic horror, the rapid aging, and the abjection of the characters towards their aged, transformed bodies turn it into a body horror. Representation of aging, hence, serves as a means for transforming the genre of the film and in this sense, this study aims to display how hyper-accelerated aging remodels the genre of the film. This paper also aims to analyse the film in relation to the clinical trial, within the framework of biopolitics, and to display how human life and health have been turned into data that can be materialised, commodified, and expropriated. The concept of biocapital, which is basically the entwinement of Foucauldian biopolitics with Marx's formulation of capitalism, will be the theoretical framework of this study. That is why, the contemporary nexus between neoliberal capitalism and biotechnology will be discussed in relation to how it is reflected in M. Night Shyamalan's *Old* (2021). In this respect, the study first offers an overview of the body horror genre with references to how the aged body and accelerated aging are used as a source of horror in the film; it then focuses on the setting and how it gives way to implications of certain disciplinary *appareils* such as panopticism and constant surveillance, and finally, through the examination of a particular scene in terms of the camera angles and how the camera operates in relation to the medical gaze, this study analyses the cinematic discourse and corporeal language of the film aiming to display the machinations of biocapital.

### Body Horror/Horror of the Body

Unlike psychological horror, which focuses on mental, emotional, and [psychological states](#) of the characters in order to frighten, disturb, and unsettle its audience, body horror, which is a subgenre of horror that has roots in early Gothic literature, exhibits grotesque and/or psychologically disturbing violations and infringement of the human body. In the making of the genre, these transgressions might be displayed through the use of several elements such as aberrant acts or bodies, unnatural movements of the body, violence, disease, and mutations together with a "'graphic sense of physicality' and culminating in a gory display" (Badley, 1995, p. 7). Gaining genuine popularity and creating a space of its own, body horror has begun

to dominate several areas including literature, TV shows, music clips, toys, anime series, video games and visual arts especially from the 1990s onward. In this sense, it is possible to see body horror “as one of several discourses of the body that use the fantastic – the iconography of the monstrous – to articulate the anxieties of [its time] and to re-project the self” (Badley, 1995, p. 3) and as a result, “horror has become a fantastic ‘body language’ for [especially Western] culture” (Badley, 1995, p. 4). Body horror thus provides a definition of its own in relation to corporeal body which is established in terms of the genre’s own iconography and mechanisms. Human body is represented as an entity that is constantly threatened and together with the advancements in the field of biotechnology, which gave rise to a form of “somatocracy” in the Foucauldian sense (Foucault, 2004, p. 7), human body has started to be depicted as “covered with tubes, cannibalized for cells, fluids, tissues, and parts, tortured and reconstructed on the procrustean bed of biotechnology” (Badley, 1995, p. 6). What body horror presents in this vein is a “recitation of the body as a text – a dissection, an exploratory probe” (Badley, 1996, p. 75). Human being, then, is defined as, in Foucauldian terms, “a living species” (Foucault, 1978, p. 142); it is thus stripped of its former character as a unified and sacred being.

In the age of biotechnology wherein somatocracy prevails, old age has become synonymous with bodily and cognitive decline as Barry (2015) writes “as far as the body is concerned, [...], ageing is usually understood as an inexorable decline, involving shrinking, atrophy and a loss of mental capacity” (p. 132). Tracing the meaning of the word ‘senile’ in relation to the perception of aging as deterioration Katz (1996) writes that throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries it simply meant ‘old age’ yet “by 1848 senile meant weakness, and by the late nineteenth century it indicated a pathological state. The term has taken on greater medical and negative connotations ever since” (p. 41). The aged body is thus construed as pathological, which indeed paves the way for the perception of the aged body as a medical object. According to Katz (1996), in the premodern period, death used to be depicted as an unforeseeable mysterious force that moves outside the borders of corporeal life. With the rise of clinical medicine death started to be relocated as a presence that can be traced in the physical body (p. 41). In the modern age, medicine “alienate[s] death from life and objectify it as a negation of the body, thereby bringing dying into the realm of medical sovereignty” (p. 32). This change is dependent upon the new perception of disease by medicine which started to discern between the aged body and other age groups with the establishment of geriatrics and gerontology as a human science in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Katz (1996) posits that as what Foucault calls the medical gaze “enhanced the discourse of senescence, the binary logic of the normal and the pathological conceptually legitimated it” (p. 43). In the context of both disciplinary and biopolitical modalities of power the aged body is reconstructed as a medicalised object and a demographic subject that needs to be monitored, controlled, regulated, and invested as Powell and Biggs (2000) put forth “aging lives become practices of surveillance because older people fit within the pathological discourse permeation of ‘it’s your age’” By acquiring knowledge and showing concern for the welfare of older people, bio-medicine provides an arena for surveillance” (p. 8). Medical power and discourse which paved the way for a “youth[and health]-oriented society” that construes senility as a pathological condition and aging itself as a “taboo” (Barry, 2015, p. 132).

In fictional narratives the pathologized representation of aging and the aged body is used in a myriad of ways: the aged body as a metaphor of moral decay, elderly people, especially women, standing as evil forces posing a threat for the protagonist, and so on. Similarly, in the horror genre, aging is posited as the source of horror while at the same time underscoring certain themes such as mortality, illness, abnormality, and corporeal transformation making us question what it means to be human. Body horror specifically depicts the aged body as an entity that is construed as the other threatening human beings as it evokes the fear of losing one’s agency, mental and bodily capacity, youth, and beauty. The aged and thus transmuted human body is the abject, which, in Kristevan terms, represents the human reaction such as

repulsion, nausea and/or horror when faced with the threat of the rupture in and the collapse of meaning which is caused by the erasure of the division between the self and the other, the subject and the object: "The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I [emphasis original]" (Kristeva, 1984, p. 2). Abject then inhabits a liminal space, somewhere between the subject and the object; it is located between the Real order and the Symbolic order. In Kristeva's postulation, the corpse, for instance, is the absolute abjection as it signifies death and demonstrates "what I permanently thrust aside in order to live" (1984, p. 3). It signifies the border between humankind as the living being and death. The corpse as the abject is "something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us" (Kristeva, 1984, p. 4). In body horror, thus, the body – even if it is one's own body – which has now turned into the other, evokes feelings of fear and loathing. This is because the shape-shifted body disrupts meaning and deranges the order as Kristeva (1984) states that what induces abjection is "what disturbs identity, system, order" and "what does not respect borders, positions, rules" (p. 5). So, the aged body whose system is deranged stands in the liminal space between life and death thereby disturbing the order and constituting the essential source of fear and terror.

M. Night Shyamalan (2021), through the use of accelerated aging, makes horror descend into the most primal fear of human beings, that is, the fear of death. Just like, for instance; David Cronenberg, who, in his body horror films "used the fantastic as a way of coming to terms with those basic things, like death, aging, and disease, which we all deal with everyday" (Badley, 1995, p. 10), Shyamalan, in his *Old* (2021), overtly employs organic fear and the chaos it brings about. However, in order to achieve that, he does not use the inevitably conventional component of a horror film, that is, the fictional monster whose primary function, by its very nature, is to be striking and intrusive and who accomplishes it "by being dangerous because humans are hard-wired to pay attention to dangerous agents, but the monster becomes even more interesting by being unnatural" (Clasen, 2012, p. 224). Shyamalan (2021), instead, renders rapidly aging, withering, and sickening body as a monstrous entity, thereby representing it as a menacing agent for both the characters and the audience. Ironically enough, *Old*'s monsters are not unnatural, but quite the opposite; they are human beings in flesh and blood. In this sense, what Philip Brophy (1986) states in relation to the most essential characteristic of modern horror applies to *Old* as it, too, primarily rests upon "the fear of one's own body, of how one controls and related to it" (p. 8). The cave scene, in this respect, might be the most emblematic of this concept reflecting the monstrous decay and transformation of the human body. The scene delineates Chrystal, ironically named by the director as a form of foreshadowing, who suffers from a kind of calcium deficiency hiding in a cave in a highly agitated state. Depicted as the only character who is very much into her looks, Chrystal's body turns into an insect-like, crooked figure with totally ruptured and twisted bones. She is abjected from and abhorred by her own body and does not want to be seen by anyone. When the siblings, Maddox and Trent Cappa, meet her in the cave, she acts frantically, screaming at the children that she does not want to be seen. Her clamour, "Don't look at me!" is accompanied by partial images of her body simultaneously seen by Maddox and Trent and the audience as the children strike a match to see inside the cave, which accentuates the hideousness of her once beautiful now twisted monster-like body. (Shyamalan, 2021, 01:16:04- 01:16:19). Horror as a genre is conventionally characterised by "the presence of monstrous of either a supernatural or sci-fi origin" (Carroll, 1987, p. 52) and also by the encounter between the human beings and the monsters which are perceived by the characters as abnormal creatures that transgress the laws of nature. Nevertheless, in *Old*, the human body itself turns into a monstrous being by means of rapid aging which engenders horror and terror. In the film, thus, the source of horror is not the monsters that are regarded "as abnormal, as disturbances of the natural order" (Carroll, 1987, p. 52), which is a distinguishing quality of the horror genre, but Shyamalan's characters themselves are monstrous and what is disturbing the natural order is the accelerated passage



of time. And as a result, “[b]oth fear and disgust are etched on the characters’ features” (p. 54) since the rapidly aged, convoluted, deformed, and sick bodies of the characters arise utter revulsion not only in the fictional characters themselves but also in the audience.

In the film, the corporal presence as the very source of horror and animosity is also seen with the experience of the children on the beach. The incongruity between the children’s quickly growing bodies and their yet immature minds effectuates another element of horror because neither their minds nor their conscious could keep up with their rapidly maturing bodies, which intensifies the anguish and abjection they experience by their own corporeal presence. Thus, because of the hyper-accelerated aging they experience, their corporeality stops being an ontological modality that would normally frame one’s identity formation. For instance, Charles and Chrystal’s daughter Kara gets pregnant right after having sex with Trent and at first, she cannot realize in immature consciousness what her rapidly swelling abdomen means and gets terrified by her antagonistically maturing body over which she has no control. Shyamalan (2021) clearly displays that Kara’s still-a-child mind cannot attune to her now-a-grown-up body, getting pregnant and labouring a child. Her child dies immediately after birth as its body, just like its mother’s mind, cannot adapt to the extraordinary temporal quality of the beach.

This bodily revulsion emanated in both the film characters and the audience goes hand in hand with the language of the film since the cinematic and scriptic language employed in *Old* is a highly biological and, as a matter of fact, a somatic or even an exceptionally medicalized one. We learn about the medical conditions of all the characters, which is indeed the quality that provides both the characters and the spectators with a medical insight. The shots and camera angles substantially contribute to this effect. The film, in this sense, employs a particular “body language,” in Badley’s words (1995, p. 3), which is produced by means of the convergence of horror and discourses of body. This also which serves as a tool for visualising the embodied self in transmutation, being shifted, re-morphed, and re-generated. It is this very re-projection of the rapidly aging characters who experience an excruciating transformation that underscores the presence of the body in the film.

### **The Medicalised Body and Biocapital in *Old* (2021)**

The setting of the film is in tandem with the corporeal transmutation in the sense that it enhances the somatic language and medicalized discourse of the film. The beach they are taken to is surrounded by steep rock hills and there is a camera on top, watching and recording their every action; so, they are confined in an enclosed space and under constant surveillance, which turns the beach into a panoptic space where the excessively supervised and inspected individuals are deployed. The setting thus makes the characters and the audience immerse into an experience of entrapment in both a threatening corporeal space, that is, the characters’ mutating bodies, and the geographically confining space of the beach. Considering the fact that they are *surveilled* by a pharmaceutical company for purely medical reasons as test subjects, the beach becomes a disciplinary milieu, a panoptic hospital/clinic by means of which “the power which functions, or which should function in an institution will be able to gain maximum force” (Foucault, 2006, p. 75) and which serves as a site “both for the exercise of power and for the formation of a certain knowledge” (p. 78) about the subjects on the beach. Within this medicalized panoptic space, the gaze of the camera turns into what Foucault (2003) calls “the medical gaze [*regard médicale*]” (p. 9) which is not “the gaze of any observer, but that of a doctor supported and justified by an institution, that of a doctor endowed with the power of decision and intervention” (Foucault, 2003, p. 89). This particular gaze pursues a self-governing movement, by means of which it goes around and through “an enclosed space in which it is controlled only by itself; in sovereign fashion, it distributes to daily experience the knowledge that it has borrowed from afar and of which it has made itself both the point of concentration and the centre of diffusion” (Foucault, 2003, p. 31). This very movement is best seen through

the scene in which Prisca Cappa is operated on by Charles, a medical doctor whose mental state deteriorates as he has schizophrenia. When Charles looks at Prisca's abdomen to check the fast-growing tumour, his gaze as a doctor becomes the camera's gaze; they overlap. And when the camera focuses on Charles's face, it identifies with the patient's gaze. This act of cross-cutting juxtaposes the subject positions of the calm and collected operator and the terrified *operatee*. Then, when Charles cuts his patient out to excise the tumour from her stomach, the eye of the camera focuses on the abdomen and the tumour with a closeup. This final shot accentuates the softball-sized tumour as the primary object of horror, which is also the product of both the scientific gaze of the surgeon and the pharmaceutical company utilising the temporal phenomenon of the beach. Thus, Prisca's body and her bodily integrity is penetrated by the medico-scientific gaze of the doctor and what is shown is not the individual, but solely a part of her body, or an organ the doctor is operating on; when the camera identifies with Charles The Doctor's gaze, it makes the eye of the camera, the gaze of the audience, and that of the doctor coalesce.

At the intersecting point of the coalescing gazes of the doctor, the camera, and the audience is a part of Prisca's body which is now totally "stripped of its fleshy protection and penetrated by the empirical gaze" (Shildrick, 1997, p. 21). This selective partiality of the medical doctor and accordingly that of the camera pinpoints a bodily fragmentation of individuals under the medical/ clinical gaze, which results in a "fetishistic fragmentation of the embodied person" (Shildrick, 1997, p. 53) by the gaze of the doctor. Despite the fact that they all are in the middle of nowhere and that Charles lacks not only the necessary medical equipment but also the clear, healthy mind of a doctor as he openly displays signs of dementia and/or schizophrenia, he owns all the characters' trust by virtue of his position as a medical doctor. Charles's authority over the others, despite his precarious mental state, underlines the power of medicine over individuals in the age of biopolitics as the doctors have turned into "priests of the body" (Foucault, 2003, p. 33) assigned by Science/Medicine, the God. So, we might argue that the encounter of Prisca, as an ill subject, and Charles, as the priest of Science with the scalpel/ sceptre in his hand, constitutes "a paradigmatic site for the technologies of the body which both shape and control" (Shildrick, 1997, pp. 48-49). This scene thus displays the workings of a certain technology of power, biopower, that construes individuals as living species and focuses on human life aiming to control, regulate, and optimize human populations.

As the grotesque body language and highly medicalised corporeal verb tense of the camera shift the genre of the film, the presence of the pharmaceutical company and its unethical trial provide it with a concrete representation of the biocapitalistic endeavour. Incorporation of the pharmaceutical company, Warren & Warren, into the film complies with real-life concerns because, as Guy Austin (2012) states in relation to fears about bodily integrity reflected in contemporary horror cinema, "[t]he development of biology and biotechnology [has started to be seen] as a source of anxiety" (p. 103). So, the cross-pollination of the use of aging, estrangement, and abhorrence together with the somatic discourse of the film and the unethical clinical trial revealed in the end pave the way for a biocapitalist reading of the film. Biocapital, a term used by K. Sunder Rajan (2006), emanates from "Marx's analysis of political economy as epistemology, and that is the study of the epistemic reconfigurations of the life sciences" (p. 12) and it is merged with Foucauldian notion of biopower and biopolitics which Nikolas Rose (2007) defines as a technology of power that is "concerned with our growing capacities to control, manage, engineer, reshape, and modulate the very vital capacities of human beings as living creatures" (p. 3). Biocapital hence is a study that is comprised of

the systems of exchange and circulation involved in the contemporary workings of the life sciences, but [it] is also a study of those life sciences as they become increasingly foundational epistemologies for our time. In the former register, it is indeed a subset or 'case study' of contemporary capitalism; in the latter, it points to the specifically biopolitical dimensions of contemporary capitalism. (Rajan, 2006, p. 12)

Together with the advancements in technoscience, biotechnology has become increasingly profitable and as a result, “the life sciences and capitalism are coproduced [...] and the life sciences are overdetermined by the capitalist political economic structures within which they emerge” (Rajan, 2006, p. 6). Life sciences, in this vein, are connected with biomedicine and “technoscience increasingly operates within the capitalist frameworks” (Rajan, 2006, p. 7). In Marxian terms, there exist two different forms of capital: industrial capital and merchant capital. Merchant’s capital is not in the form of commodity; it is in commercial form and its function is

not just the production and exchange of commodities as a means to an end (that end being the generation of surplus value) but is commercial activity as an end in itself. This “special type” of capitalist to whom Marx refers is the speculative capitalist, a precursor to the types of capitalists, such as, for instance, venture capitalists or investment bankers, who are central to sustaining the dynamics of contemporary capitalism. [...] Commercial capital, [...], does not create surplus value in and of itself but does so indirectly by constantly perpetuating the circulation of capital, and by providing it with its own self-perpetuating, self-sustaining logic that does not need to originate from the moment of production of commodity. (Rajan, 2006, p. 9)

Contemporarily, an identical division exists “in the form of production and circulation in which biotech and pharmaceutical companies are involved” (Rajan, 2006, p. 9). In this sense, it would not be wrong to argue that biocapital is very emblematic of capitalism. And hence, the presence of a pharmaceutical company “involves the coexistence of at least two simultaneous, distinct, yet mutually constitutive forms of capital, one directly dependent on the production of commodity, the other speculative and only indirectly so” (Rajan, 2006, p. 9). Rajan (2006) further argues that the biocapitalistic mode of capitalism is comprised of particular structures which form the basis for the emergence of a technoscientific enterprise. This very construction enables political economy to serve as an epistemology (p. 11), which takes us to the Foucauldian notion of biopower which puts life at the very centre of the political calculus, and “operates through institutional, epistemic, and discursive mechanisms” (Rajan 2006, p. 13). The sciences that deal with knowledge about human beings are central to the rationality of both the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries as Rajan (2006), referring to Foucault’s *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1973), states that “the three disciplines, biology, political economy, and philology, concerning the knowledge of humanity become fundamental to the operation of modern rationality and provide and understanding for life, labour, and language” (p. 14). This is, I believe, pertinent to the radical monopoly of medicine as a science, which, according to Ivan Illich (1975), “goes deeper than that of any one corporation or any one government” (p. 14). Different from the ordinary monopoly which seizes the market, or the commercial monopoly that delimits the circulation of commodities, the radical monopoly “impinge[s] still further on freedom and independence. [It] impose[s] a society-wide substitution of commodities for use-values by reshaping the milieu and by ‘appropriating’ those of its general characteristics which have enabled people so far to cope on their own” (Illich, 1975, p. 14). The contemporary monopoly of medicine and pharmaceutical companies is reflected in the film as Guy Cappa, upon finding the brochure of Warren & Warren in his hotel room, comments that “Warren & Warren must be affiliated with this resort. They must have conventions here. We love this pharmaceutical company at work. we’re considering asking our clients to use Warren & Warren drugs as a way to lower their insurance rates” (Shyamalan, 2021, 00:04:58-00:05:15). This scene indicates that biomedicine performs in a capitalistic framework, as Rajan (2006) argues, implying that Warren & Warren is a multinational corporate company that owns many other properties and businesses other than pharmaceuticals. The scene also displays, via Guy Cappa’s job as an agent working for a health insurance company advising people a certain company’s drugs, how human health has become an object within this firmly knit biocapitalistic network of biomedicine, pharmaceuticals, technoscience and the neoliberal market. From a Marxist point of view, we could argue that the health insurance sector applies



to merchant capital that is in commercial form; it does not create any surplus value but just maintains the circulation of this biocapitalistic network, selling the consumers an “immaterial product (i.e., health insurance)” which the sector itself is “mass producing” (Mitchell and Snyder, 2015, p. 189). Health insurance then is a profit-ridden industry whose “profit motive [...] is exposed as a logic of [...] accumulation by dispossession” (Mitchell and Snyder, 2015, p. 189). So, medicine as a monopolistic industry has incorporated into many elements from different sectors and thus owns a rhizomatic character, reaching at the individuals’ lives and bodies, thereby creating new epistemologies. Genomics, biotechnology, and contemporary medicine, in this sense, are among the most effective disciplines that conceive of human life as information. Despite the fact that human life as information used to be a metaphor, especially now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it has become a commodified real product; “one does not just have to conceive of life as information: one can now represent life in informational terms that can be packaged, turned into commodity, and sold as a database” (Rajan, 2006, p. 16).

What literally epitomizes this idea in *Old* (2021) is seen towards the end of the film, in a research laboratory full of scientists observing the people on the beach. Thinking that the siblings, the last two test subjects, drowned, the company agent that watches them from rock hills announces: “Final members of trial 73 are deceased. Observation’s complete” (Shyamalan, 2021, 01:30:14- 01:30:20). Then, the clinical laboratory is shown with a number of researchers working on drugs. The resort manager, thinking the trial is finalised, asks for a moment of silence for the members of trial 73 and immediately after that, in an attempt to justify their means, states that because of this beach, they have been able to save hundreds of thousands of lives with new medicines and it will be millions in the future. Even though the manager states, to extenuate their unethical methods, that they are saving thousands of lives, what really happens is that “rehabilitation on behalf of the few that inevitably operates at the expense of the many” (Mitchell and Snyder, 2015, p. 189). The manager later declares that despite many failures in previous trials, the trial 73 is a success (Shyamalan, 2021, 01:32:21- 01:32:44) as a scientist in charge states in relation to Patricia Carmichael, the epilepsy patient on the beach:

One of this cohort, uh, was a woman with the epileptic seizures. Her name was Patricia Carmichael. She suffered debilitating seizures her whole life. Nothing could help her. The medicine we gave her when she arrived turned out to be the exact mixture. She didn’t have a seizure for eight hours and 17 minutes [which is equal to] 16 and a half years. We cured her epilepsy. We’ll now fast-track trials, make that medicine and share it with the whole world. Every single person that needs it. Nature made that beach exist for a reason. Warren & Warren was meant to find it on their research expedition. We were meant to test medicines in one day instead of a lifetime. Lots more work to be done, everyone. Let’s do what nature wanted us to do. (Shyamalan, 2021, 01:32:51- 01:33:50)

These scenes present the idea that biocapital creates “new specific epistemologies” and subjects for the development of newly emerged life sciences and these could be “patients, or consumers, or experimental subjects” (Rajan, 2006, p. 19) who are turned into instruments disciplined for specific purposes. Shyamalan’s characters, in this vein, are turned into both patients and experimental subjects at the service of Warren & Warren. Their bodies have become epistemological objects that provide Science with not only the necessary information about their already present illnesses but also knowledge on the effects of newly developed medicine and future treatments of certain illnesses. Also, the rendering of the unethical trial a success clearly displays the benefit-prone mentality of the “neoliberal for-profit medicine” in which, as Mitchell and Snyder (2015) states in relation to the placement of disabled populations within the biopolitical domain of profit-based medical technologies,

a premium is placed upon the numbers of people who might benefit from a particular treatment regimen in the risk calculations of viability for future medical research, the procurement of financial backing for the development of treatment technologies and protocols,

and the training of sufficient expertise in medicine to improve viability for those in peripheral embodiments. (p. 157).

Similarly, the chronically ill individuals of *Old* are rendered peripheral subjects by the fictional pharmaceutical company, Warren & Warren. The characters' position as test subjects in peripheral embodiments invokes the primary characteristic of Foucauldian biopolitics, that is, the major formula of biopower as "*right of death and power over life*" [emphasis original]" (Foucault, 1978, p. 135). This formula refers to the substitution of the ancient right (of the Sovereign) to kill or let live by biopower that sustains and multiplies life or reduces it to the point of death. The characters, who are bound by the mutual stigma of being sick, fall under the category of spendable and /or disposable lives as they are used and discarded at the cost of other lives. This again applies to the biopolitical mechanism of power "to foster life or disallow it to the point of death," (Foucault, 1978, p. 139), that is, the power of making live or letting die, which, according to Foucault (1978), opposes to the ancient "right of life and death" (p. 135) which is exercised by sovereign power. However, considering the status of the characters, it could be argued that what is at work in the film is more like thanatopolitics operated by the sovereign, as Foucault (1978) puts it:

The sovereign exercised his right of life only by exercising his right to kill, or by refraining from killing; he evidenced his power over life only through the death he was capable of requiring. The right which was formulated as the 'power of life and death' was in reality the right to take life or let live. [...]. Power in this instance was essentially a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself; it culminated in the privilege to seize hold of life in order to suppress it. (p. 136)

As the pharmaceutical company holds the right of life, the characters are degraded into the level of bare life. Moreover, they are turned into anonymous subjects as the hotel management seizes all the official papers documenting the test subjects' identities, such as passports, identity cards, etc. turning them into *no-body*: "PRISCA. They have our passports. We could just disappear. / GUY. They sent us a special car to the airport. A plane. They can... / PRISCA. They can make it look like we never left our house" (Shyamalan, 2021, 00:57:28-00:57:39). This *no-bodyness* of the characters creates a paradox as they embody a valuable corporeality, since it is their physical body that matters for the company, Warren & Warren, yet they embody a particular form of absence at the same time; the characters bodily exist yet they are officially absent. This absence that is characterised by their exclusion from not just any kind of socio-political existence but from life itself, given that they are bound to die in a matter of hours. Their very position echoes the Agambenian notion of *homo sacer* [emphasis original]<sup>1</sup> because of the fact that all the characters, bereft of their legal status as citizens, are turned into "*homines sacri* [emphasis original]" (Agamben, 1998, p. 73) that are pushed out of the sphere of *bíos* and included into that of *zoē*. So, they have become the subjects incorporated into a state of exception and in this vein, the beach they are taken to is similar to a detention camp where their bodies are laid bare at the service of the formidable power of the sovereign. They are totally under the control of the sovereign who "decides on the exception" (Schmitt, 2005, p. 5) and who has the power to suspend the law. In this case, the characters are subjects

<sup>1</sup> According to Agamben's (1998) postulation of biopolitics, *homo sacer* (sacred man), "a figure of the archaic Roman law" is the one "whom the people have judged on account of a crime (p. 9). It is not permitted to sacrifice this man, yet he who kills him will not be condemned for homicide; in the first tribunitian law, in fact, it is noted that 'if someone kills the one who is sacred according to the plebiscite, it will not be considered homicide.' This is why it is customary for a bad or impure man to be called sacred." (Agamben, 1998, p. 71). The life of *homo sacer* falls under the category of *zoē*, a term that refers to the ancient Greek concept of life which specifically indicates "the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods)" (Agamben, 1998, p. 1), that is, the bare life. He does not own *bíos*, the life in the political sphere, life of a citizen dwelling in the polis; a form of life that women, animals, and slaves do not and cannot possess.

that are deployed within “zones of ‘expendability’ [emphasis original]” (Mitchell and Snyder, 2015, p. 99) and the sovereign is the pharmaceutical company in the film, or to put it in a biocapitalistic rendering; the “[B]ig [P]harma” (Rose, 2007, p. 219) is the new sovereign in the age of biomedicine who owns the power to let some individuals die in order to invest and multiply the lives of certain individuals.

### Conclusion

In *Old* (2021), M. Night Shyamalan builds a panoptic milieu in which the characters under perpetual monitoring by the Big Pharma are entrapped, circled by huge rock hills and also the border of the wall of an invisible temporal anomaly. Within this particular space the children reach into puberty within hours, the other characters suffering from different chronic illnesses age at an alarming speed, and their health deteriorates as it is suggested that half an hour on the beach equals to one year *on earth*. As a result, all the characters are alienated from and abominated by their own bodies which turn into the very source of fear, abhorrence, and horror for them. This very alienation and abjection are among the key qualities that render the film as a body horror. As the time passes and the bodies of the characters’ transform, the film moves towards the realm of a body horror since hyper-accelerated aging acts as the catalyst converting the genre of the film. Thus, Shyamalan’s *Old* (2021) through the treatise of aging via a highly biological, somatic, and medico-scientific filmic language, displays an accelerated metamorphosis of human body, from child to adolescent, from young to old, from healthy to sick, and finally from alive to dead. Shyamalan (2021) creates cellular chaos in which the human body, in a *Samsaesque* manner, acts as an autonomous entity over which the characters by no means have control and thus are alienated from and terrified by. This very rendering of aging not only underscores the highly biological and somatic body language and discourse of the film, but also transforms the genre of the film providing and furnishing it with generic and thematic qualities of body horror. Furthermore, the somatic language of the film and the cinematic eye converging with Foucauldian medical gaze open up the biopolitical terrain for analysis. The film, via the twist at the end, presents a more contemporary and tangible horror that human life and health has been turned into information at the service of biocapital. This highlights the notion that these characters have always been under observation and would have been so indefinitely from the moment of their initial diagnosis. While some degree of cinematic redemption is achieved in the arrest of the hotel manager/ experiment overseer, the contemporary status quo of neoliberal governing mechanisms denies us that kind of optimistic closure.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The author of the article declared that there is no conflict of interest.

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