2014

The Devil Made Her Do It: Three Horror Film Case Studies in the Exorcism Subgenre

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THE DEVIL MADE HER DO IT:
THREE HORROR FILM CASE STUDIES
IN THE EXORCISM SUBGENRE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Communication Studies

by
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B.A., University of Alabama, 2008
M.A., University of Alabama, 2010
August 2014

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Mary Sydney McDonald, who remains a constant influence and inspiration.

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Beau Breeden, Tweet, Zero 7, The Album Leaf, God Speed You! Black Emperor, Mogwai, Ani Difranco, Sp33fy M@n, Phutureprimitive, Kendrick Lamar (and not Macklemore), Pretty Lights, The Chimes (Highland), PJ's Coffee, Natalie Barlow, Sarah Friday, Monster Energy, Gabriel Byrne, Red Bull, Voodoo BBQ, Charlotte Gouvier, the New Orleans Saints, William Friedkin, Scott Derrickson, Daniel Stamm, James Wan, Linda Blair, Jennifer Carpenter, Ashley Bell, Lili Taylor, Vera Farmiga, William Blatty, Missy Elliot, Alissa Comeaux, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Edward Norton, Al Pacino, Mort Guffman, Kerry Washington, Michael C. Hall, James Franco, *The Social Network*, *Ocean's Eleven*, *Dredd 3D*, *Spring Breakers, Swingers, Superbad, Rounders, Fight Club, Breaking Bad*, *Six Feet Under*, *Lost Girl, The Blue Planet, Scandal, The Killing, True Blood,* David Attenborough, and any ocean-related nature documentary ever made.

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ABSTRACT

Although interest in exorcism has spiked in real world and fictional filmic contexts, scholars have yet to fully identify the exorcism film as a subgenre of the horror film. Following Anne Rothe's (2011) argument that representation of trauma in popular culture may function like "a discursive knot in contemporary culture due to its vast associative powers of generating interactions between disparate ideas" (p. 4), this study recognizes exorcism as a discursive knot that deserves further attention.

Utilizing a case study approach, this dissertation focuses on three exorcism films: *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005), *The Last Exorcism* (2010), and *The Conjuring* (2013). Results concluded that although filmmakers utilize a distinct formula of narrative stages and signature characters to represent contemporary exorcism, such elements were negotiated through each film's construction. Additionally, this study utilizes Lowenstein's (2010) concept of "spectacle horror" to highlight dynamic elements of the exorcism film including: bodily contortions, film-viewer relationships, and intertextuality.

Based on the analysis, gender stands as a significant theme in the exorcism film's content and in conceptualizing its constitution. Exorcism films portray women as inescapably connected to men, but rebellious performances of possession provide liberatory possibilities for new symbolic orders. This study also indicates that representation of exorcism *itself* is gendered and draws attention to the distinct strategies characters utilize. Finally, this dissertation finds the mother-daughter relationship as a crucial site of stability (and horror) in the exorcism film.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCING THE STUDY

The conjuring up of monsters of the mind and the objectifying of them in the cinema is a symbolic form of exorcism, which very likely the general public intuitively grasped the genre long before William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973) popularized the subject (Solomon, 1976, p. 112).

We know the story. The young demonically possessed girl behaves erratically; she contorts her body. Her baffled family calls in an exorcist. Through great scriptural recitation and aggressive theatrical gesticulation, the holy man drives out the demon and restores the young woman to a docile, lady-like, and civilized state. We know this story very well.

But what of the following curious images: a contorted body, a character's glance toward the camera, a familiar text incorporated into a new setting, a surprising lack of closure? We know the exorcism story, but each film plays with its details in unique ways, forging new ground and certain possibilities along the way.

Though forty years old, *The Exorcist* (1973) remains one of the most influential films in horror cinema (Meehan, 2010). The film inspired several international imitations which attempted to replicate and capitalize on the film's box office success. In the last century, over 65 films released across the globe have dealt with themes of exorcism. More importantly, nearly two-thirds of those films have been released in just the last 15 years. In his ethnography of exorcism, sociologist Michael Cuneo (2001) argues that *The Exorcist* incited an unprecedented interest in exorcism—as a form of entertainment and as a form of alternative medicine.

In 1999, the Vatican issued a "revised rite of exorcism" in an effort to remove the medieval stigma associated with the practice (Tagliabue, 1999, p. 16). Within a year, Warner Bros. released a revised *The Exorcist: The Version You've Never Seen* (2000). By 2004, a pair of *Exorcist* prequels was released—the same year the revised rite of exorcism was emended and

published (Van Slyke, 2006). A year later, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005) succeeded at the box office and offered a new story loosely based on the case of Anneliese Michel, a young Austrian woman subjected to several sessions of exorcism. The case, and the film it inspired, has had tremendous impacts on how popular culture represents contemporary exorcism (Duffey, 2011; Goodman, 2005). For example, religious studies scholar Melanie Wright (2007) specifically points to *Emily Rose* to argue that the United States has seemingly undergone a cultural shift in which moral and cultural relativism are increasingly favored over rationalism. In other words contemporary horror films depict the failure of professions, like medicine, to explain particular phenomena and portray the spiritual or supernatural as providing viable explanations.

Andrew Tudor (1989), known for his foundational cultural history of the horror genre, argues that horror films are direct reflections of societal woes. Constellations of horror film form and content often provide access points for elaborating on a population's collective fears and value systems. The simultaneous revision of exorcism by the Vatican and exorcism's increased representation in film indicate the current cultural significance of exorcism. Rhetorical scholar Joshua Gunn (2004) notes a "continued fascination with the demonic" in popular discourse around the turn of the millennium, citing several films and books as well as real world practice. He writes, " . . . critics have given little attention to ritual exorcism as a generic form or as a rhetorical means for *naming the ineffable* in order to cope with social realities" (p. 5).

Gunn's (2004) suggestion that exorcism is a metaphor that serves performative or communicative functions fascinates me. While I am not interested in speculating on social realities, Gunn's (2004) hypothesis recognizes that exorcism has not only become a useful framework, but it is worthy of further inquiry. Artists like Madonna, Lady Gaga, and Nicki Minaj have utilized representations of exorcism in live performances (Derakhshani, 2012); other

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artists like Florence Welch and Otto Dix have referred to exorcism to describe their creative processes (McGreevy, 2001; Smart, 2012). Widespread access to exorcism films offers our cultural imagination a useful vocabulary. Gunn's (2004) call for more attention to exorcism as a genre certainly warrants support.

Feuer (1992) argues that the recognition of genre depends on the analyst. Thus, this dissertation aims to recognize the exorcism film as a distinct subcategory of horror films. Viewers engage not only film, but *collections* of films, and collections of elements *related* to films. Additionally, viewers utilize a wide variety of perspectives when discussing relationships between films and their constitutive elements. Rooted in genre studies, Olson (1996) claims that viewers define subgenres and make meaning from *collections*—of films or film-related aspects. Brophy (2000) notes our propensity to categorize components of the horror genre, including origins, actors, auteurs, and subgenres. Thus, spectators play an integral part in the meaning and success of these films. Theater-goers continue to develop their own relationships with the horror film as filmmakers continue to find ways to engage with more playful, interactive elements of the genre. In this study, I use a spectacle horror framework to analyze the dynamic constructions of form and content in the exorcism film.

Since the re-release of *The Exorcist: The Version You've Never Seen (2000)*, the United States has witnessed a marked increase in movies dealing with exorcism. Few scholars have accounted for the resurgence of exorcism at the box office beyond cursory conclusions related to capitalism. Since 2000, over 40 fictional films released in theaters or direct to DVD (domestic and international) deal with the practice of exorcism (see Appendix A). As no scholar has attempted to write an analysis of the exorcism film since *The Exorcist* (1973), this study begins that process and provides groundwork for further study.

I argue that exorcism films feature a significant cultural formula that engages in playful cinematic game and historicizes discursive possibilities for the female body in a male-dominated world. These films also feature what I call the "performance of purification," marked by a particular procession of narrative stages. This study recognizes the persisting trend of exorcism films and discusses how such dramas may be culturally significant. I examine the following cinematic texts: *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005), *The Last Exorcism* (2010), and *The Conjuring* (2013). Exorcism films are distinct from possession or evil house films because they feature ritual ceremonies to rid the possessed body of invading forces. These selected films comprise a canon of the exorcism film, a subgenre of the horror film.

I define the exorcism film as film that incorporates a seven-stage exorcism narrative formula (the performance of purification) and some degree of relevant iconography: a male in crisis, a female possessed, a parental crisis, a spiritual warrior, a spiritual guide, a continued contest between the home, the hospital, the church, and the state, and tell-tale signs of the supernatural such as a cold room, the smell of something burning, windows and doors opening, objects moving on their own, the possessed speaking in other voices or languages. The exorcism film also incorporates the use of spectacle horror primarily through contortions of the possessed body, celebration of familiar texts, and performance of exorcism.

Most critical attention to exorcism films focuses on the familiarity of tropes and (often failed) attempts to expand the subcategory. Quite simply, critics and journalists have missed fruitful opportunities to explain why exorcism persists as viable form of the horror film. Greenblatt (1995) argues that culture is often defined through positive reinforcement, such as box office success. *The Last Exorcism* (2010), *The Exorcist Chronicles* (2007), and *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005) together grossed $144 million (Puente, 2011). *The Conjuring*

was the most successful horror movie of 2013, garnering just under $140 million (The Conjuring – Box Office Mojo, 2014). Based on revenue alone, I argue that the U.S. mainstream audience enjoys this subgenre of horror. This study works to reveal what the exorcism subgenre offers audiences and what might contribute to its popularity.

Horror films dramatically impact the discursive limits of how viewers deal with the world and its problems (Clover, 1992; Creed, 1993; Phillips, 2005; Tudor, 1989; Wood, 1985). Through content, form, or poetic device, films draft rhetorical possibilities. Since the female body is a key ingredient for exorcism, these films hold great potential for discussing women's issues, feminism, and gender—and perhaps, for carving out new vocabularies. For instance, exorcism films position the female body as a battleground for spiritual and moral warfare, prompting questions relating to sexual difference and gender normativity. Exorcism films offer opportunity to reconsider these points of cultural contest.

Popular film has a capacity to highlight areas of collective trauma. With the surge of real world practice, popular film has taken a closer look at the curious subject of exorcism. Thus, both popular film and real world practice have contributed to interest in exorcism as a concept. Latour (1987) argues that a concept generates more salience the more it connects with heterogeneous concepts, or unrelated ideas. Expanding Latour's argument, Anne Rothe (2011) argues that representation of trauma in popular culture may function like "a discursive knot in contemporary culture due to its vast associative powers of generating interactions between disparate ideas" (p. 4). Different segments of culture may participate in the tug of war over a particular concept. Thus, this "discursive knot" suggests that a concept does not gain more clarity and simplicity with use, but rather, a concept's associations to varying ideas drives its complexity and usefulness. *The Exorcist*, for instance, features a harrowing pursuit for a solution

to Regan's erratic behavior. Chris consults with several experts, such as a physician, a hypnotherapist, a police officer, a young priest, and an old priest—all of whom offer distinct interpretations. Although characters deduce that the threat is demonic, recent exorcism films focus more on the accumulation of contradictory codes inscribed on the possessed body.

Indeed, recent interest in exorcism has generated a significant discursive knot, entangling several related but distinct discourses and their practices. For example, a priest may read that a young woman's bodily contortions are due to possession and the supernatural, while a physician may read the same behavior as convulsions due to an epileptic seizure. This study recognizes exorcism films as artifacts that participate in this knot-tying—since the horror film is, indeed, a way for the public to deal with the social world and the cultural imaginary (Tudor, 1989). The exorcism film's persistent presence suggests that these films perform valuable cultural work. As Braudy (1998) notes, re-performance, or the redrafting of previous works suggests that we have "unfinished cultural business" to which we must tend (p. 331). Thus, exorcism films are not just the result of discursive knots, but reflect concerted efforts to negotiate those knots.

Method

As my research questions rely heavily on the analysis of individual films, I offer three case studies for consideration. This method allows me to analyze individual films as well as establish connections between them. Simply, I analyze three cinematic texts and their relationships to social and historical contexts. Unlike phenomenology or ethnography, I do not wish to describe the "essence" of an experience or understand a specific group of people (Creswell, 2007, p. 26). Rather, I am interested in studying films as cultural texts, or what Tudor (1997) calls "cultural artefacts" that pose and reflect the values of its consumers (p. 443). Although these cultural texts bear remarkable consistency, they also offer points of departure.

Thus, the exorcism subgenre is marked by its stability *and* its dynamism. Each case study seeks to describe the content of a specific exorcism film, as well as take into consideration its unique context. My method may be further defined as structuralist. I identify the constitution and nature of the exorcism film. I also hope to provide a useful framework for future research and point to the dynamic processes that continue to influence the exorcism subgenre.

The Films

This study draws analysis from the following exorcism films: *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005), *The Last Exorcism* (2010), and *The Conjuring* (2013). In Chapter Two, *The Exorcist* (1973) and its re-release *The Exorcist: The Version You've Never Seen* (2000) serve as a paradigmatic model in the review of literature that enables me to analyze the other films. Taken together, the films comprise a canon of the exorcism film subgenre. In my analysis, I also refer to other films that further my understandings of the subgenre. Beyond possession or haunted house films, exorcism films are defined by religious ritual ceremonies to rid possessed individuals of invading forces.

I selected the case study films from a timeline (see Appendix A) of over 65 films in the past century that feature some element of exorcism. These films were selected after filtering through five criteria: 1.) total lifetime box office gross provided by BoxOfficeMojo.com, 2.) aggregate critical acclaim rating provided by RottenTomatoes.com, 3.) commonality of narrative components, 4.) the presence of possessed bodies rather than possessed houses, and 5.) my personal preferences for the purposes of this study. These films achieved the best overall score in meeting all five criteria, and comprise a canon of the exorcism film. Specifically, I am concerned with defining how contemporary culture deals with exorcism through representation in film.

Data Collection

I viewed each case study film both in a theater and at home. I watched each film in the study multiple times. Although I discuss relationships between film and audience, I am only interested in the *composition* and *structure* of the films and how they *facilitate* performative possibilities. Unlike some mass media studies, I do not analyze particular audiences. I focus on the films and utilize what Geertz (1973) referred to as "thick description" in order to guide my reader through various readings of bodies, film composition, and performative possibilities (p. 3).

The review of literature offered in Chapter Two guides how I categorize material in discussion. Any cinephile knows that one can never see a film too many times, and no matter how many times one has viewed a film, one will always discover something new. Our personal experiences collide with film creating unique resonances and significances (Barthes, 1981). Therefore, I recognize that my subjectivity impacts the films selected and my analysis of them.

Analysis

In my analyses, *The Exorcist* (1973/2000) serves as the paradigmatic example—and rightly so. With the amount of success and the critical and scholarly discussion the film has generated, Friedkin's work endures as a landmark of horror cinema. Thus, *The Exorcist* (1972/2000) informs analysis for each case study film.

A case study involves the study of a particular case within a bounded system, a system bound by time and place (Creswell, 2012). However, as enduring texts, films complicate the "boundedness" of the case study. Meaning and significance rest on historical subjectivities and are not limited to a simple "snapshot" of a case. Yet, I have resisted the urge to contextualize the films outside of their original releases and leave that for future research. Nevertheless, case studies are not meant to be analyzed in isolation. Rather, the researcher has the option to examine

a series of cases or bounded systems over time (or culture). Creswell (2012) argues that the case study functions more like a methodology: "a type of design in qualitative research that may be an object of study, as well as product of inquiry" (p. 97). Analyzing a series of cases, then, allows the researcher to analyze how such cases "speak" to one another, which is why I find the method appropriate for this study.

This methodology allows me to track how one case study of an exorcism film clearly impacts another. After all, the horror genre has been described as one that "mimics itself mercilessly," often recycling tropes and other cinematic materials (Brophy, 2000, p. 277). A film might engage what Schatz (1981) deemed as baroque style which features self-awareness, reflexivity, or reference to other films. For instance, *The Last Exorcism* (2010), in its self-aware style, features Cotton Marcus resorting to exhausted tropes popularized by *The Exorcist*, including Damien Karras's famous line "Take me!" (Bliss & Stamm, 2010).

Through her analysis of the stalker film, Dika (1990) found that in the postmodern age, horror films engage in pastiche, an art form that draws from or pays respect to previous works that influence its style and composition. She writes of her subgenre of choice, "As a cultural product of the late seventies, early eighties, the stalker film shares this dominant shift in attitude. As noted, it, too, uses material from earlier films, creating works that are almost entirely composed of previously seen narrative and cinematic elements" (Dika, 1990, p. 133). Whether pastiche or other nuanced uses of intertextuality establishes a clear formula or subgenre, or merely indicates that such a formula already exists, I analyze such use of recurrent elements in exorcism films.

The case study approach also engages multiple sources of information. Although I focus primarily on the films themselves, I also engage pertinent cultural contexts, criticisms, and

significances. Film impacts culture in remarkably persistent ways, often exceeding the singular "snapshot" of time and space that the case study attempts to neatly define. Thus, my approach affords me the opportunity to consider larger contextual influences.

Finally, rather than solely reiterating identical structure for each film analysis, each case study invests in distinct foci. I address striking similarities between the films (with a structuralist approach), but I also highlight unique aspects of each exorcism film which allows for more nuanced and generative criticism. Each film possesses special constitutive and contesting elements at work in the exorcism subgenre. Although this research could trace a multitude of connections to social and historical significances, the selected areas of inquiry in this study provide more than enough foundational description for future study of the exorcism film.

In this chapter, I have introduced the study, provided a working definition of the exorcism subgenre, proposed the selected films for analysis, and explained the case study as my method of analysis. Chapter Two provides a review of pertinent literature from various fields to better understand the subgenre. In addition, I offer the *The Exorcist* (1973 & 2000) as the paradigmatic exorcism film with which to compares the others. I also identify and outline a narrative formula found in the exorcism subgenre. Chapters Three, Four, and Five offer case studies. Each case study has two distinct halves: 1) structurally identifying the exorcism narrative formula and 2) probing at the text's relationship to culture through appropriate theories. Thus, Chapter Three approaches *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005) through theories of the body in order to discuss how contortion contributes to exorcism's discursive knot. Chapter Four considers *The Last Exorcism* (2010) through theories of spectatorship and documentary film to understand how the unique combination of the exorcism narrative and the found footage style cinema influence film-viewer relationships. Chapter Five examines *The Conjuring* (2013) using

theories of intertextuality to better understand the film's citationality and progressive

possibilities. In Chapter Six, I conclude by discussing overarching themes and arguments

emerging from the three case studies.

CHAPTER 2
THE EXORCIST: REVIEWING THE LITERATURE
THROUGH THE PARADIGMATIC EXAMPLE

Scholarship about the exorcism film, specifically, remains largely relegated to isolated case studies from various fields. Although *The Exorcist* remains one of the major landmarks in U.S. cinema, touted as one of the most influential films in the horror genre (Konow, 2012; Meehan, 2010; Phillips, 2005), most studies do not extend beyond it, leaving a contemporary collection of strikingly similar films generally unexplored. This study seeks to illuminate a collection of films that I identify as the exorcism subgenre. In this chapter, I build my foundation by reviewing the scholarship on the horror genre, especially literature concerning *The Exorcist* and related films. I then apply that literature to *The Exorcist* as the paradigmatic example of the subgenre.

One of the fastest growing areas related to communication studies is "new media," which includes a culture's relationship to film. As scholarship related to our complex relationships with technology expands, research dedicated to the horror film has also increased. Jason Zinoman (2011), author of *Shock Value: How a Few Eccentric Outsiders Gave Us Nightmares, Conquered Hollywood, and Invented Modern Horror*, observes that horror genre scholarship has substantially increased over the past three decades, from book-length studies, such as Carol Clover's *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, to peer-reviewed journals, like *Horror Studies* (2010) and the *Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies* (2006).

Exorcism as a horror subgenre, however, has only been minimally explored. Most discussion relegates exorcism to a trope or gimmick without considering how the concept fits into a particular network of narratives. As the field of horror studies continues to take shape, so do attempts to define the problems related to its discursive limits. Researchers may have

difficulty overcoming the temptation to simply confirm established theories. Noting some of the landmark contributions to the field, Ahmad & Moreland (2013) offer a pointed criticism worth citing at length:

> While these studies have contributed much to the academic recognition of the importance and complexity of the horror field, each has also tended to subordinate horror texts to particular conceptual or methodological schemes such as psychoanalysis, implicitly suggesting that horror fictions are important *only* insofar as they reveal the truth, or the use, of a particular theoretic system. (p. 6)

Horror texts often serve as examples for particular theories, but these applications offer little insight into the films themselves. Rather than using theories to pry open and access meaning in particular cases, researchers continue using cases to support exhausted theories. Such practices offer "only a passing nod to a text or two before proclaiming that horror is really 'about' Kristevan abjection (Creed), 'about' gender normativity (Twitchell), 'about' Deleuzian schizoanalysis (Powell), or some other enticing theoretical blank" (Ahmad & Moreland, 2013, p. 7). Several questions remain about the horror texts themselves. At best, previous scholarship has demonstrated that horror texts are complex and significant cultural artifacts. At worst, horror films are used as props to further support the "validity" of established theories—reaching vague conclusions that reproduce the very frameworks previously applied.

Despite fascinating developments for the horror film, critical discussion remains stale and fragmented. The scholarly reluctance to engage reiteration in horror films stands as one particular stumbling block. Film scholar Hantke (2007) contends that critics are too bound to classical horror works and hastily dismiss any instance of remake. With 2013 highlighting the 40th Anniversary of *The Exorcist*'s theatrical release, the film has endured as a mainstay of the horror film genre and continues to influence a growing subcategory of exorcism films in the 21st century. Yet, this subcategory has been dismissed by horror filmmakers; Eli Roth recently

dubbed the recent slew of films as "exorcism-sploitation," in which young filmmakers replicate various elements of *The Exorcist* to "make a quick buck" (Blakely, 2010, para. 10). Critical discussion interprets so-called knock-offs or the "remake rut" as symptoms of capitalism rather than grappling with persisting elements embedded in these cinematic texts. Critics quickly dismiss repetitive elements as outdated gimmicks, rather than consider why certain forms and content remain viable. Rather than asking why people keep making these movies, critics should be asking; "Why do people keep seeing them?"

Hantke (2007) argues that in order for academics to get out of our own rut, we must expand the boundaries of criticism: "A radical re-evaluation of the aesthetics and politics of the remake, for example, might break the genre out of its current slump" (p. 200). By spurning remakes, reiterations or revisionings, academics stifle discussion and divert attention away from asking deeper, more complex questions about the persisting elements in recent horror films. Scholars should discuss these persisting elements. If the horror film and daily life do not exist in isolation from each other (Clover, 1992; Phillips, 2005; Tudor, 1989; Twitchell, 1983; Wood, 1986) something is more at work than exorcism-sploitation.

Few scholars have attempted to understand exorcism as a generic form. Although Kallendorf (2005) maps out a "rhetoric of exorcism," the study only provides a taxonomy of exorcism as rhetorical practice—a mode of persuasion—based strictly on holy texts (p. 209). Gunn (2004) argues that exorcism "as a violent, ritual cleansing of a body, has reemerged as a significant generic form of demon-making in three interrelated domains: the mass media; the ritual practice of Catholics and Protestants; and presidential speech craft" (p. 4). Perhaps the exorcism film features more than just a movie plot, more than just a series of embodied practices. Perhaps exorcism has been appropriated as a specific type of framework or metaphor.

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While broader themes related to exorcism (such as possession and haunted houses) have been explored, studies of the exorcism film's constitution, nature, and functions are significantly lacking. Since a cultural history or genre analysis of the exorcism film does not exist, the review of literature may be one of the most important elements of this study. Thus, I cover studies that have analyzed *The Exorcist* and related films relevant to the exorcism subgenre.

One way to explore beyond established terrain is to test out new frameworks. For example, Lowenstein's (2011) concept of spectacle horror extends beyond identification. Lowenstein (2011) argues that Metz's (1982) exhausted notion of identification (often utilized in horror scholarship) falls short where his concept and mode of engagement, spectacle horror, may prove useful. Thus, to better conceptualize the exorcism film, I first review the nature of formulas and their relationships to genre formation; second, I review Lowenstein's "spectacle horror" and other theories of horror film-viewer relationships; finally, I use *The Exorcist* as a paradigmatic example to identify the subgenre's narrative.

Formulas & Genre-fication of the Exorcism Film

> A formula is a conventional system for structuring cultural products. It can be distinguished from invented structures which are new ways of organizing works of art. Like the distinction between convention and invention, the distinction between formula and structure can be envisaged as a continuum between two poles; one pole is that of a completely conventional structure of conventions . . . the other end of the continuum is completely original structure which orders inventions. . . . (Cawelti, 1970, p. 29)

A film is an industrial product, a symptom and vehicle of the culture industry (Feuer, 1992). Genre is the apparatus by which the film industry may "control the tension between similarity and difference inherent in the production of any cultural product" (Feuer, 1992, p. 142). Genres define the norms of style, and in the United States, Classical Hollywood style is the barometer "to relegate the production of difference by producing . . . differences within very

circumscribed structures of similarity" (Feuer, 1992, p. 142). Filmmakers incorporate familiar, formulaic elements so that their works may be read more intelligibly within a particular genre.

Film genres do not exist within the texts themselves, but are identified through relationships with other films. Genres are frameworks that organize and identify particular collections of films (Phillips, 2005). Scholars have attempted to define the composition and function of the exorcism film, but these studies examine isolated films rather than *collections* of film. Collections of film breed culturally and historically specific types of what Feuer (1992) calls a genre film, which is: "a particular kind of film—the mass-produced 'formulas' of the Hollywood studio system" (p. 141). This study identifies the exorcism film as a genre film constituted by a particular formula.

Film genres establish themselves through repeated use of conventions—familiar aspects of the narratives, characters, and setting (Worland, 2007). Kendrick (1991) calls this process "genrefication" (p. 165). Worland (2007) describes this process as "the gradual but steady production of assorted literary and cinematic works that establish stock characters, plots, and conflicts that producers successfully repeat and audience soon expect to be found in particular story forms" (p. 17). Viewers become familiar with the elements through repetition; they form expectations in relation to those elements.

Film genres prompt analysis beyond mere themes. Thematic analyses may explain what the film is "about," but tend to blatantly ignore the horror genre's relationship to the film industry—or that the horror film is a cultural product. Feuer (1992) argues that many analyses are rooted in traditions of literary criticism, which has highly influenced the ways scholars engage film criticism. Yet, the reflexive capacity of genre films like *Scream* (1996) continue to remind us of the horror film's conscious relationship to the film industry. The horror film *knows*

it is a product. Therefore, scholars should include the nature of film production in their analyses of genre and theme. Without consideration for film production and promotion, thematic analyses are reductive and focus too much on notions of invention or originality.

Yet, the formula has not been an attractive framework. Critics tend to demonize or outright deny that the film industry participates in the *generative* process of facilitating the convergence and dissipation of film genres. Feuer (1992) reminds scholars that: "film genre study is grounded in the realities of the film industry, even though, in theory, any genre critic is free to construct any genre he or she wishes" (p. 142). Critics are quick to disparage repetition as a failure of innovation, rather than acknowledge that part of the generative process comes from the repetitive nature necessary for genre formation.

Discourses within horror film criticism invest heavily in limited notions of originality. For example, Jancovich (2002) quickly dismissed *The Blair Witch Project* as a one trick anomaly—despite the "found footage" style eventually becoming a staple of the 2000s horror film. Attitudes that privilege notions of "originality" fail to recognize repetition's integral role in film industry success. The exorcism film's relationship with the motion picture industry is indeed often predicated on generating income and critical acclaim. Further studies into formula could certainly enrich discussion of genre formation.

Vera Dika's (1990) study of the stalker film offers some points for consideration. Building on Cawelti's work in defining the Western, Dika (1990) demonstrates how formulas not only generated interest, but were instrumental in defining the stalker film. The stalker film gained commercial success for a brief number of years due to a repeated formula of memorable elements, such as an on-screen female victim and an off-screen (presumably male) killer, often within an isolated locale (Dika, 1990).

The formula allows researchers to locate consistent repetition of particular elements. In the last fifteen years, nearly forty films dealing with exorcism have employed similar tropes and iconography from *The Exorcist* while also exploring some new element of the exorcism film. Dika's analysis examines a narrow window (1978-1981) of commercially successful stalker films, but my selected films are not bound by a particular window of time. Indeed, studies of subgenres and film cycles have not necessarily been categorized by a particular chronology (Olson 1996; Worland, 2007). Historical and cultural contexts are also important elements in classifying and theorizing the horror film (Phillips, 2005; Tudor, 1989). Dika's research, while bound to a certain chronology, categorizes films based on similar structure and ingredients.

Commercial success indicates how the use of a formula encourages generic expectations. In fact, the most popular stalker cycle aligned most closely to the rigid stalker formula (Dika, 1990)—which justifies why one of my film selection criteria is commercial success. Using the formula as a lens, Dika (1990) charts how select films attempted to replicate the success of *Halloween* through familiar elements and succeeded. Although immediate attempts to replicate *The Exorcist* failed horribly in the 1970s, films emerging in the 21st century, such as *Emily Rose*, created a canon of exorcism films and generated substantial box office success.

The formula also promotes a level of interactive spectatorship. Dika (1990) finds the relationship between horror cinema and audience members essential for the emergence of subgenres. As viewers became familiar with the stalker formula, such practices produced generic expectations and ritualized behaviors. The formula (a particular set of elements) facilitates cinematic "games" in which several forms of play emerge between film and spectator (Dika, 1990, p. 21). The familiarity and predictability of these elements are what produce the pleasure of engaging the cinematic game of the stalker film. The viewer knows the killer will strike. Thus,

the stalker film teases the audience member with the anticipation of predicting not *if* the killer

will strike, but *when* and *how* (Dika, 1990). Playing on established generic expectations,

filmmakers employ specific formulaic elements to constitute the cinematic game.

Indeed, the stalker film is both medium and product of the formula. The formula is a

recipe with which to cook up an effective stalker film, and the cinematic game is the event akin

to a dinner party. Dika's (1990) focus on ritualized cinematic games provides a productive

framework to ascertain why the exorcism film has emerged so frequently and consistently. This

study investigates how a contemporary series of exorcism films implicitly used *The Exorcist* as a

founding template to develop formulas integral to the construction of the exorcism subgenre.

Genre

Persistent use of a formula eventually prompts viewers to consider a collection of films as

a particular genre. Film genres develop, in part, from *other* genres. Films operate within a large,

complex network of citationality. Citationality refers to the reiterative nature of language and

signs (Derrida, 1988). Every utterance bears the possibility of being copied or incorporated into

another system, and thus, the utterance may refer to previous use, but does not invest in notions

of origins (Derrida, 1988). Film genre formation develops in the same fashion as language—a

complex construction of citations from previous utterances. Thomas Schatz uses a language

analogy to better apprehend the nature of film genres:

> Following Claude Levi-Strauss, Schatz views genres as cultural problem-solving
> operations. He distinguishes between a deep structure that he calls *film genre* and a
> surface structure that calls the *genre film*. The genre film is the individual instance, the
> individual utterance or speech act (*parole*). The film genre is more like a grammar
> (*langue*) . . . a system for conventional usage. (Feuer, 1992, p. 143)

To develop further vocabulary for a film genre like the exorcism film, repetitive use and

experimentation is necessary. Feuer (1992) argues that genre should be studied on a sign system

based on cultural consensus. However, a seeming cultural consensus may be predicated on a

male-centered reading (Clover, 1992; Creed, 1993). Thus, the more texts that participate in this

sign system (and the texts that critique that system), the more enriched the exorcism lexis

becomes. Basically, the more exorcism *films* and exorcism *discourses* that are produced, the

more complex the network of signs related those languages (or sign systems) become.

Accordingly, construction of film genre is predicated on viewers. The film genre

represents "a tacit contract between the motion picture industry and the audience, whereas the

genre film represents an event that honors that contract" (Feuer, 1992, p. 143). One feature of

that tacit contract is participation in feedback:

> The language analogy sees an active but indirect participatory role for the audience in this
> process of genre construction. For the industrial arts, the concept of genre can bring into
> play (1) the system of production, (2) structural analysis of the text, and (3) the reception
> process with the audience conceived as an interpretive community—that is, a social
> grouping whose similarities cause them to interpret texts the same way, as opposed to
> completely individual interpretations. (Feuer, 1992, p. 144)

Interpretive communities provide feedback essential for genre development. Viewers cannot

intervene with the sequences in the film, but audience members do engage discussion *about*

films, which may elaborate on elements of production, text, and reception—integral to

genrefication's dynamic process. Viewers may interpret intertextually, whereby they may

formulate meaning through a collection of related texts—and their relationships to one another

(Ott & Walter, 2000). Viewers do not merely identify patterns, but also evaluate suitability for

classification and quality of execution. Schatz (1981) refers to this as part of "the feedback

circuits" in which audience members evaluate what is or is not acceptable in terms of what is

produced (p. 5). Audience members, too, gauge the normative standards of a particular genre.

Because filmmakers, too, are also audience members, it is no surprise that some films directly

refer to previous works.

Following the language analogy, the vocabulary of a genre is also defined by use of iconography. The term iconography means "picture writing," and Worland (2007) argues that genres are constituted by the repetitive use of images in relation to the character, scene, or setting: "Like genre itself, iconography is a culturally coded language system that is developed through many statements, repetitions, and variations that audiences have come to understand and accept through exposure to assorted works" (p. 18). The familiar ensemble of crosses, holy water, and religious texts reassure viewers that an exorcism is likely to take place. Intertextual meaning-making allows viewers to recognize the particular qualities or characteristics of a genre (Feuer, 1992). As audience members continue providing feedback, producers continue ascertaining what works and what does not. In sum, viewers gain a sense of the aesthetic and constitutive elements of an emergent subgenre from the ritualized viewing and interpreting of cinematic texts.

Finally, film genres are always developing. Genres are not snapshots of film history, but amorphous ecosystems that depend on a number of texts and agents to maintain a thriving landscape. Genres develop and dissipate based on relationships between filmmakers, film, audience, and culture. Following Schatz's (1981) taxonomy of genre evolution, Worland (2007) offers the categories *experimental*, *classical*, *refinement*, and *baroque*, as they apply to the horror genre. This taxonomy provides the framework needed to chart how an exorcism subgenre has taken shape.

First, the experimental is a stage in which producers of film begin testing the waters for what does or does not work (Worland, 2007). Early film adaptations of *Frankenstein* (1910) or *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1911) mark experimental indications of a distinct horror film genre. For the exorcism subgenre, some experimental instances are found in *The Dybbuk* (1937), *Matka Joanna od aniolów (Mother Joan of the Angels, Poland)* (1961), or *Il Demonio (The Demon,*

Italy) (1963). Worland (2007) reminds us that experimental instances are only intelligible due to their classical counterparts. That is, critics may not recognize early incarnations until the classical era is established.

Second, the classical period is a stage in which "conventions reach their 'equilibrium' and are mutually understood by artist and audience" (Schatz, 1981, p. 37). For Worland (2007), the notion of a "horror movie" first emerged with Universal's *Dracula* & *Frankenstein* in 1931, and this period ranges from the 1930's well into the 1960's with films that feature the central convention of destroying the monster. For the exorcism subgenre, *The Exorcist* solidified the classical stage and inspired several international imitations (see Appendix A). The re-release and surge of interest in the demonic at the turn of the millennium also contributed to *The Exorcist* being firmly set in place as the classical exorcism film.

Third, the refinement period is a stage in which "certain formal and stylistic details embellish the form" (Schatz, 1981, pp. 37-38). Films begin testing the limits of classic conventions, and begin experimenting with new aspects of canonized stories. Worland (2007) points to new color versions of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* with contemporary actors. For the exorcism subgenre, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* offered a hybrid of horror and courtroom drama, and introduced a skeptical tone in challenging how viewers come to diagnose possession.

Finally, the baroque stage exhibits "increasing stylistic adornment and self-consciousness in which genre's conventions are sharply revised or inverted" (Worland, 2007, p. 19). Worland (2007) points to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1973), which features no closure or extermination of threat, and *Scream* (1996), which offers a reflexive take on the 80's slasher cycle, and ultimately breaks the established formula. Baroque films also cast naturalized classical elements as artificial and played out. Comedies or "spoofs" of horror are likely to appear. For the

exorcism subgenre, *Repossessed* (1990) is a spoof directly referencing *The Exorcist*, and *Last Exorcism*'s Cotton Marcus directly uses lines from *The Exorcist* as part of his put-on performance of exorcism.

These genre periods are primarily concerned with patterns in narrative and plot. They are not necessarily bound by time, although time (and culture) may impact the popularity of a given period; they overlap, often featuring elements of two periods (Worland, 2007). Culture also plays a role in the process of meaning making. Literary types tend to traverse several time periods, while "film and television . . . are culturally specific and temporally limited" (Feuer, 1992, p. 139). Thus, films are cultural artifacts that represent elements of their respective cultures, but also implicate those who interpret such works. Researchers must recognize the privilege of hindsight, which affords opportunity to engage in productive genre work.

Thus, film criticism investigates the culture of the artifact, but also implicates the culture of the interpreter. Identifying a genre removed from its cultural context influences the way it is conceptualized. Engaging film is a form of cultural exchange between medium and viewer. Examining and re-examining cinematic works in contemporary contexts prompt us to *rethink* texts. Thus, I hope to draw more attention to the selected exorcism films so that we may rethink each of them, to consider histories that may have gone unnoticed.

Spectacle Horror

No one watches a horror film passively. While some viewers claim that horror films do not produce any personal anxiety, the genre rests on active audience engagement. We must fully consider how horror actively engages its viewers. Horror films are designed to violate audience sensibilities. Exorcism films, specifically, solicit a distinct level of participation from their

audience members. Although scholars have suggested film and spectactor engage in playful participation, many vary on their definitions of what degree or type of participation occurs.

Previous literature on horror film-spectator relationships is dominated by notions of identification. Theoretical discussion of identification as a mode of spectatorship is "voluminous" (Clover, 1992, p. 7). Lowenstein (2011) cites Brophy, Clover, and Sconce, who have attempted to adjust over-simplistic viewer identification models, but emphasizes that all three scholars still utilize identification as their primary mode of analysis. In basic terms, discussion following Metz's (1982) identification often unfolds on two levels: "primary identification (with the camera, wherever it may be and whatever it may be up to) and secondary identification (with the character of empathetic choice)" (Clover, 1992, p. 8).

Identification may productively describe audience perception, but is restricted in expressing terms of horror construction. Lowenstein (2011) argues that identification often falls short and fails to apprehend the *attractions* in horror films that are specifically produced for its spectators. Attractions incite curiosity and are designed to astound audience members with spectacular feats with the guidance of the cinematic showman (Gunning, 1989; Lowenstein, 2011). A framework of attractions implies that viewers are not required to identify with the performer, nor immediately accept camera framing. As Jagose (2008) suggests, since attractions are organized by exhibition, inquiry through a psychoanalytic lens of voyeurism is ill-fitting. Thus, I extend discussion of film-viewer relationships beyond the limitations of identification to better discuss forms of solicitation, spectacle, and viewer participation in the exorcism film. To further elucidate these dynamics, I turn to Lowenstein's *spectacle horror*, and Gunning's *cinema of attractions*.

Lowenstein (2011) begs for a mode of inquiry that extends beyond identification. In his response to Edelstein's (2006) condemnation of so-called "torture porn," Lowenstein (2011) contends that: 1.) "torture porn" has become a popular but not useful term, 2.) torture porn does not exist, and 3.) a legitimate art form is being ignored. Accordingly, he offers the term "spectacle horror," a productive framework which seeks to apprehend and interpret the excess of so-called "torture porn" (Lowenstein, 2011, p. 42). Spectacle horror, as a method of construction, is: "the staging of spectacularly explicit horror for the purposes of audience admiration, provocation, and sensory adventure as much as shock or terror, but without necessarily breaking ties with narrative development or historical allegory" (Lowenstein, 2011, p. 42). The term "staging" is important because it suggests that the texts are constructed in such a way to encourage particular modes of spectator engagement.

In his analysis of *Hostel*, Lowenstein (2011) successfully demonstrates how identification is not only limited, but an incorrect method of engaging so-called torture porn. Rather, *Hostel*'s engagement of the audience echoes a tradition of exhibition cinema prominent in the early 1900s (Lowenstein, 2011). Such engagement is distinct because it does not ask the audience to identify with a certain character. Rather, the film is constructed to address the audience directly through a cinema showman, echoing the traditions of the vaudeville sideshow (Lowenstein, 2011). *Hostel* is not an assault on the audience, but rather, a playful solicitation of the audience's attention to the looming spectacle of violence. Spectacle horror encourages audience participation with all of its ambivalent pleasures, rather than stabilizing the collapse of audience spectatorship with character perspective. Lowenstein (2011) shifts focus from identification to spectacle.

Spectacle horror is distinct because it is constructed not by blind use of excessive gore, but through an intimate relationship between spectator, film, and filmmaker. Lowenstein (2011)

clarifies that this relationship does not equate to traditional or advanced models of identification commonly employed in horror film analyses.

Spectacle horror develops from Tom Gunning's (1986) "cinema of attraction," an era of cinema prior to the dominant use of narrative (p. 64). The cinema of attractions notably employed tricks and illusions designed to attract the interest of spectators, rather than investing in story or characters (Gunning, 1986). Through shocking use of exhibition and stunt, this particular type of cinema devotes active focus outward toward the spectator (Gunning, 1986). Indeed, the attractions are highly visible—distinct from the voyeurism associated with identification.

Spectacle horror nevertheless has an immediate relationship with spectators. In addition to typical cinema of attractions strategies, such as direct address to the audience and theatrical display (Gunning, 1986), Lowenstein (2011) details the immediacy that emerges from spectactor engagement: "Spectacle horror's 'loudness' as a mode of direct, visceral engagement with viewers distinguishes it from 'quieter' forms . . . but this distinction should not mandate the negative value judgements that structure torture porn as a category" (p. 42). While some critics have quickly dismissed violent horror films being devoid of substance, Lowenstein (2011) finds that "torture porn" taps into a longstanding tradition which preceded narrative: the magic and trick films of attraction cinema. Using *Hostel* as a case study, Lowenstein (2011) successfully shifts theoretical discussion from the limitations of "torture porn" to the fruitful notion of spectacle horror.

Incorporating Gunning's cinema of attractions, Lowenstein (2011) proposes that spectacle horror is both a method of horror *construction* and a mode of critical *inquiry* both of which invest less in narrative and more in solicitation of the spectator. This framework is a

refreshing and vital component for this study for two reasons: First, identification does not fully account for how spectators *refuse* to identify with characters or what is being presented. Spectacle horror recognizes the experience of repulsion, in which there is clear distinction between spectactor and character. Second, I answer Hantke's (2007) call to radically revise our sense of aesthetics in critical discussion by delving further into the nuances of film-viewer relationships and spectacular bodies presented in the horror film.

Spectacle horror is particularly useful because it is not relegated to simply apprehending attractions. Rather, the framework accounts for the construction of attractions within common uses of narrative and allegory (Lowenstein, 2011). Perhaps most productively, spectacle horror resists the notion that attractions and narrative are somehow incompatible. Thus, the concept allows for more nuanced descriptions of horror construction and aids in discussing dynamic forms of play between film and spectator.

The Exorcist: The Paradigmatic Example

No one has provided a study of exorcism films utilizing frameworks of formula or spectacle horror. Because *The Exorcist* was so successful and the iconography remains influential in the horror genre, I demonstrate how *The Exorcist* and its revised 2000 version set a firm foundation for the emergence of the exorcism subgenre in the 21st century. Since a formula is derived from a particular framework, explicating *The Exorcist's* influential narrative structure and iconography are productive for analyzing contemporary exorcism films. In this section, I provide a synopsis of the film, describe its constitutive elements, identify seven stages of the exorcism narrative found in the film, and finally, discuss the nature of spectacle horror in the film.

The Exorcist is a supernatural horror film directed by William Friedkin based on the 1971 best-selling novel by William Blatty. The film follows the possession of a young girl and her mother's enlisting of priests in order to expel a demon named Pazuzu. The film features a pair of story lines: one involving a teenage girl becoming a possessed by demons, and another involving a priest's crisis of faith. Blatty's novel was loosely based on the real life exorcism of a young Maryland boy in 1949 (Fry, 2008). The film earned ten Academy Award nominations and won for Best Sound Mixing and Best Adapted Screenplay (Konow, 2012). The critical and public response to *The Exorcist* was unprecedented. Reports described viewers vomiting, passing out, and driven to madness. Zinoman's (2011) description is worth citing at length:

> Audience members were fainting and vomiting, screaming at the screen. One woman had a miscarriage and another suffered a heart attack. Police were called in to stop riots in Kansas City and New York. One man saw a demon in Berkeley. The hysteria over *The Exorcist*, which opened over the holidays in 1973, fed on itself, generating more outbreaks of panic and anger. (p. 100)

Indeed, the collection of spectacles surrounding the actual film, such as audience response, fueled the film's clout and continues to serves as its own marketing campaign. In its respective context, *The Exorcist* was the highest-grossing film of all time (only to be outdone just two years later by *Jaws*) (Muir, 2002). The film remains one of the highest-grossing films of all time.

Synopsis

The Exorcist opens with an archeological dig in Northern Iraq. Father Merrin (Max von Sydow) uncovers a peculiar amulet and encounters a strange force. Merrin recognizes the image to represent Pazuzu, a demon he has faced before who now seeks revenge.

Meanwhile, in Georgetown, Washington, D.C., Chris McNeil (Ellen Burstyn) stars in Burke Dennings' (Jack McGowan) new movie. When Chris arrives home from the set, her adolescent daughter, Regan, regales her mother with stories of her afternoon. Regan also teases

her mother about her interest in Burke. Regan's father is largely absent from her life. He is only implicated through Chris's tirades about missing Regan's birthday.

After playing with a Ouija board with an entity named "Captain Howdy," Regan begins behaving strangely. During a party with Burke and friends, Regan enters the living room in what may be best described as a trance. She tells the piano player "You're going to die up there" and urinates on the floor. The group is confused and embarrassed. Chris takes her into another room.

The next day, Chris brings Regan to a clinic. Regan is resistant and fights back. The doctor explains that Regan let loose a string of obscenities, which Chris finds extremely peculiar. The doctors attribute this behavior to a lesion on Regan's brain for which she may need surgery, but they are unsure. Regan is put under intense examination as doctors run further tests.

One night Chris arrives home to receive news that Burke is dead. Although Burke was supposed to be watching Regan, authorities found his body at the bottom of a long flight of stairs with his head turned completely around. The film implies that Regan may have killed Burke. Burke's death attracts Detective William Kinderman (Lee J. Cobb) who questions Chris about the events of that night. The detective questions Damien Karras (Jason Miller), a young priest suffering a crisis of faith after his mother's recent death.

Clinical tests fail to locate the cause of Regan's erratic behaviors. A psychiatrist's techniques of hypnosis also fail to help Regan. The medical board asks if Chris has considered exorcism. A representative explains that Regan's behavior is akin to something more primitive and must be met with more primitive means.

With this suggestion, Chris seeks the counsel of Father Karras. As Chris and Regan are not religious, and Father Karras is going through his own crisis of faith, Karras gathers empirical evidence to assess whether Regan really needs an exorcism.

Although Regan is strapped to the bed, it appears she has telekinetic powers. Objects move on their own. Not until Karras discovers that his recording of Regan's speech is actually English in reverse, and the words "HELP ME" appear on Regan's abdomen, does he seek permission from Georgetown University to perform an exorcism. The university contacts Father Merrin since he has had previous experience with exorcism. Merrin is summoned, and he travels to Georgetown.

When Merrin arrives, he and Karras prepare for the exorcism ritual with proper dress and equipment. The priests enter Regan's bedroom. She is restrained to the bed. Karras and Merrin begin exorcism through incantation and the administering of holy water and crosses. They attempt to exorcise the demon, Pazuzu, from Regan. Regan reacts violently to the rituals, and Pazuzu jeers at Karras, citing his failure to care for his mother. Merrin commands Karras to focus, but he is easily distracted. After the first wave of rituals, the priests rest outside the bedroom. Merrin returns to continue the exorcism. Karras returns shortly after and finds Merrin dead on the floor. Regan is no longer bound to the bed.

Father Karras reacts wildly to the demon. He grabs possessed Regan and demands "Take me! Take me!" The demon transfers to Karras. He jumps through the window and falls down the long flight of stairs to his death—just as Burke did. Just as police and onlookers arrive on the scene, Father Dyer (William O'Malley) performs the last rites for Karras as he passes away.

The film closes with the McNeil family moving to Los Angeles. Regan appears restored back to normal with no memory of what happened. The McNeils meet Father Dyer and say goodbye. Detective Kinderman shows up too late, missing both Karras and Merrin, and persuades Dyer to see a movie with him.

Constitutive Elements of the Exorcism Film

The exorcism subgenre has been given many names: the possession narrative (Renner, 2011), the possession subgenre of the occult film (Clover, 1992), the supernatural invasion movie (Tudor, 1995), "an invasion-metamorphosis narrative of the paranoid horror film class" (Ballon & Leszcz, 2007, p. 227). A formula is not just founded upon narrative, but also on several constitutive elements within the narrative. In this section, I use previous films and scholarship to map out the following constitutive elements of the exorcism narrative: *characters*, *setting, plot*, and *theme*.

Characters

Typical horror film characters include victims, monsters, and experts (Tudor, 1989). Victims in exorcism films are often young female main characters in close proximity to puberty (Clover, 1992; Creed, 1993; Renner, 2011; Tudor, 1995). Yet the possessed may also be an older woman (*The Devil Inside, The Conjuring*), or even a man (*The Rite*). Renner (2011) identifies the possessed child as a specific type of character related to the larger category of "evil children" in film and literature (*The Omen, The Bad Seed*).

The threat is not necessarily a character, but certainly causes chaos and disorder. In the exorcism film, the threat is often a malicious, invading spirit. Possession stories reach back to biblical stories of Satan and demons. Yet, not all possession narratives are religious and include ghosts or the deceased as invading entities (Renner, 2011). Some possession narratives feature dybbuks—spirits of dislocated souls described in Jewish mythology (Legutko, 2010).

A secondary threat in the exorcism film is the failure of institutions. Films like *Requiem* (2007) and *Emily Rose* (2005) focus on the hospital's failure to identify and ameliorate perceived problems. The threat is not necessarily a monster, but rather secular "monsters." Feminist

readings in particular consider patriarchy, its institutions, and its practices oppressive threats

(Creed, 1993; Legutko, 2010). Further, masculine-oriented frameworks are quick to value *any*

invasion as unwelcome. Legutko (2010) notes two types of possession: negative and positive.

Negative possession is the traditional notion of an invading (unwelcome) force, such as a demon,

with evil intentions. Positive possession, however, can often feature welcoming a positive entity,

such as an angel or spiritual guide—a distinction that undermines several traditional notions of

perceived threat.

Distinction between victim and threat is peculiar with possession since the threat often

rests inside the victim. The threat is not just the demon, but the possessed woman influenced by

the invading spirit. The possessed woman operates as a "fusion character" in which two

conflicting entities compete across the same body: "conflicting themes are yoked together in one,

spatio-temporally unified figure" (Carroll, 1981, p. 19). Possessed characters embody conflict.

For instance, Phillips (2005) recognizes Regan's possessed body as a site of struggle between

demonic and higher powers. Carroll (1981), however, argues that Regan's possession is an

expression of infantile rage, highlighted by her incivility, despite her upbringing. Carroll (1981)

interprets Regan's possession as a symptom of puberty—the transition between two conflicting

eras: child and adult.

Experts are often the genre's "heroes" (Tudor, 1989, p. 113). Experts in the exorcism film

may come in various forms, such as a doctor, but primarily manifest in the faith healer, often a

Catholic priest. Tudor (1989, 1997) never fully defines the expert, but implies experts are

recognized by their abilities to offer specialized knowledges to quell the threat. A large portion

of the exorcism narrative vests in locating proper expertise. Chris and Regan whisk through

several experts and procedures to locate the threat. Medical experts, such as physicians and

psychologists, are often ineffective in locating and treating the threat in exorcism films. As Phillips (2005) notes, not until "Karras abandons his psychiatric training and reclaims his religious faith is he able to resolve Regan's crisis and vanquish the demon" (p. 116). Characters' anxiety emerges from their inability to locate the threat. Not until the latter half of exorcism films are main characters able to locate an effective expert to drive out the invading force.

Setting

Exorcism narratives primarily take place in the home, which may be why possession films are commonly categorized as "family horror" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2001, p. 105). Scholars have paid little attention to the location of the events, even though location is integral to the narrative. Contemporary exorcism films are often set in the United States. Exorcism rituals are performed in the possessed woman's home—specifically her bedroom. The American home, as a distinct setting, is directly related to the formation of family horror—a generic convergence of horror and family melodrama that emerged after the release of *Psycho* (Sobchack, 1996). While early gothic horror threats resided in European castles, horror in post-1960 was increasingly found in the American home.

Recent exorcism films are typically set in rural locations. Though *The Exorcist* was set in Georgetown and characterizes evil originating from the Middle East, contemporary exorcism films often stage possession and exorcism outside of the city. *Last Exorcism* points to Cotton's journey from the suburbs of Baton Rouge to the depths of the Louisiana bayou. *Emily Rose* and *Requiem* highlight the young woman's transition to the city that opens up the young woman to new threats. Clover (1992) finds the tension between the city and country as old as Little Red Riding Hood, a tale that suggests the farther one strays from society, the closer one engages what

is "beyond social law" (p. 125). The countryside, or the edge of town, is ripe for the type of sideshow found within the exorcism film.

Plot

Possession and exorcism narratives (although distinct) employ strikingly similar and consistent sequences. Renner (2011) finds that possessed child narratives are created in such a way that young girls are frequently the victim, "and such stories often culminate in an exorcism which may or may not succeed" (p. 179). If such stories consistently culminate in a final exorcism scene, why are these not recognized as exorcism narratives? Possession is only part of the exorcism story. The confrontational exorcism is not the sole defining feature, but it is certainly one of the main *attractions* for anticipating viewers.

The exorcism film thrives on the discovery plot. Carroll (1981) claims that *The Exorcist* uses the discovery plot and outlines four essential components: the film establishes the monster's presence; the monster's existence is discovered by an individual or group but the threat is not acknowledged by the powers that be; the individual/group convinces the powers that be that a threat exists; and characters confront the threat.

Possession narratives often do not begin with possession, but rather spend substantial time establishing ordinary life; the narratives are structured to allow viewers to see the possessed before, during, and after transformation (Renner, 2011). Once the norms of the family are established, characters generate horror when they engage in behavior that is "cruel, violent, and, for girls, often sexually suggestive" (Renner, 2011, p. 177). The possession narrative aims to bring the family back together, highlighting its disintegration (Renner, 2011). Thus, familial dysfunction plays a distinct role in the child's vulnerability to possession and influence.

The exorcism plot feeds off of the established possession narrative, which Renner (2011) defines as "a supernatural entity of some kind embodies or influences one of the living, compelling the victim to act in malicious, disturbing, or at least uncharacteristic ways" (p. 179). The description of possession omits any indication of how to *rid* the invading spirit. Too often exorcisms plots are couched within the realm of possession narratives, leaving the actual practice of exorcism implicit.

Clover (1992) suggests that the exorcism plot is a particular sector of the possession subgenre featuring a distinct set of plotlines: male in crisis *and* female possessed. Male in crisis focuses on the transformation of a rational man using the tools of White Science to a man taking on a mystical perspective and employing the tools of Black Magic to save the possessed woman (Clover, 1992). Many films necessitate exorcism as the specific device for treating possession; possession is merely one half of the exorcism plot. Renner (2011) explains that the male in crisis storyline is still at work in *The Last Exorcism* (2010) in which Cotton Marcus begins his quest in exposing exorcism as a scam, but eventually resorts to mystical methods to confront the demonic entity. Male in crisis and female possessed are two theoretically rich concepts that fuel analysis in this study.

Conclusions are the most variable components of exorcism narratives. For instance, in select Jewish literature, the possessed typically dies (Legutko, 2010). In contemporary horror films, some follow the model of *The Exorcist*, in which the possessed is saved and the family unit is restored (*The Conjuring, Stigmata, The Possession*). Other exorcism films feature conclusions in which the possessed is restored but the family is not the same (*The Unborn, Season of the Witch*), the possessed dies (*The Exorcism of Emily Rose, The Shrine, The Devil Inside, The Exorcist: The Beginning*), exorcism is rendered ineffective (*The Last Exorcism*),

exorcism is oppressive (*V/H/S, Requiem*), exorcism is unnecessary (*The Last Exorcism: Part 2*), or exorcism never comes to fruition (*REC 2*).

Theme

Two major themes from *The Exorcist* and previous research include: *the family* and *sexual difference*. Exorcism narratives are often characterized by the breakdown of the family (Bordwell & Thompson, 1985; Phillips, 2005; Renner 2011). "Family horror" films of the 1970s, like *The Amityville Horror* and *The Exorcist*, came to "reflect social concerns about the break up of American families" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2001, p. 105). *The Exorcist's* historical context, for instance, challenged established notions of the traditional nuclear family: "Americans in the 1970s held an uneasy view of children . . . traditional marriage and the responsibilities of children infringed on the new self-oriented middle class ethic" (Phillips, 2005, p. 109). Fissures in the family facilitate the child's susceptibility to possession: "children are vulnerable to dangerous influences when traditional family structures are damaged and parents are negligent in their duties" (Renner, 2011, p. 180). The family unit is the established structure, which the invading threat may destroy.

Yet, whether the threat is supernatural or secular is often a point of contention for exorcism narratives. Although threats often manifest in the supernatural, the root causes are often interpreted as secular, such as parental absence, divorce, and women entering the work force. Most often, the threat is a complex combination of the two. Renner (2011) points to *The Exorcist's* original novel text and argues that poor family structures allowed supernatural forces to invade the home. The demon faults Chris for becoming consumed with her work: "It is *you* who have done it! Yes, *you* with your career before *anything*, your career before your *husband*, before *her*" (Blatty, 1971, p. 349, emphasis in original). Regan's innocence is further evidenced

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by her supernatural 360 head spin and levitation, proving that she is "temporary puppet of a malevolent force" (Renner, 2011, p. 181). The breakdown of the family is thus both cause and symptom of possession—echoing Sobchack's (1996) shift in focus in horror cinema from terrorizing child to child terrorized.

An unstable family and a vulnerable child lead to another distinct focus for the exorcism narrative: parental crisis. Building off of Clover's male in crisis, Renner (2011) argues: "it is also a narrative of *parental* crisis, a probing of the dynamics behind the failure of the family and proposal for a remedy" (p. 180, emphasis in original). For Renner (2011), the possessed child narrative: "performs important ideological work that has less to do with the child—who in many ways remains an innocent figure taken advantage of by a more powerful spirit—and more to do with his or her parents" (p. 179). Thus, the breakdown of the family and the struggle to restore the possessed young woman places emphasis on a parental crisis.

The second major theme emerging from exorcism narratives deals with sexual difference. In terms of both structure and content, exorcism tales are decidedly gendered. For example, Clover's (1992) set of typical possession storylines (male in crisis and female possessed) are specified by gender. Legutko's (2010) analysis of dybbuk possession narratives by post-second wave feminist Jewish women authors notes three prevailing components: 1.) emphasis on the possessed, rather than the exorcist, 2.) address of second wave issues rather than marriage, and 3.) use of humor—all of which were not previously found in male-dominated authorship. Legutko (2010) also highlights distinct feminine approaches to exorcism: "The female exorcism is initially gentle, full of compassion and understanding for the suffering dybbuk. It is a joint effort: they offer the dybbuk a soothing song, food, advice as if they were consoling a close friend" (p.

14). Such work begs researchers to consider the implications of sexual difference and the gendered nature of exorcism.

Mapping out generative instances of feminism in possession narratives may allow scholars to shift focus from women as objectified victims to "agents who use their bodies in order to challenge the power relationships in society" (Legutko, 2010, p. 12). A feminist reading may interpret behaviors associated with possession as a means to confound the male-established symbolic order. The unruly body, then, is not a symbol of victimhood but of resistance, autonomy, and authority. For Creed (1993), while the young woman's unruly behavior may be read as a threat to the family or patriarchy, the disciplining of female bodies through exorcism may also be read as oppressive rather than generative. The films selected for this study are all written and directed by men. Legutko (2010) calls for deeper consideration of *authorship* with possession and exorcism narratives. Male-centered perspectives privilege the male-in-crisis and the compulsion to save the young woman in distress (Blakely, 2010).

Feminist readings also provide means to identify instances when exorcisms extend beyond the male-established symbolic order. Some of these extensions include opportunities to act out or perform resistance to societal norms. For example, Legutko (2010) points to An-sky's dybbuk narrative, in which main character Leah refuses to marry Menashe. This specific instance embodies an act that McIlvenny (2002) calls a 'negative performative' which challenges the "authority wielding" performatives uttered by men (Legutko, 2010, p. 12). Clearly, exorcism and possession narratives continue to wrestle with the established symbolic order, especially as it pertains to gender. Leah's resistance to being a "transaction between men" focuses on the notion of woman as commodity, as kinship was often decided between groups of men (Legutko, 2010, p. 12). These same themes are apparent in exorcism tales. But exorcism, distinct from cultural

exchange, is a *competition* over the woman's body as spiritual commodity. She is reduced to a spiritual battleground upon which men of the supernatural wage war to carry out their specific agendas. Previous scholarship finds exorcism narratives rife with several points of contest relevant to both sex and gender.

Narrative Formula in *The Exorcist*

Explicating a formula demands not only locating familiar formal elements (such as characters, setting, themes), but also narrative structures that shape generic expectations (Dika, 1990). *The Exorcist* (1973/2000) provides a sound framework for coding these particular sequences. To define the cinematic game emerging from the exorcism film, I identify seven recurring stages in exorcism narratives:

1. Recognition of the normal body

2. Suggestion of invading force

3. The body acts strangely

4. Attempt to diagnose (with failure)

5. Location of threat

6. Administration of methods to expel the threat

7. Restoration (optional)

The first stage establishes *the normal body*. Possession narratives do not begin with possession, but rather spend "considerable time developing the characters of these victims and their families" (Renner, 2011, p. 177). The first stage sets the tone of a normal family. The exorcism film utilizes the body metonymically; corporeality stands in for larger conflicts or ideas. The body refers to or may stand in for particular institutions, and by doing so, contributes to discourse (Frank, 1990). In *The Exorcist*, Regan's body functions metonymically for the

American home, or the state of the family. Phillips (2005) argues that *The Exorcist* "frames the body as a site for a higher struggle" (p. 116).

Recognizing the normalized body involves acknowledging the sets of norms which are constituted and inscribed through bodies, corporeal ability, or bodily behavior. Indeed, theorists like Judith Butler (2008) remind us that notions of standard bodily behavior, such as gender, are naturalized from reiterated performances of the body. Cultural scripts and standards for both men and women are constituted through such bodily performance. The exorcism film's horror emerges from the disruption of the normalized body. For example, *The Exorcist* privileges the traditional nuclear family and points to Regan's possession as a stand-in for the "decline" of the family (Phillips, 2005). Body representation performs ideologically—giving flesh to standards and excesses that fall outside such sanctioned ideals. Thus, the first component of the exorcism narrative establishes normative behavior for a young girl's body, as well as the state of the stable family. The beginning of *The Exorcist* features scenes that allow viewers to grasp the nature of Chris and Regan's relationship. They share the events of their days; they disclose observations of each other's lives; Chris and Regan embody a healthy mother-daughter relationship.

The second stage is a *suggestion of an invading force*. Horror film narratives typically employ a structure of *order-disorder-order* (Tudor, 1989). The first narrative step establishes the normal order while the second step marks the brink of disorder—on individual and collective bodies. Often subtle, the invading force or "the threat" is what brings about disorder (Tudor, 1989). Characters (and viewers) may not immediately recognize the invasion of an insidious force. For example, Chris finds Regan's bedroom window wide open—symbolizing openness and vulnerability—and quickly closes it. This sequence is followed by strange sounds coming

from the attic. "We've got rats in the attic," Chris claims. These brief instances, I argue, are suggestions of invading forces.

Invasion typically occurs with female bodies, which theorists describe (within narrative context) as open-ended, subject to being invaded, scrutinized, and housing other life (Clover, 1992; Pateman, 1988; Tudor, 1995). Extraordinary circumstances in the family unit, such as the death of a parent or relocation to a new house, produce permeable entry points for the invading force. As Renner (2011) argues, the "breakdown of the family unit" creates gaps, leaving the child vulnerable to the influence and invasion (p. 177). The absence of Regan's father, for example, is an entry point for an invading force. Meddling with the supernatural may also inadvertently produce fissures, or worse, invitations for invading threats. Regan's interaction with a Ouija board invites an entity named "Captain Howdy" to invade their home. Thus, the second step in the narrative formula highlights points of entry and unusual permeability.

Third, after the threat invades, *the body acts strangely*. A defining feature of the exorcism film is a possessed body (corporeal flesh) engaging in behavior that ranges from the culturally taboo to the physiologically impossible. Bodies are significant beyond the terms of the film's narrative and extend to the social realm of the viewers. Douglas (1970) reminds us "the human body is always treated as an image of society and that there can be no natural way of considering the body that does not involve at the same time a social dimension" (p. 70). Thus, characters' bodies inherently negotiate the discursive possibilities of various subject matters.

Additionally, the house and the body often stand in for each other. As Creed (1993) writes, "The symbolization of the womb as house/room/cellar or any other enclosed space is central to the iconography of the horror film" (p. 55). England (2006) writes that the body and the house share an intimate relationship in supernatural horror films. When transgressive, the

body/the house may temporarily undermine patriarchal coding of space, but ultimately, each "reinscribes patriarchal gender codings of space" (p 353). Thus, the body and the home are inescapably linked. In the exorcism film, changes in the house may manifest through the body acting strangely, such as unusual sounds, smells, or temperatures. Regan complains, "My bed was shaking. I can't get to sleep" (*The Exorcist*, 1973). As the invading force makes its way into the young woman, she embodies disorder and behaves disorderly. Initial changes may appear as mild illness, but strange behavior grows exponentially with time. Strange events begin at a dinner party when Regan tells an astronaut, "You're going to die up there," and urinates on the carpet. Chris quickly takes Regan to her room. The window is wide open again—reaffirming that the invading force has made entry.

The exorcism film's spectacles derive from unusual behavior of the house and of possessed bodies. The McNeil's physician comments on Regan's use of swearing—very uncharacteristic for Chris's daughter. Regan's behavior in *The Exorcist* consistently escalates, but the body acting strangely does not necessarily remain consistent. Strange behavior may manifest in cycles (which some may interpret as allusions to hysteria or sexual difference).

Increasingly violent behavior prompts supporting characters to advance to the fourth stage, *attempt to diagnose (with failure)*. Exorcism narratives participate in family horror discourse, often featuring the possessed surrounded by befuddled family members who must locate the perceived threat. Diagnosis is a harrowing stage of disorientation that prompts several questions: What is causing this behavior? Is she faking it? If it is a demon, why is *she* selected? Characters also typically fail to diagnose the problem because they lack the correct expertise. In *The Exorcist*, doctors cannot effectively isolate the answer. Tests show up negative. Failure to diagnose exposes the socially constructed legitimacy of medical expertise. The confounding

nature of possession challenges established secular institutions. The failure of traditional White Science (as Clover puts it) forces the family to resort to more experimental and alternative measures rooted in Black Magic, including Catholic exorcism (Clover, 1992).

The failure to diagnose also manifests in misdiagnosis, which may lead to inappropriate medications and treatment. Regan is prescribed Ritalin (a stimulant) to combat the nerves of adolescence, but Chris suspects that Regan may benefit from a psychiatrist. The physician insists on Ritalin, which only amplifies Regan's symptoms.

Attempting to diagnose the problem also marks the highly tenuous relationships between bodies, institutions, and discourses. Effectively interpreting root causes of erratic behavior within a particular institution may prove rather difficult. Meaning making vastly changes with respect to the institutional authority that interprets bodily behavior. Thus, the physician, the priest, and the mother all formulate varying interpretations—contributing to the effects of disorientation. The ritual exorcism eventually emerges as the effective course of action, especially after the failure of physicians and other specialists.

Anxiety also emerges from strict adherence to a particular treatment, especially when the phenomena have been completely misread. Authorities of respective fields (all with good intentions) utilize aggressive treatment, which advances from excessive to oppressive. Treatment is a major point of contest for exorcism narratives since the very nature of possession is also contested. With many exorcism narratives placing emphasis on sexual difference (in bodies, practices, and worldviews) it comes as no surprise that the institutions saturated with patriarchy may be read as oppressive, while the unruly female body may emerge as a sign of liberation. The failure to diagnose also embodies what Renner (2011) calls the *parental crisis*, that not only

refs to the state of helplessness that Chris McNeil experiences, but also implies that the state of their family unit is what allowed her daughter's possession to take place.

The exorcism narrative's fifth stage is *location of the threat*. Pursuit of an effective remedy eventually brings central characters to an established expert in a religious field who effectively identifies the threat. After seeking help from a physician and a hypnotherapist, Chris places her trust in Damien Karras, who invests substantial time collecting empirical proof of Regan's demonic possession. Exorcists are required to utilize the utmost discretion when proceeding with cases of exorcism. Karras sits across from a restrained possessed Regan and begins an informal interview utilizing a recording device. Not until later that evening, when he realizes that Regan's recorded speech is actually English in reverse, is he convinced he has located the threat. Locating the threat is significant because it provides hope to the bereaved that their loved one has a chance at recovery. Tudor (1989) notes the futility of established experts in paranoid horror—contributing to the narrative's instability. In secure horror, however, experts effectively locate and quell the threat.

Properly identifying the threat also reassures the spectator that the narrative's ontology is stabilized. Postmodern horror films produce anxiety by what I will call ontological slippage. Viewers believe they are secure in a particular set of assumptions, but the slip comes from the reveal that not everything is what it seems. M. Night Shyamalan made a career out of the ontological slip, or what many referred to as a "twist" ending. After establishing characters with depth and building detailed life worlds, the "twist" moment asks the audience to reevaluate the entire scenario. This process of reevaluation is found in exorcism films. The oscillation between institutions like the clinic, the church, and home reinforce the motif of uncertainty. But films like

Emily Rose and *Last Exorcism* generate uncertainty by posing the central question: is the possessed woman faking it?

The sixth stage, *administering methods to expel the threat*, refers to the specific training and equipment qualified experts use to effectively drive out the threat. Purging the threat is most effectively achieved through exorcism. The man of God uses a Holy Bible, the rite of exorcism, a cross, customary cincture, and holy water. This ensemble has been criticized in feminist readings as theatrical and excessive (Legutko, 2010). Legutko (2010) frames the use of traditional garb and incantation as a painfully masculine way of approaching exorcism and provides several new possibilities for representation, such as the feminine exorcism, which resists the aggressive, dominating exorcism and focuses on dialogue, communion, and support.

The exorcist's methods are always under high scrutiny because the narrative stakes are so high. Regan's life depends on Father Karras and Father Merrin. Exorcists are cautioned not to reason or dialogue with the demon—which is curious since dialogue is a central component of psychotherapy and Legutko's (2010) feminine exorcism. Exorcism is a process and its effectiveness does not typically manifest in one session. Karras and Merrin engage exorcism rituals multiple times.

Methods to expel the threat also come from a variety of angles, which inculcate discussion of "experts" and texts that attempt to control the discursive possibilities of treatment. Although *The Exorcist* firmly stabilizes Roman Catholic ritual as the sole effective treatment, I will show how other films attempt to expand the notions of effective treatments. Ultimately, the exorcism film marks the inefficiency of scientific methods and the fragility of those possessed.

The final (optional) stage is *restoration*, which highlights a return to normalcy. Merrin passes away before the exorcism is complete. Ultimately Father Karras is the one to effectively

transfer the demon to himself before leaping to his death. Although secure horror narratives

return to a state of order, paranoid horror films often incorporate open endings, denying narrative

closure (Tudor, 1995). Paranoid or postmodern horror films may not feature a restoration phase,

but rather, may feature the possessed continuing to madness until she passes away from

malnutrition (*Emily Rose*). In rare cases, the possessed embraces the evil within and carries on

(*The Last Exorcism: Part 2*). Regan is indeed restored and she seems unaware of the events that

transpired during her possession. The young woman reclaims identification with her body, and

similarly, the family regains cohesion. *The Exorcist* features experts who effectively restore

familial order for the McNeils.

Spectacle Horror in *The Exorcist*

Spectacle horror solicits the viewer through film construction. Direct address of the

audience typically manifests through a "cinema showman," who offers exciting spectacles

(Gunning, 1986). For instance, the cinema showman beckons audience attention in movie trailers.

The original trailer for *The Exorcist* features a narrator (showman) directly addressing viewers:

"Somewhere between science and superstition lives another world. The world of darkness.

Nobody believed it. And no one could stop it" ([ryy79], 2009). The cinema showman solicits our

attention with a promise to show us a glimpse into this world of darkness. The trailer teases with

quick cuts of Regan's behavior, and the climax offers a peak of objects swirling around Regan's

bedroom. The trailer promises a good show, but in true vaudevillian, side-show style, the

preview incites curiosity and encourages viewers to pay the price of admission to witness more.

This example illustrates techniques associated with attractions. The trailer's effectiveness is all

the more typified as the film is based on the best-selling novel. Audience members anticipated

seeing spectacular scenes in literature dramatized in film.

Second, the cinema of attractions creates an interactive relationship with the audience member or spectator. Attractions establish contact with the viewer through a plethora of devices and strategies, such as the "recurring look at the camera by actors" (Gunning, 1986, p. 64). The soliciting gesture draws the viewer from passive consumer to active participant. "From comedians smirking at the camera, to the constant bowing and gesturing of the conjurors in magic films, this is a cinema that displays its visibility, willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator" (Gunning, 1986, p. 64). Thus, techniques associated with attractions help construct the interactive film-viewer relationship found in spectacle horror.

Spectacle horror foregrounds attractions. Elements of character or narrative become, as Méliès himself claimed, "a pretext for the 'stage effects,' the 'tricks,' or for a nicely arranged tableau" (as quoted in Gunning, 1986, p. 64). Yet, spectacle horror recognizes that attractions can operate effectively within the conventions of narrative. Since the exorcism film effectively incorporates family melodrama with spectacular attractions of demonic possession and exorcism, spectacle horror is a useful framework. After considering Lowenstein's spectacle horror and its techniques, I identify repeated elements of spectacle horror at work in the exorcism film. The familiarity with attractions allows us to understand how exorcism films utilize familiar iconography and spectacular sequences to produce and adhere to an exorcism formula.

The Exorcist is the foundational template for identifying types of spectacle horror in exorcism films, but I will also refer to other films to bolster justification for drawing attention to these techniques. A resounding connection between cinema of attractions and the exorcism film lies with the representation of bodies, particularly bodies that contort.

Contortionist as Exorcism Attraction

Our journey begins at the carnival sideshow. Gunning (1986) argues that the cinema of attractions rivals the fairgrounds more than conventional theater: "The relation between films and the emergence of the great amusement parks, such as Coney Island, at the turn of the century provides rich ground for rethinking the roots of the early cinema" (p. 65). As the cinema of attractions often engages in vaudeville, it is no surprise that the main attraction of the exorcism film is directly related to an irreplaceable staple of the sideshow, the contortionist.

The contortionist remains a classic sideshow attraction. Yet, little academic attention has read the possessed body in such terms within the exorcism film—despite contortion prevailing as one of its most central attractions. In fact, an actress was hired to play in *The Devil Inside* (2012), specifically because of her contortion abilities (Cook, 2012). Of all *The Exorcist*'s special effects, the most memorable were Regan's contortions, such as the infamous 360° head spin.

Why was there a sudden rise of exorcism movies in the 21st century even though *The Exorcist* was released decades before? The answer may begin with the release of *The Exorcist: A Version You've Never Seen* (2000), which features a previously deleted scene of contortionist Linda R. Hager performing the infamous "spider-walk" down the flight of stairs (Kermode, 2003, p. 92). This moment, I argue, set a firm precedent for the use of bodily contortion as an *attraction* in the exorcism film. Previous scholarship finds Regan's body significant because it is unruly, rebellious, and serves as a battleground for higher discourses and agendas. But few scholars have discussed Regan's contortions as a fundamental element of the exorcism film's iconography. Although Regan's body contorts in the original release of *The Exorcist* (1973), the deleted "spider walk" scene typified bodily contortion as central to the exorcism film formula.

The young girl contorting her body in unnatural ways would come to be one of the major spectacles of exorcism films.

One recent overt use of contortion is in *The Last Exorcism: Part 2* (2013) movie poster, in which the possessed Nell is not only bent over backwards with her hand writhing (evoking images of physical disability), but she is positioned in such a way that her body and shadow comprise an overall image of the number "2". The cinema of attractions "directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity" (Gunning, 1990, p. 58). Nell's peculiar bending over backwards, her violent facial expression, and the overall composition of her body forming a "2" directly addresses the viewer. This positioning implicitly asks the viewer: "Can you see it?" Such uses of the body extend beyond conventional readings and may be interpreted as performative. Nell's body becomes spectacular and performative as it solicits and gestures toward the viewer. Thus, I argue that the use of bodily contortion is one of the exorcism film's main cinematic attractions.

Though many vaudeville strategies, such as direct communication with the spectactor, became taboo with the rise of the narrative, "the system of attraction remains an essential part of popular filmmaking" (Gunning, 1986, p. 68). Vaudeville endures as an integral part of the horror film. Adams (2001) points to Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932) as a crucial moment in the film industry wherein, by engaging spectacle aesthetic, the director invites viewers to confront negative views of bodily difference: "*Freaks* is structured to reproduce, not counteract, the sideshow's transformation of bodily difference into freakish spectacle" (p. 67). The cinema of attractions, then, has a confrontational power that asks viewers to consider and possibly re-consider a subject. Adams (2001) argues that the structure of attractions is what allowed Browning to succeed in "decoupling disability from freakishness by demanding a more

engaged—and potentially sensitive—mode of viewing in the audience" (p. 68). Thus, this study asks how the exorcism film utilizes bodily contortion and other spectacular acts to confront audiences with bodies of difference.

I argue that bodily contortions are attractions specifically constructed to directly engage audience members. The character does not contort just because she is possessed. The performer contorts because it puts on a good show. Viewers are not encouraged to seek narrative immersion, but to maintain aesthetic distance, to stand at a distance in shock and awe, repulsion and attraction. Possession and contortion are ruptural performances that confound the status quo (while simultaneously adhering to the conventions of their own formulas). Such bodily contortions prompt us *not* to engage in traditional forms of identification, but rather to engage with spectacle as a particular type of event. "Stand back ladies and gentlemen." Spectators know that she will contort her body, but *when* and *how* she does it is bound within the familiarity of the exorcism formula. Viewers are encouraged to engage in a cinematic game, which requires some aesthetic distance, rather than prioritizing immersion in the psyches of the characters. Thus, bodily contortion in the exorcism subgenre is a form of spectacle horror.

Transformation

Transformation of the possessed bodies is a fundamental trope of the exorcism film, but transformation is also a key element in the cinema of attractions:

> The trick film . . . is itself a series of displays, of magical attractions, rather than a primitive sketch of narrative continuity. Many trick films are, in effect, plotless, a series of transformations strung together with little connection and certainly no characterization. But to approach even the plotted trick films…simply as precursors of later narrative structures is to miss the point. The story simply provides a frame upon which to string a demonstration of the magical possibilities of the cinema" (Gunning, 1986, p. 65).

Transformation showcases technological advances of the time. Early film itself was an attraction: "Early audiences went to exhibitions to see machines demonstrated, (the newest technological

wonder. . .) rather than to view films" (Gunning, 1986, p. 66). The horror film continues to be a venue for exploring the latest technological wonder, from props and makeup like the work of legendary Tom Savini (Skal, 2001) to the rise of computer graphic interface (CGI). At the time of its release, *The Exorcist* was known for its remarkable special effects. Regan's levitation and head rotation stand out as some of the most cited and referenced instances of movie magic (Brophy, 2000). In light of recent fascination with found footage and mockumentary styles, *Last Exorcism* experiments with the possibilities of technology and representation through dynamic and immediate interactions with the camera.

The significance of transformation is not limited to just the body, but also in film construction. Transformation was fundamental for the trick film. Thus, the exorcism film is a type of trick film. The spectacle of seeing the "appalling transformations" of the young woman's body is one of the main attractions for the exorcism film (Paul, 1994, p. 293). Thus, scholars must re-engage the exorcism film with an aesthetic of attractions in order to uncover the exorcism film's engagements with audience members. By doing so, scholars may be able to locate the more dynamic interactions between performer, text, audience, and event.

In this chapter, I provided a review of literature to effectively analyze *The Exorcist* and other materials related to the exorcism film to generate a paradigmatic example. I first discussed how formulas of the film industry impact genre. Second, I discussed spectacle horror as a means of extending discussion beyond terms of identification. Third, I proposed *The Exorcist* as paradigmatic example by explicating its constitutive elements. Fourth, I offered a narrative formula of the exorcism film through *The Exorcist*. Finally, I demonstrated spectacle horror's applicability to *The Exorcist.* With *The Exorcist* serving as the paradigmatic example, the next three chapters apply these frameworks to three individual case studies.

CHAPTER 3
CASE #1: *THE EXORCISM OF EMILY ROSE* (2005)

The Exorcism of Emily Rose (2005) is a supernatural horror film directed by Scott

Derrickson (*The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Sinister*) based on true events related to the Anneliese

Michel case in the 1970s. The film earned over $75 million in domestic box office sales and

nearly $70 million internationally (a grand total of over $144 million) (The Exorcism of Emily

Rose – Box Office Mojo, 2014). The film received a 45% rating from Rotten Tomatoes:

"Loosely based on a true story, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* mixes compelling courtroom drama

with generally gore-free scares in a ho-hum take on demonic cinema" (The Exorcism of Emily

Rose – Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.). Although the film received a relatively mid-level rating in its

respective time, *Emily Rose* was the most successful exorcism film (critically and commercially)

to emerge since *The Exorcist*. In the wake of two box office flop *Exorcist* prequels, *Emily Rose*

offered an invigorating take on a historical case of exorcism. A similar film released in Germany,

Requiem (2006), was based on the same Michel case. *Requiem* received high reviews but did not

generate the same box office income.

Shot as a courtroom drama, *Emily Rose* fostered a public debate over the exorcism

controversy. The inquiry from medical, religious, and judicial perspectives dramatized a degree

of skepticism not previously portrayed in an exorcism film. *Emily Rose* unfolds through a

fragmented series of flashbacks incited from witness testimony and expert opinion. Distinct from

The Exorcist, which took a clear turn toward the divine, *Emily Rose* asked viewers to "Witness

the disturbing story . . . that will make you question . . . all of your beliefs" (Yorn & Derrickson,

2005). The film constructs horror through demonic possession and existential crisis. Thus, *The

Exorcism of Emily Rose* forces audiences to consider multiple perspectives and engage in critical

thought over the evidence presented.

<center>**Synopsis**</center>

The film opens with a medical examiner visiting the Rose homestead. Emily Rose (Jennifer Carpenter) has passed away, and the examiner cannot conclusively state that Emily died from natural causes. Parish priest Father Moore (Tom Wilkinson), who performed an exorcism on Emily Rose, is brought in under criminal charges for her death.

Erin Bruner (Laura Linney), a young star lawyer, wants to boost her career by taking on the high profile case. The Archdiocese requests Bruner for damage control: to keep Moore from taking the stand and tarnishing the image of the Catholic Church. Moore does not believe Bruner is fit to represent him, nor is he interested in a plea bargain. He only wants to share Emily's story. They come to an agreement: Bruner will let Moore take the stand if she is allowed free reign in making choices to win the case.

Bruner then meets with lead prosecutor Ethan Thomas. They decide to move to trial, and she begins work at home. That night, Bruner's clock stops at 3 A.M. The next day, she notices her watch stopped at 3 A.M. Thomas's opening arguments frame Father Moore as solely responsible for Emily's death. She was only 19. The story is told in flashbacks. As Bruner and Thomas provide statements and question witnesses, the forensic (courtroom) approach dramatizes interpretations of evidence through stylized narrative renderings.

The first witness, Dr. Edith Vogel, describes Emily's first episode: it is 3 A.M. in Emily's dorm room and her roommate is gone for the weekend. Objects on her desk begin to move. Her bed creaks. Emily writhes as if something is pushing her body down. When she regains control, she wails and storms out of her dormitory. Dr. Mueller, head of the university neurological division, follows Vogel's testimony. He believes Emily had epilepsy. She was prescribed the medication Gambutrol, but Emily and Father Moore believed the problem was spiritual. Bruner

<center>53</center>

undercuts Mueller's rendering of the events and suggests that Mueller has simply selected bits of evidence to fit his epilepsy diagnosis.

Father Moore warns Bruner that there are spiritual forces battling around the case. He recalls Emily's progression with Gambutrol: Emily is sent to the hospital for testing and observation. She sees flashes of demonic faces. She withstands a series of convulsions; her body writhes in pain. Emily's boyfriend, Jason describes Emily's progression further: During a class test, Emily sees demonic faces outside. Her classmate's face becomes demonic. Emily reacts hysterically. She runs out of the classroom and down the street. The faces of passersby change. Emily heads for the chapel. Jason follows and finds Emily bent over backwards, pupils dilated. Meanwhile, strange events unfold at Bruner's apartment. The clock stops ticking; the power goes out; the front door opens on its own. Father Moore senses an unwelcome force in his cell and calls upon Michael, the archangel.

Dr. Briggs, an expert in neurology and psychiatry, interprets Emily's death to be caused by a gradual shutdown of her body from malnutrition and the inability of her body to recover from traumas. He offers a near perfect medical explanation for Emily's behaviors, including his term "psychotic epileptic disorder," and ultimately concludes that if Emily had taken the Gambutrol, she would still be alive.

As the doctors' testimonies give Thomas the upper hand, Bruner argues that the established doctors have utterly failed to reach Emily. She then calls on Dr. Adani, an anthropologist specializing in cases of demonic possession who utilizes medical perspectives to validate possession—not to debunk it. Dr. Adani describes Emily as a hypersensitive, someone with a strong connection to the spiritual realm. Adani claims Emily was invaded by an entity from the supernatural realm. Adani further argues that Gambutrol caused Emily's death because

it rendered Emily immune to the exorcism. Adani demonstrates that what appeared to be an obvious solution to Emily's recovery was ultimately what contributed to her death.

Mr. Rose shares his account: He finds Emily eating insects in her bedroom. When Father Moore arrives, he asks Emily if she can hear him. A deep voice replies, "I am the one who dwells within." Emily shows clear signs of possession. Father Moore leaves to seek permission from the Catholic Church to perform an exorcism.

Meanwhile, Bruner makes contact with Dr. Cartwright, the doctor present during Emily's exorcism. Cartwright offers a tape recorder used the night of the exorcism. He is convinced that Emily was not suffering from a mental disorder, and he is prepared to testify.

Father Moore takes the stand to share Emily's story. The exorcism begins in Emily's bedroom on Halloween. She breaks through her restraints and runs toward the barn behind the house. When resuming the exorcism, Moore discovers that six demons reside inside Emily: the demons of humans Cain, Nero, and Judas Iscariot and the demons Legion, Belial, and Lucifer— each speaking its native language.

Dr. Cartwright does not appear to testify. Bruner finds him outside the courthouse, and he apologizes for backing out. As he leaves, he is killed by an oncoming car. With her main witness dead, Bruner asks Moore to return to the stand. Moore recounts the letter that Emily wrote after her exorcism, which details a vision she had before her death. Emily describes a conversation with God in which she could choose to die or become proof that God and the devil exist. Moore explains that she received stigmata, a mark from God himself. For Thomas, Emily simply injured her hands on a barbed wire fence. Moore is ultimately found guilty, but the jury makes a recommendation for time served. Bruner is offered a position at her firm, but turns it down. She

accompanies Moore to Emily's grave displaying Phillipians 2:12: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

Historical Context

Emily Rose has a close relationship with history. The film draws heavily from a variety of actual exorcism cases, but a majority of the film is inspired by the Anneliese Michel case:

> According to court findings, [Anneliese Michel] experienced her first epileptic attack in 1969, and by 1973 was suffering from depression and considering suicide. Soon she was seeing the faces of demons on the people and things around her, and voices told her she was damned. Under the influence of her demons, Michel ripped the clothes off her body, compulsively performed up to 400 squats a day, crawled under a table and barked like a dog for two days, ate spiders and coal, bit the head off a dead bird and licked her own urine from the floor. By 1975 Michel was asking for an exorcism. (Hansen, 2005, p. N04)

Inspired by the Michel case, the film incorporated several specific details, such as the tape recorder and Emily's compulsive squats in her bedroom. In fact, the case of Anneliese Michel has had a tremendous impact on how popular culture deals with notions of contemporary exorcism (Goodman, 2005; Duffey, 2011). Just a few years after the release of *The Exorcist* (1973), the story of Anneliese Michel made waves as a potentially genuine case of demonic possession, treated with exorcism ritual, and culminating with the sentencing of her parents and two priests "guilty of negligent manslaughter . . . six months in prison, suspended with three years' probation" (Hansen, 2005, p. N04). The case forced the public to wrestle with questions of the supernatural and the ethics of treating possible epilepsy or demonic possession. The dialogues began with the Michel case and have only gained more salience in the last fifteen years.

Emily Rose references the surge of interest in exorcism in the 21st century. Father Moore's media spectacle alludes to several "botched" real world exorcisms, including the 2005 case of Sister Maricica Irina Cornici, an Orthodox Catholic Nun, in which the diagnosis of "schizophrenic psychosis," was used to explain her erratic behavior (Duffey, 2011, p. 163). With

substantial increase in the practice of contemporary exorcism, Duffey (2011) contends that exorcisms have become dangerous from lack of safety and discretion and characterizes priests as "all too ready" to resort to such practices (p. 165). For example, another case in 2004 involved an eight year old boy with autism, Terrance Cottrell, Jr., who died of asphyxiation during an exorcism (Duffey, 2011). Filmmakers drew from historical events and their accompanying texts to explore exorcism as a public problem—and to ask questions of liability.

  Emily Rose also marks a turning point for the exorcism subgenre because of its box office success and cultural impacts. In fact, Gleiberman (2013) goes to extensive lengths to demonstrate *Emily Rose*'s impact on the exorcism subgenre:

> As a culture, we're right in the middle of an exorcist moment. And we have been ever since the very, very scary day of Sept. 9, 2005. That's the day that *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* opened during the deadest week of the fall, and got savaged by critics, and still . . . amassed an astonishing $30 million . . . hell, along with its favorite resident, had just made a major movie comeback. The comeback was actually supposed to happen a year earlier, when Renny Harlin's dusty desert Satan prequel *Exorcist: The Beginning* — a remake of Paul Schrader's *Dominion*, which had initially been shelved — was released. But audiences didn't care for it much. *Exorcist: The Beginning* . . . scared up an indifferent box-office response. (para. 1-2)

Emily Rose succeeded (with critics and the box office) where the release of *Exorcist: The Beginning* (2004) miserably failed.

  Released just years after the September 11th attacks of 2001, *Emily Rose* stands as an example of 21st century horror. Wetmore (2012) notes that the accumulation of demonic cinema around 2000 set the backdrop for 9/11 as a definitive turning point in 21st century horror. The events contributed to the public adopting an apocalyptic mindset (Gunn, 2004). With this mindset came a resurgence of religious fundamentalism. Gleiberman (2013) argues that exorcism films began to sell especially well, beginning with *Emily Rose*, because they appealed to an Evangelical audience. In fact, director Scott Derrickson graduated from Biola University, a

private evangelical Christian liberal arts university (Derrickson, 2005). Gleiberman (2013) argues that "to evangelical audiences, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* wasn't just a horror bash – it was practically a documentary. And it opened the floodgates to a rash of exorcist films that have been playing out the primal clash of good and evil ever since" (Gleiberman, 2013, para. 3). Thus, the first decade of this century provided a cultural landscape characterized by vulnerability and a reconsideration of forces that exist beyond the secular world.

The frame of *Emily Rose* acknowledged audience skepticism and paranoia. The film served as a sharp contrast to the realism of *The Exorcist* by employing qualities associated with Pinedo's (1996) idea of postmodern horror and Tudor's (1989) notion of paranoid horror: ineffective experts, lack of narrative closure, unstable realities, monsters who win, and victims who die. Although some characterize *The Exorcist* as a paranoid film (Ballon & Leszcz, 2007), the narrative's reality is ultimately definitive. Regan was no doubt possessed because of the supernatural evidence: she levitated, she psychically removed her restraints, and her head spun a full rotation (Creed, 1993). Distinct from *The Exorcist*, *Emily Rose* makes no definitive commitments to the supernatural and features a main character who dies. Rather, *Emily Rose* indicated that child deaths associated with exorcism were increasingly becoming matters of the state. Roger Ebert's (2005) review notes that: "[the film] asks a secular institution, the court, to decide a question that hinges on matters the court cannot have an opinion on" (para. 6). Through clever staging, *Emily Rose* puts exorcism on trial.

Narrative Formula

Emily Rose reflects the refinement stage of the exorcism subgenre, in which "certain formal and stylistic details embellish the form" (Schatz, 1981, pp. 37-38). The film fulfills the exorcism narrative formula but does so through stylistic shifts in time. The film's courtroom

drama style introduces fragmented, disordered bits of narrative. Indeed, the film's characters seek to gather and order the fragments in a coherent manner; experts attempt to narrativize Emily's story—illuminating several fractures, interpretations, and points of contest. In this section, while occasionally referencing *The Exorcist*, I demonstrate how *Emily Rose* incorporates the exorcism narrative formula.

Viewers *recognize the normal body* through reconstruction of courtroom evidence. From the onset, Emily Rose is dead and Father Moore is charged with criminal negligence. Within the constraints of the court, Ethan Thomas highlights Emily's normal life. He displays photos of Emily before and after the ritual exorcism performed by defendant, Father Moore. The jury is presented a clear image of Emily's transformation—reaffirming the image of her normal body. Furthermore, Erin Bruner visits Mrs. Rose, Emily's mother, to gain better insight into Emily's home life. Mrs. Rose explains, "Before she went away to university my Emily was so very happy" (*The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, 2005). Mrs. Rose recalls Emily and her sister playfully jumping on her bed as they celebrated Emily's scholarship letter. Viewers learn that Emily had a very positive home life.

Witnesses characterize Emily's transition to college with several *suggestions of an invading force*, including separation from her family. In fact, the film features both mother and daughter acknowledging their looming separation. Creed (1993) argues that the fissure in the mother-daughter relationship in *The Exorcist* was the source of Regan's aberrant behavior. Divorce, or the broken home, is what allowed Regan to become vulnerable. But it is Emily's *geographical* separation from her family that serves as an entry point for several threats. Her transition to the city incites culture shock described through Dr. Vogel's testimony of the dorm room incident. Like Regan's open window, the dormitory building doors wildly fly open. Emily

must enter the main hallway to shut them. I argue that the open doors are the first definitive sign of an invading force. Thus, Emily's transition to college (a place of new experiences) inculcates the permeable state for forces to invade.

The body first acts strangely when Dr. Vogel describes Emily's "hysterical" phone call. The film dramatizes Emily's dorm room incident with an overlay of Vogel's narration. In the story, many tell-tale signs of the supernatural such as 3 A.M., the smell of something burning, and objects moving on their own, exist.

However, the testimonies ultimately cast Emily as an unreliable narrator. Dr. Mueller believes that Emily was experiencing an epileptic seizure. Throughout the reconstruction of Emily's narrative, testimonies cite that Emily had visions/hallucinations, contortions/convulsions, and difficulty eating. She was prescribed medication, but experts still could not effectively ascertain the cause of Emily's erratic behaviors. The film is unique among the others in this study because certain scenes are reconstructed and recast depending on the expert's interpretation of the events—underscoring the tenuous process of interpretation.

Emily's episodes prompt several *attempts to diagnose (with failure).* Although *The Exorcist* undermined the credibility of the hospital, *Emily Rose* undermines the hospital, the church, and the judicial system. The courtroom structure of witness testimony, expert opinion, and cross-examination epitomizes the difficulty of properly diagnosing the threat. The setting also opens deliberation on the ethics of exorcism to the public. What was once a private matter of the home (and the Catholic Church) in *The Exorcist* is now a matter of public policy and media spectacle in *Emily Rose*.

Location of threat does not come neatly in a paranoid horror film. Director Scott Derrickson explained that the narrative was intentionally structured to produce more questions

than answers (Yorn & Derrickson, 2005). Although *The Exorcist* considers a few possibilities, one answer eventually achieved ascendancy. In *Emily Rose*, however, interpretations fracture from the same empirical evidence and bear no clear answer. The doctors are ineffective (as highlighted by Dr. Adani). Both Dr. Cartwright and Father Moore had agreed that Emily's condition was not mental, but by the second half of the film, Cartwright is dead and Moore is cast (at best) as superstitious. Yet, by the climax, the film elevates Father Moore's story of exorcism and culminates toward his release due to time served.

The threat is never definitively located, but the characters' drive to locate the threat still propels much of the narrative. In fact, the film's construction of the exorcism as climax encourages that viewers sympathize with Father Moore on some level. No absolute answer comes by the end of the film, but the jury's recommendation for time served implies that the supernatural cannot be substantiated in a court of law. Although Moore is charged for Emily's death, the jury recognizes that he, Emily, and her family were consenting adults who practiced their faith. The judicial system in *Emily Rose*, while privileging evidence, extends Tudor's (1989) paranoid discourse because it maintains a skepticism that does not rule out possibilities immediately. Thus, the new institution in the exorcism narrative—the court—is inherently paranoid.

Father Moore picks Halloween night for the final exorcism scene in which he *administers methods to expel the threat*. Father Moore, Mr. Rose, Jason, and Dr. Cartwright all occupy Emily's bedroom. They attempt to restrain Emily, but she escapes to a nearby barn. While Cartwright monitors Emily's physiological state, Father Moore confronts the series of demons through incantation and other techniques, and Mr. Rose and Jason standby for support. Moore commands the demons to identify themselves.

The trial serves as a method to treat a secondary threat—the malpractice of experts. Indeed, the entire trial seeks to locate that which threatens secular bodies—other secular bodies. Thus, people of the court turn a critical eye toward the rational and the empirical. Thomas and Bruner ask hard questions about how religious and medical professionals proceed with diagnosis and treatment. Thus, I identify the court's trial as a secondary exorcism or method to expel the secular threat of irresponsible experts who threaten the lives of those they attempt to save.

Restoration does not emerge in conventional fashion. Distinct from the restoration of *The Exorcist*, Emily is never restored. (Her death is established from the start of the film.) Restoration comes elsewhere. Disorder is not necessarily just Emily's possession, but rather, Father Moore's legal crisis. Father Moore, although charged with criminal negligence, is somewhat vindicated by the film's end. Departing from restoration of the possessed in *The Exorcist*, this narrative compels viewers to privilege the male in crisis and identify with Moore's restoration—his fulfillment in sharing Emily's story.

Analysis

Emily Rose successfully drew attention to exorcism as a public problem. The film highlights Rothe's (2011) extension of Latour's "discursive knot" in which a single concept may gain more complexity through its association with disparate ideas (p. 4). For instance, the concept of "love" is entangled in several discourses that attempt to claim or define what "love" is. The film features a competition of discourses and institutions over the young woman's body. To better understand what *Emily Rose* uniquely offers the exorcism subgenre, I first discuss how the film's construction impacts the exorcism narrative. Second, I explore the relationship between gender and spiritual expertise through Father Moore and Dr. Adani. Finally, I outline how the contorted body may be read as an explicit performance of the discursive knot.

The Forensic Approach: Toward an Ethics of Exorcism

The forensic approach reshapes the exorcism narrative toward a consideration of multiple perspectives. Emily's story is told through an oral history of testimonies and dramatized through a series of flashbacks. The courtroom frame facilitates clashing perspectives over what actually transpired. The film utilizes a forensic approach to interpret evidence and seek justice. The term "forensic" often refers to public discussion in the court of law, as well as argumentation and debate. Forensic is also derived from the Latin, *forensis*, which means "whatever pertains to a forum" (Haubrich, 2003).

Derrickson's direction extends *Emily Rose* from a mere horror film with contortions and demonic shrieks to a public deliberation on the ethics of exorcism. The dramatized scenes vastly change depending on testimony and interpretation. Representatives from various fields recount events. Others, including a myriad of medical experts, provide diagnoses that conveniently fit within the boundaries of medical study. Institutional discourses collide within Moore's trial (the home, the church, the clinic, and the court) and their constituents (the family, the priest, the doctor, and legal counsel). *Emily Rose* thus historicizes public discussion of contemporary exorcism and implicates the viewer as jury member.

Much of the film focuses on Erin Bruner's interactions in and outside the courtroom. But during witness testimonies and expert interpretations, the film dramatizes what is narrated—even if they refer to the same evidence. A clear and concise case of this rendering and re-rendering exists in one particular scene: the dormitory incident. The scene features two vastly different interpretations of the same evidence. Emily's experiences are first cast as contortions and then re-cast as convulsions.

Dr. Edith Vogel is the first medical professional to testify. As the Rose family doctor, she has a long history with Emily. Vogel recounts her phone conversation with Emily which described the events that took place: "She was quite hysterical" (*The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, 2005). The scene cuts to a dramatization of Emily's dorm room at 3 A.M. Her bed sheets move autonomously. An invisible force holds her down. The scene borders on representation of spiritual rape. A force thrusts her down upon her bed. Her night shirt begins riding up her abdomen. Something pins her hands down. Her facial expressions convey desperation to escape. Emily fights to free her body.

The dramatization is interrupted with testimony from the next witness, Dr. Mueller, chairman of the department of neurology. Mueller explains that the doctors found no drugs within Emily's system, which made him suspect the possibility of epilepsy. Mueller then explains the nature of epilepsy and its symptoms:

> a person may lose consciousness for several minutes and suffer involuntary contractions of all the muscles of the body. The muscle contractions could feel like an extreme pressure on the body. And it is certainly possible, with all that brain activity, for a person to perceive all sorts of strange and violent things. . . . I administered an electroencephalograph. . . . It showed a possible epileptic focus in the patient's left temporal lobe. (*The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, 2005)

During this description, the film re-dramatizes the same scene: Emily writhes in her bed, only this time her eyes roll back. The camera pans to a profile shot that focuses on her body convulsing in a fashion similar to a seizure. Crucially, Emily's body convulses so violently that it constricts to an unusual back bend. The re-dramatization asks audiences to reconsider the evidence—to re-evaluate the inexplicable. The film features instances of what Alia (2004) calls the "Rashomon effect" in which experts clash over their interpretations of evidence due to biased values and proximities to the subject. The Rashomon effect, derived from the 1950 film Rashomon, posits "that no one account of a story can convey the whole story, therefore it is

impossible for any one journalist to gather all of the facts or experiences of an event" (Alia, 2004, p. 14). And yet, reconsideration for the events in *Emily Rose*, and implicitly Anneliese Michel, suggests that the courtroom may somehow answer for exorcism in the United States. The re-dramatization not only echoes the cross-examination of the courtroom, but also reinforces exorcism as a subject that demands reconsideration from multiple perspectives.

Vogel's longstanding history with the Rose family represents the family's interpretation of the events, while Mueller speaks on behalf of the university hospital. The second interpretation not only provides a counter to the first, but demonstrates how varying interpretations may be formulated. The discrepancy between the two foreshadows the possibility that the truth may never be located. Thus, film viewers are encouraged to adopt the position of jury member whereby they are asked to engage in critical thought over the evidence presented—even though the narrative ultimately favors Father Moore's vindication.

The common tagline "based on true story" reminds viewers that the film is based on a collection of real world materials. *The Exorcist*'s narrative remained largely within the McNeil's home, in the private realm, and rarely extended discussion of exorcism outside the home, the church, or the hospital. *Emily Rose*, on the other hand, placed the exorcism formula (set forth through developments of exorcism and demonic-related texts around 2000) squarely in the public realm of the jury trial.

Spiritual Warrior & Spiritual Guide

Emily Rose distinguishes two performances of spiritual expertise I shall develop over the course of this study: *spiritual warrior* and *spiritual guide*. Elaborating on Clover's (1992) observation that many possession films feature "female-engineered" exorcisms and Legutko's

(2010) distinction between male and female exorcisms, I draw out a few distinctions between two types of *strategies* employed in exorcism and those who employ them.

Briefly, the *spiritual warrior* describes one, often a man, who uses a hyper-masculine, well-costumed and equipped approach to exorcism with crosses, Holy Water, and the Roman Catholic Ritual of Exorcism. He may also utilize recording devices to substantiate claims of demonic possession, as required by the Catholic Church. The spiritual warrior recognizes the possessed body as incapable of taking care of itself and combats evil *for* the possessed through violent, verbal exchanges and brute force. Crucially, the spiritual warrior must identify the demon in order to eradicate it. Thus, the spiritual warrior focuses on evil as an external threat that only a spiritual authority can expel. The *spiritual guide*, however, refers to one, often a woman, who utilizes a more feminine, minimalist approach to exorcism that does not invest in costumes or equipment, but rather, intimate communication. She focuses on conversing with the possessed, rather than simply eradicating the perceived invading threat. The spiritual guide recognizes the possessed individual's agency and encourages her to fight from within. The spiritual guide does not necessarily ascribe evil as an external threat, nor does she seek to name the demon.

Spiritual warrior and spiritual guide are defined more effectively by their strategies than by the characters who take up each style. Although men typically occupy the roles of spiritual warriors, and women usually embody spiritual guides, experts are not limited to one category. Rather, spiritual authorities may oscillate from one strategy to another in order to produce desired effects. Legutko (2010) notes that even the "female" exorcisms may escalate from feminine to traditional masculine style if necessary. Thus, I call spiritual warrior and spiritual guide *performances* of spiritual expertise. To better understand these concepts of spiritual

warrior and spiritual guide, I examine strategies employed by Father Moore and Dr. Adani in *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*.

Father Moore represents the *spiritual warrior*, and he is marked by all the primary signs. He abides by the procedures of the Catholic Church, incorporates use of recording devices, dons traditional Roman Catholic garb, and reads scripture from the Holy Bible. While he is deeply considerate of Emily's well-being, Father Moore places focus on his responsibility to protect Emily through direct confrontation with evil. He raises his voice and charges the demon to identify itself: "I now command you. Tell me your name!" (*The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, 2005). He learns there are actually six demons that dwell within Emily's body and responds with even more violent verbal force. Moore is never able to effectively help Emily beyond sharing her story.

Throughout the film, Moore often discusses events in terms of spiritual warfare. Bruner comments that she did not get enough sleep. Moore responds, "You're under attack . . . Demons exist whether you believe in them or not" (*The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, 2005). Moore argues that evil forces are surrounding the court case and trying to compromise Bruner's ability to perform. When Moore takes the stand, he describes the amount of discretion that he and the Rose family took in preparing the exorcism. The ritual was set for Halloween night, an occasion with a high amount of spiritual activity to draw demons "out into the open." Moore describes his encounter with a demonic apparition as confirmation that "the game is on." Prosecutor Ethan Thomas mocks Moore: "You're really God's gunslinger, aren't you, Father? Standing tall and facing the devil with your prayer book at your side" (*The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, 2005). Moore's worldview consistently orients toward spiritual warfare.

Although I categorize Moore as a spiritual warrior, he briefly acts as a spiritual guide. During the exorcism scene, Moore speaks to Emily: "Emily? Can you hear me?" But when a

demon speaks back to him, he reverts back to his masculine style. He responds directly and aggressively to the demon. Thus, Moore temporarily embodies the spiritual guide when attempting to counsel Emily, but advances to spiritual warrior when confronting the demonic.

In contrast, Dr. Adani represents the *spiritual guide*. Although Dr. Adani does not treat Emily firsthand, her expert opinions and interpretation underscore a fundamentally different approach to treating possession. Adani is privy to the spiritual realm. Bruner's assistant notes that Adani's work is primarily in the "third world." She does not ascribe to the Catholic Church or any Western or Judeo-Christian belief system. "No, I don't think possession is a typical experience. But I am convinced that it is a scientifically verified cultural universal one" (*The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, 2005). Rather, she represents the ethos of anthropology and psychiatry, specializing in how culture is interpreted and managed through the body. Thus, her expertise resists the Western dichotomy of spirituality and science; she transcends the patriarchy to which Moore ascribes.

Dr. Adani introduces the term "hypersensitive" to describe Emily's nature: "They can have visions of the future, or see the dead and sometimes be uniquely susceptible to invasion by an entity that is alien to them" (*The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, 2005). Hypersensitives have intimate relationships with the spiritual realm, a border not easily distinguished. This particular scene is special because Dr. Adani inadvertently foretells the future of the exorcism subgenre. A pattern of the hypersensitive, as I will demonstrate later, continues with *Last Exorcism* (Nell can foresee the future) and *Conjuring* (Lorraine can see the dead). Thus, Adani draws attention to the way the subgenre represents female bodies' relationships to the psychic and spiritual realms.

Focus on the spiritual realm privileges indeterminacy, the unseen, and collaboration. A spiritual guide operates in a cooperative manner and adopts a less determined worldview than the

spiritual warrior. Thus, Adani's expertise does not necessarily provide closure for Emily's narrative. Rather, as Scott (2005) argues, Dr. Adani "is studiously noncommittal as to whether [demonic possession] really exits. The movie pretends to take the same tolerant, anything's-possible position" (para. 6-7). Adani's orientation is a curious counter to the spiritual warfare that aims to definitively locate and identify the threat. Like Adani's term "hypersensitive," the spiritual guide is open to possibility.

Consent

The concepts of spiritual warrior and spiritual guide expose an implicit dilemma of consent that deserves further inquiry. Although *The Exorcist* highlights Regan's coming of age, *Emily Rose* focuses on Emily's transition toward autonomy. Both narratives focus on themes of consent in relation to supernatural and secular invading forces. Day (2013) specifically points to Regan's possession in *The Exorcist* as a kind of "supernatural rape" (p. 91). Semmerling (2006) argues that the crucifix scene is not "masturbation" but spiritual rape, as viewers hear Regan's voice refusing the act (p. 50). For the spiritual warrior, women and their bodies must be "saved" from demonic forces. A force invading a child begs for intervention because the child cannot, in any way, provide consent for medical treatment.

Emily Rose, however, was not a minor, and her level of consent focuses on her ability to exercise choice. But the spiritual warrior only recognizes a possessed individual as incapable of providing consent. The spiritual guide, however, believes in the young woman's agency to exercise choice. As a secular extension of spiritual guidance, the presence of the court and its female constituents (Bruner and Judge Brewster) suggest a certain degree of legal agency.

However, Emily's lack of consistent agency prompts an overwhelming number of men from various communities to speak and act on her behalf. Father Moore explains to Bruner,

"What I care about is telling Emily Rose's story. I want people to hear what only I can tell" (*The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, 2005). Ethan Thomas tells the jury, "I stand here for Emily Rose . . . who died horribly at age 19" (*The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, 2005). Doctors' discussion of intervention extends this masculine orientation. Dr. Briggs argues, had he been responsible, he would have advanced to the extent of tranquilizing, medicating, and subjecting Emily to electro-shock therapy in order "to save her life." I might call Briggs a secular warrior. Ultimately, doctors cite Emily's refusal to take prescribed medication as the catalyst for her death. Emily's exercise of choice over her own body is characterized as directly destructive to her livelihood. Not only does possession render Emily incapable of making decisions for herself, but her attempt to exercise choice only worsens her situation.

Dr. Adani refutes this claim and argues that Emily's prescribed medication, Gambutrol, was the key that "locked Emily in the possessed state" and stole her agency (*The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, 2005). If Emily had subjected herself to cooperative exorcism, she may have had opportunity to exit the possessed state. Thus, a secondary institutional threat (the hospital) impeded Emily's ability to recover or to even engage in effective exorcism.

The film does not fully embody or illustrate a feminine approach to exorcism. The narrative privileges Father Moore's traditional masculine exorcism, which ultimately fails. In sum, the film highlights the greater issue: a young woman died because no one was able to effectively help her, and no one enabled or allowed her to help herself. Yet, the narrative provides a sense of restoration—not to Emily through Father Moore's exorcism, but to Father Moore in his ability to share Emily's story.

The two concepts of *spiritual warrior* and *spiritual guide*, enacted through the characters of Father Moore and Dr. Adani, contribute to Tudor's (1989, 1995, 1997) work on experts—

characters in horror films defined by their effectiveness. This extension recognizes performance

of gender as a constitutive factor of identifying experts' relationships to main characters. Dr.

Adani is a particularly important figure as her character exposes the underlying misogyny in

traditional filmic representations of exorcism. Perhaps one of the reasons most scholars have

failed to recognize the spiritual guide in film is because women are largely excluded from

leadership positions in the Catholic Church and in life (Lind & Brzuzy, 2008). However,

scholars like Clover (1992) and Legutko (2010) beg for further inquiry into the possibility of a

woman exorcist, who may engage distinct modes of treatment.

Contortion in *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*

After considering the gendered nature of exorcists, I now examine the corporeal

representation of the exorcised. Bodily contortion is a fundamental aspect of the exorcism film,

and *Exorcism of Emily Rose* highlights contortion in unique ways. As Scott (2005) puts it:

"[Emily] does perform some extreme yoga poses" (para. 5). But just when contortion is

stabilized as a typical feature of possession, the film re-dramatizes the account as an epileptic

seizure—moving exorcism out into the secular world and drawing attention to interpretive

dilemmas. Because several children in the 2000's were exposed to versions of exorcism and died,

many criminal negligence cases, like that represented by Father Moore, were brought to court.

Emily Rose signals a discursive shift in the exorcism subgenre toward the ethics of exorcism.

Thus, the film provides a means to discuss exorcism as a legitimate public problem rather than a

belief of the extremely spiritual or superstitious.

Emily's body serves as a corporeal landscape for answers; her body is a means of

charting supernatural (or secular) threat. In *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, Emily's body is asked

to make itself known, to materialize itself, and to explain itself to a degree higher than even *The*

Exorcist. The woman's body is doubly put on display: first through the rendering of exorcism scenes, and second, through the figurative exorcism in the courtroom. *Emily Rose* highlights the contests not just between supernatural forces, but also between secular institutions. The church, the court, and the family all compete for Emily's body. Extending beyond Phillips' (2005) description of Regan's body as a site of supernatural warfare in *The Exorcist*, Emily's body is used as a pawn in a contest of the church versus the state versus the clinic in *Emily Rose.*

Emily's contortion performance quite literally embodies the discursive knot of exorcism that emerges in the mid-2000s. The re-performance of certain scenes asks viewers to reconsider the evidence and exposes the collision of several institutions entangled in exorcism. In *The Exorcist*, terms of justice were defined by the family and the church. Through *Emily Rose*, the concept of exorcism becomes not just a matter of the home, the church, and the hospital, but now the court (and the public) is involved.

Character bodies indicate relationships to institutions. Indeed, the body performs metonymically, or the body stands in for something else. Various institutional representatives are present in the courtroom: Erin (agnosticism, secular law), Father Moore (the Catholic Church), Ethan Thomas (the skeptical man of faith), several doctors (the hospital), Dr. Adani (the supernatural), and the Rose family (the home). As these worldviews collide in one courtroom, Emily's curious contortion forms as a stand in of several ideas that manifest as a discursive knot. To better understand how Emily's body functions as a discursive knot, I discuss contortion as the embodiment of a discursive knot. I then introduce Arthur Frank's (1990) sociology of the body, which aids in explaining the relationships between bodies, discourses, and institutions.

Possession as discursive knot

The possessed body confounds. As a fusion character, the possessed features at least two entities competing across the same body (Carroll, 1981). The court setting highlights the dilemmas that arise in interpreting and treating the possessed body. Deliberation on the ethics of exorcism arises from vastly different institutional readings and interpretations of the possessed body. Discursive knots become most apparent when two experts with two distinct interpretations debate over the same possessed body. The possessed body performs this discursive knot through literal contortion. The young woman's contortion points to an outright disorder of the body and distorted bodily behavior. Experts have the compulsion to re-order the body. Yet, different experts disagree about what that order looks like. Bodily contortion begs for reconsideration of the discursive knot. Rothe (2011) elaborates on how Latour's discursive knot is extended to popular culture:

> I suggest that the trauma concept functions as a discursive knot in contemporary culture due to its vast associative powers of generating interactions between disparate ideas. In other words, the discursive knot generated by the trauma concept provides the dominant mode of emplotment—the basic narrative structure and core set of characters—for representing such diverse experiences as child abuse, Holocaust survival, war combat, terminal illness, and addiction in contemporary Western culture. (p. 4)

In other words, the discursive knot of exorcism and the emplotment (narrative stages and iconography) of the exorcism film mutually contribute to the complexity of exorcism's representation in popular culture.

In *Emily Rose*, fragments of different worldviews emerge from interpreting instances of Emily's "possession." Contortion is a performance act that extends Carroll's (1981) fusion character. Carroll (1981) identifies the possessed woman as fusion, but I add that the very act of contortion suggests that two or more influences compete across the same body. Thus, Emily's contortions are not just indicative of possession, but they also refer to the many discourses and

institutions that influence her corporeality. In this way, I name contortion as a performed embodiment of a discursive knot.

Contortion calls for analysis that extends beyond simple binaries and border-crossings. Binaries helps scholars make sense of bodily struggle. Phillips (2005) notes that the tension (or border) between degradation and transcendence is what "most graphically" highlights how *The Exorcist* uses the human body (p. 116).The body defines itself through the Other. For example, Paul (1995) argues that: "The religious framework ensures that we understand disgust in negative terms because religion assures us of the elevation of the spirit over the flesh" (p. 292). Binaries provide convenient frameworks to interpret body representation.

Likewise, horror—regardless of subject matter—depends on some type of binary framework to construct what is disturbing. Similarly, bodies may better understand themselves by crossing some type of boundary or border. Creed (2000) points to border-crossing as a crucial element in the genre: "the concept of a border is central to the construction of the monstrous in the horror film; that which crosses and threatens to cross the 'border' is abject" (p. 66). Thus, female bodies in exorcism films are most subject to border-crossing.

Both border and battle lines depend on the context or situation. Creed (2000) argues that while the specifics regarding the border vary from one situation to the next, the purpose of the monstrous remains the same, namely "to bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability" (p.66). The possessed woman threatens the stability of symbolic order. Thus, contortions are not threatening just because they challenge one particular institution, but because they simply refuse symbolic order. The contorting body is one that refuses to be ordered.

The contortions in *Emily Rose* complicate body representation by moving beyond binaries or borders. Disparate discussions related to possession and exorcism become entangled in the same body. Several institutions ask for Emily's body to make sense. In fact, Clover (1992) argues that the woman's body, in particular, is subject to severe scrutiny and examination:

> Film after film interrogates what *Beyond Evil* calls the 'physical presence' of a woman: forces [her body] to externalize its inner workings, to speak its secrets, to give a material account of itself—in short, to give literal and visible *evidence*. (p. 82, emphasis in original)

Given the extent to which the female body and its inner workings are endowed with semantic value, work that demystifies how such signification shapes conceptualization of women's bodies and bodies at large seems important. Re-performance, in this film, functions as a way to unravel some of this binding, a way to parcel out one interpretation from the next. I use Arthur Frank's basic framework to unravel the bodily representation in *Emily Rose*. Film clearly recognizes the possessed woman's body as a rich site of struggle, but its construction does little to answer how various interpretations become entangled within a single performance.

Frank's sociology of the body

History and culture manifest in and on bodies. Arthur Frank (1991) argues that scholars need a theory of the body to more effectively theorize the relationships between bodies, behaviors, and culture. Such a theory should account for the body's recursive nature: "to apprehend the body as both medium and outcome of social 'body techniques,' and society as both medium and outcome of the sum of these techniques . . . bodily and social reproduction is not linear, but proceeds recursively" (Frank, 1991, p. 48). Recursion suggests that bodily actions inspire several "copies" that may be altered or unique in some way. Schechner (1985) calls this phenomenon restored behavior, or "twice-behaved behavior" (p. 36). The term "restored" suggests that both memory and history are lodged within performance as a concept and a practice.

Thus, embodied practices and bodily acts found in exorcism films may hold and transmit certain memories and histories. For example, contortion in possessed bodies is not only a reiteration of previous behavior, but also hails particular histories associated with *The Exorcist* and beyond. To understand the explicit focus on contortion in *Emily Rose*, I turn to a theory of body representation to further understand the possessed bodies in the exorcism film.

Frank's (1991) sociology of the body is useful in analyzing the content of selected exorcism films because the framework explicates bodies' relationships to discourses, institutions, and corporeality. Discourses refer to "cognitive mappings of the body's possibilities and limitations" or "how the body can understand itself" (Frank, 1991, p. 48). Institutions are associated with a specific time and place, "a physical place where one can go, which may or may not be there any longer" (Frank, 1991, p. 49). Institutions refer to a specific time and place, such as the American home in the 1970s. Corporeality recognizes the body's material flesh and its limitations in expressing and acquiring knowledge.

Additionally, Frank's framework accounts for the body's relationship to other bodies. Human bodies do not exist independently or in a vacuum, but rather, exist among discourses and institutions (Frank, 1991). The body always communicates and is always bound to a context. Discourses help us make sense of our bodies and the meanings associated with them. Discourse provides a way of accessing knowledge through language. Accounting for the institution recognizes the dynamic and mutually informed relationship between body and place. Discourse decodes that relationship.

Frank (1991) recognizes bodies as starting points for analysis in order to "theorize institutions from the body up" (p. 49). He admits, however, that "we must recognize institutions from the beginning, since the actions of bodies are already oriented to institutional contexts"

(Frank, 1991, p. 49). Ultimately, Frank (1991) defines "the body" as "the intersection of an equilateral triangle the points of which are *institutions, discourses,* and *corporeality*" (p. 49). Because institutional representatives (the priest, the lawyer, the doctor, the parent) all deliberate (participate in discourse) over what transpired with Emily's body, it is no surprise that the "body" of the exorcism film is epitomized by contortion—the curious intersection between institutions, discourses, and corporeality in *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*.

Types of bodies in *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*

Several discourses, institutions, and corporealities are at work in *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005). *The Exorcist* is the most influential work, but looking at other films will help illustrate the recursive nature of the body as Frank (1991) describes. Because the body continues to perform "possession," the discourses and their relationships to institutions continue to develop. Thus, I extend Frank's (1991) framework to isolate how several discourses are hailed through the same bodily performance. Through coding *The Exorcist* and *Emily Rose*, I arrived at four main "bodies" that I name: *spirituality*, *disability*, *incivility*, and *sexuality* (see Table 3.1). These bodies are not mutually exclusive. They overlap, compete, and oscillate between one another. I provide a brief description of each.

Table 3.1 Types of Bodies in *Emily Rose*

	Discourses	Institutions	Corporeality
Spirituality	Good/Evil	Church	Exorcism and Demon voice
Disability	Old vs. New Medicine	Hospital	Examination and Contortions
Incivility	Child-rearing, the family	Home	Enclosure and Grotesque
Sexuality	Women/Children	Bedroom	Restraints and Sexual behavior

First, the *body of spirituality* recognizes the body as a battleground between Higher and Lower forces (most commonly God and the Devil). The religious rite of exorcism is a corporeal practice associated with the Catholic Church, and the ritual is consistent through both films.

What is most at stake, Hansen (2011) argues, *is* the religious ritual: "it is an ethical apparatus that propels narrative, thematic, and even stylistic components" (p. 67). Exorcism is in the film's title. Hansen (2011) proceeds to claim that the rituals associated with exorcism have:

> …strong ethical signs in the broader non-Catholic cultural imagination that symbolize a less theological and melodramatic notion of "good" (one defined by its direct opposition to "evil"). Roman Catholicism cannot claim sole ownership of this binary, and the dynamism of *The Exorcist* trope lies in the simultaneous ability of its representation of "evil" to function as a powerful moral signifier in both Christian (religious) *and* secular (melodramatic) contexts. (p. 67)

Thus, the body of spirituality recognizes the broader (and perhaps secular) discourses of good and evil through the corporeal practice of exorcism and the portrayal of possession. In fact, the presence of the demon is most noticeable in the voice and through self-identification. The body may utter (anti-)religious discourse. For example, Emily speaks in Aramaic and refers to Biblical demons. Possessed Regan takes a crucifix and plunges it into her vagina: "Let Jesus fuck you!" (*The Exorcist*, 1973). These representations are distinctly grounded in religious discourse. Thus, the body of spirituality places emphasis on the body as a spiritual battleground of Good and Evil.

Second, the *body of disability* in the exorcism film provides an opportunity to discuss tensions between old and new medicine. Clover (1992) argues that possession films are "remarkably" (p. 82) similar to what Doane (1987) refers to as medical discourse films. Both films show the hospital as a site of failure to diagnose or treat illness. Appropriately, Wright (2007) notes a recent cultural shift where moral and cultural relativism are progressively privileged over rationalism and points specifically to *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* as a concise illustration: "viewers are asked to accept the validity, if not the reliability, of a supernatural explanation of Emily's condition over that suggested by medical professionals, embodies postmodern relativism and an unease surrounding the claims of scientific discourse" (p. 97). *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, in particular, spends much time distinguishing the supernatural and the

natural, old medicine and new medicine. The church's exorcism is placed in opposition to the hospital's medical treatment—each claiming malpractice by the other. With the body of disability, the maladies of the material body are not due to demons, but due to medical conditions, such as epilepsy or psychosis. Women's bodies contorting in unusual ways are less about the soul and more about the uncertainty of the human body's physiology. Thus, bodies in exorcism films may also be sites of contestation for medical discourses.

Third, the *body of incivility* pays attention to the undisciplined body, particularly of young women. Several horror scholars have noted the decline of the family as central to 1970s horror (Phillips, 2005; Tudor, 1989; Wood, 1986). *The Exorcist* deals with divorce. And while the family in *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* does not appear to be dysfunctional, they do appear to be isolated from society. Both films deal with discourses concerning parenting, child-rearing, and proper adult behavior. For the body of incivility, the home is the consistent site for trying to exorcize the demons.

Regardless of the possessed woman's condition, the family attempts to maintain privacy and enclosure from the outside world. Resistance manifests in the grotesque body. For example, Regan urinates on the floor in front of her mother's dinner guests. In a later scene, she projectile vomits the infamous green bile. Emily collects and eats insects. Both characters encounter blood and bleed. The leaking bodies represent a failure to compose, behave, or discipline oneself. Further, both women speak profanely and explicitly. Rather than demons, these are interpretations of bad parenting and poor disciplinary action. The parents are to blame for their child's insubordination and lack of self-control—highlighted by the young women's ages. Regan's coming of age manifests in bodily changes; she is also threatened by her mother's attention to Burke (Creed, 1993). Emily ventures out into the real world with her first semester of

college and is completely unprepared and overwhelmed. In fact, doctors attempt to cast incivility on Emily for lacking the discipline to continue taking her prescribed medication. Significant changes in these women's lives highlight the tumultuousness of growing up, and the "demons" illustrate the result of an undisciplined body.

Finally, the *body of sexuality* bears implications related to gender more than sex. The characters are not necessarily sexualized. Rather, the idea of "sexuality" is a compilation of several different factors related to sexualized bodies. Similar to the body of incivility, the institution is the home, but more specifically, the bedroom. Many of the "possession" scenes are in the young woman's bedroom. Both characters are restrained or "tied up." Aside from the obvious sexual connotations, restraints suggest that the female body cannot control itself. The woman is at the mercy of her body, a discourse that runs quite deeply throughout gender politics. Thus, the uncontrollable "urges" are not about epilepsy, but sexuality. Emily's body changes upon forming a relationship with Jason. In fact, one of the possession/seizure episodes takes place when Emily and Jason are alone in her dorm room. No evidence supports that Emily engaged in sexual behavior. But her relationship to Jason opens up a permeable state—a terrain with several possibilities.

Performances of possession may resonate with the turbulence many young women face in trying to explore their sexualities. However, the repression or restraint, as Foucault (1978) observed, only intensifies the interest and cultural production in sex. In a religious light, demons are the cause of perverse sexuality. Religious discourse suggests women's bodies become the vessels for demons to carry out their perversion. But the body of sexuality refers more to the secular, base body in opposition to the body of spirituality.

Emily Rose does not fully explore the body of sexuality in the ways *The Exorcist* did. In many instances, *The Exorcist* casts sexuality and perversion in extremely repulsive ways, such as Regan's infamous crucifix scene. The body of sexuality provides a site for commentary on the politics of sex, especially regarding women and children. But Emily's budding relationship with Jason and the overwhelming presence of men in her bedroom bears resonances that are difficult to ignore. Men attempt to contain instances of female sexuality.

Discursive knots tighten through the nuances of possession. Frank's (1991) framework provides useful way to identify four distinct types of bodies in *The Exorcist* and *Emily Rose*. Finally, one must consider the body's relationships to other bodies, or what Frank (1991) called "self-relatedness" (p. 52). Frank (1991) provides the vocabulary of dyadic and monadic: dyadic refers to a body in distinct relation to another, while monadic refers to the body in a more autonomous state. Such distinction is crucial to understanding how monstrosity is constructed in the exorcism film.

One particular scene in *Emily Rose* illuminates the relationship between the dyadic and monadic, resulting in what might be called "monstrous autonomy." After hallucinating during a class exam, Emily storms out of the building and rushes through the rain to the university church. Emily approaches the altar and sees the praying women's faces transform. She screams. The two praying women quickly exit as Jason enters the church. As he approaches, Emily's body begins to contort in front of the main altar.

Jennifer Carpenter's (Emily) performance of possession is directly modeled off of the re-released version of *The Exorcist* (2000) because it incorporates the iconic back bend contortion (see Figure 3.1). *Emily Rose* incorporates a clear reiteration of a previous image which begins solidifying contortion as an attraction of the exorcism film.

Figure 3.1 Emily contorts to a backbend in *Emily Rose* (2005). Courtesy of Sony Pictures.[1]

Jason, her boyfriend, approaches her, "Emily?" Emily turns her head. Her pupils are dilated and a deep growling voice says "Don't touch me!" (see Figure 3.2). Her body collapses. Emily's normal voice comes through, "Jason, please don't leave me."

Figure 3.2 "Don't touch me!" *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005). Courtesy of Sony Pictures.

Viewers witness the possessed struggle with dyadic connections to her significant other and the church, and the struggle to achieve monadic independence. This scene illustrates Emily

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[1] Figures 3.1 and 3.2 are screenshots from *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005) and are protected under the fair use clause since as are used strictly for educational (and absolutely no commercial) purposes.

as most monstrous when she refuses any relational support. Although her boyfriend, priest, and family all attempt to help her, many scenes culminate in her rebellious, monstrous behavior. The deeper implication is that Emily, although poised to find independence at university, cannot be coded as independent in a positive light. Indeed, Emily's independence is almost always cast monstrous, or more accurately, vulnerable to monstrosity.

Monstrosity is also indicated by setting. The religious context arouses consideration for demonic possession, but also suspicion that a church is a convincing setting for an unruly young woman faking possession. Although the notion is never explicated, some characters implicitly question whether Emily was faking her possession. Regardless of the possession's authenticity, contortion is an ambivalent symbol of oppression and liberation. The irony is that the more Emily is threatened by an external force, the more others are compelled to save her. Thus, the bodily performance of contortion is an instance of what I call "monstrous autonomy," which emerges from monadic independences and refuses dyadic connection of any form.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided a description, synopsis, narrative formula, and analysis of Scott Derrickson's *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005). First, I demonstrated how the film's forensic approach influences the exorcism narrative. Second, I explored the gendered roles of spiritual warrior and spiritual guide through the characters Father Moore and Dr. Adani. Third, I argued that the possessed woman, particularly when she contorts her body, literally performs the discursive knot of possession. Finally, I utilized Arthur Frank's (1991) sociology of the body to untangle theses threads of discourse and isolated four body types: spirituality, disability, incivility, and sexuality.

Emily Rose presented a heightened awareness of contemporary exorcism. Rather than ascribing to one worldview or orientation, the filmmakers committed to producing a film that would interrogate rather than declare. The discursive knot illustrates why and how experts clash over the same evidence. The film makes explicit what was implicit in *The Exorcist*: the problem is not just spiritual possession, but also institutional oppression. This analysis also indicated that women's bodies are understood in relation to men's bodies. The possessed woman is cast as monstrous when she is autonomous or eludes the presence of men. Further, due to the nature of interpretation, several discourses and institutions may be hailed through one singular corporeal performance. This first case study provides necessary vocabularies to gain better insight into films that feature demonic possession and exorcism.

CHAPTER 4
CASE #2: *THE LAST EXORCISM* (2010)

'Documentary' suggests fullness and completion, knowledge and fact, explanations of the social world and its motivating mechanisms. More recently, though, documentary has come to suggest incompleteness and uncertainty, recollection and impression, images of personal worlds and their subjective construction. (Nichols, 1993, p. 174)

The Last Exorcism (2010) is a found footage supernatural horror film directed by Daniel Stamm. The film earned $41 million in domestic box office sales, and nearly $27 million internationally (a grand total of over $67 million). *The Last Exorcism* received a 72% rating from Rotten Tomatoes: "It doesn't fully deliver on the chilly promise of its Blair Witch-style premise, but *The Last Exorcism* offers a surprising number of clever thrills" (The Last Exorcism – Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.). The film is unique in terms of this study because it successfully combines the exorcism film with the found footage subgenre. While a handful of select exorcism films attempt this type of integration (*The Devil Inside*, *REC 2, Anneliese: The Exorcist Tapes*), *The Last Exorcism* is certainly the most successful.

Scholarship on the found footage genre is emerging, but the cinema verité style of filmmaking has easily become a staple of the horror film over the last decade. While horror scholar Jancovich (2002) wrote off found footage catalyst, *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), as "a one-off gimmick rather than the start of a new cycle of horror production" (p. 7), and the cycle took years to gain traction, *The Last Exorcism* is just one of over 35 found footage films released from 2010 to 2012, and several more found footage films have emerged over the past decade. Jancovich's (2002) hasty dismissal serves as a potent example of how some scholars may rest too comfortably in their methods or positions. However, Jancovich (2002) effectively noted a trend at the turn of the millennium: "Hollywood seems to have turned back to the 1970s and is

making a series of films that draw on stories of demonic possession and conspiracy" (p. 7). *The Last Exorcism* marks a peculiar intersection of found footage and exorcism.

The film also points to the elasticity of the horror genre and filmmakers' abilities to produce hybrid works by a fairly simple process of isolating recurring tropes and integrating them in novel ways. Heller-Nicholas (2013) notes that: "horror directors themselves go to considerable lengths to clarify how their found-footage effort deviates from what has now become the norm" (p. 67). Cawelti's (1984) work with formulas argues that such patterns emerge from attempts to tease out a social or historical need. For the 2000s and early 2010s, horror films were a way of dealing with the ubiquitous presence of surveillance and its connections to collective anxieties (Tziallas, 2010). *The Last Exorcism* demonstrates the flexibility of the horror film genre and its capacity to dissect social woes.

In this chapter, I offer a synopsis, historical context, and narrative formula description of *The Last Exorcism*. I then provide two distinct areas of analysis: First, I explain how the film's use of documentary style impacts the exorcism narrative. Second, I examine how characters Cotton Marcus and Nell Sweetzer challenge the status quo of the exorcism subgenre through spectacle horror performances.

Synopsis

A camera crew follows Reverend Cotton Marcus (Patrick Fabian) as he prepares for a Sunday sermon. The film introduces family members through several interviews and reveals Cotton's childhood as a young faith healer. Although active in the church, Cotton admits he is not a religious man. After learning of several exorcisms gone awry, Cotton signs on to perform an exorcism for the documentary in hopes that it will expose exorcism for the "scam" it is.

Cotton receives an urgent letter from farmer Louis Sweetzer (Louis Herthum) whose livestock are being mysteriously slaughtered and whose daughter, Nell (Ashley Bell), may be possessed. Cotton sees this scenario as a possible case for the documentary. Iris (producer/director) and Daniel (camera operator) accompany Cotton to the Sweetzer farm. On their way, they meet Louis's son, Caleb Sweetzer (Caleb Landry Jones), who instructs the crew to go back home. When they reach the farm, they meet Louis, who immediately resists being filmed. Cotton spends time praying with Louis to earn his trust in order for the documentary to continue.

After Louis's wife died from cancer, he withdrew Caleb and Nell from church and public school. Louis now homeschools them to protect them from the influences of the secular world. Cotton meets with Nell and notes her talents as an artist. After hearing the details of the case, Cotton decides an exorcism is necessary to rid Nell of a demon called Abalam.

Cotton reveals his repertoire of tricks to the camera crew, including sound effects and a smoking crucifix. Cotton dupes the Sweetzer family by performing a fake exorcism, going even so far as to use direct lines from *The Exorcist*: "Take me!" Louis pays Cotton and the crew heads back to the hotel.

During the night, the camera crew rushes to Cotton's hotel room and finds Nell on the bed in a trance. The crew takes her to a hospital, but the doctors are unable to locate any physical ailments. Doctors cannot administer a psychiatric evaluation without Louis's consent. Louis is convinced that Cotton must perform another exorcism and heads home. Cotton argues that Nell needs a doctor. At the farm house, the crew finds a drawing of a dead cat.

That night, Nell steals the documentary camera and proceeds to the barn, where she records herself killing a cat. She returns to the house and approaches Cotton while he is sleeping.

Iris intervenes before Nell makes physical contact. Members of the crew find two more of Nell's drawings: one featuring Cotton holding a crucifix in front of a large flame and another of Iris and Daniel violently dismembered.

The hospital calls and reveals that Nell is pregnant. Though Louis is convinced that Abalam has defiled his daughter, Iris believes that Nell may have been raped by her father. When the crew confronts Nell, she attacks Cotton with a pair of scissors. Convinced that her only salvation is through death, Louis charges after Nell with a shotgun. To save Nell from Louis, Cotton agrees to perform a second exorcism.

Everyone proceeds to the barn, where Cotton attempts to make contact with Abalam. Abalam manipulates Nell to contort her body. Cotton and Abalam reach an agreement that if Cotton remains silent for ten seconds, Abalam will release Nell. Abalam begins breaking Nell's fingers as he counts to ten. Nell's possession comes under scrutiny when she refers to a "blowing job." Cotton starts to believe Nell may be faking her possession. Nell eventually breaks down and confesses that she lost her virginity to a boy named Logan. Cotton summons local Pastor Manley and his associate, Becky, to provide counsel.

On their way home, the crew locates Logan and learns that he is gay and has never had sex with Nell. The crew rushes back to the Sweetzer farm to find the walls covered in occult and countercultural symbols. All family members are missing.

The film closes with the camera crew entering the woods. They follow the sounds of voices and discover a large ritual bonfire led by Pastor Manley. Louis is tied to a pillar and Nell gives birth to a young inhuman child on a Satanic altar. Manley hurls the child into the fire, which causes the fire to roar. Cotton grabs his crucifix and heads toward the fire. Members of the congregation discover Iris and Daniel. A member attacks Iris with an axe. Caleb approaches

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Daniel (holding the camera) and decapitates him with a scythe. The camera falls to the ground before cutting out.

Historical Context

Last Exorcism marked a turning point for the exorcism subgenre. If *Emily Rose* facilitated discussions of the ontology of possession and the ethics of exorcism, *Last Exorcism* asks audiences to take the supernatural occult seriously. *The Last Exorcism*'s title also suggests a possible nail in the coffin in the recent ruminations of contemporary exorcism, despite the later released, *The Last Exorcism: Part II* (2013).

Last Exorcism draws attention to the remarkable number of reports and historical accounts of botched rituals during the 2000s (Cheston, 2012; Duffey, 2011; Jackman, 2009; Makwabe, 2012; Mercer, 2013). Echoing themes of *Emily Rose*, Cotton discusses the dangers of hasty exorcisms and specifically refers to the death of a young boy with autism. The film draws directly from the Cottrell case as described by Duffey (2011), including elements of suffocation (which Cotton cites in the film). *Last Exorcism* illustrates a form of Ott and Walter's (2000) strategic intertextuality, creative appropriation, which "comments on the text that it steals from or on that text's role in the larger culture" (p. 437). *Last Exorcism* actively participates in the ethical debates on exorcism, while simultaneously allowing the main performer (Cotton Marcus) to focus on the "scam" of exorcism. Whereas *Emily Rose* dealt with Roman Catholic rites, *Last Exorcism* also marks a crucial turning point for the exorcism subgenre because it draws attention to the distinct practice of deliverance by Evangelicals in the United States. The surge of practice in deliverance became a main precipitant for ethical debates in medical and religious communities (Mercer, 2013). The film demonstrates a reflexivity toward historical and cinematic texts that contribute to public discourse.

Last Exorcism was also the first film in the exorcism subgenre to explicitly address

pregnancy and abortion. Themes of pregnancy, the demonic, and children hail the historical

context of *The Exorcist*, specifically the Roe v. Wade court decision. In fact, *Last Exorcism*

draws on a particular theme from that specific time period's discourse on abortion: Is she faking

it? Indeed, Norma McCorvey (better known as "Jane Roe") lied about being raped in attempt to

terminate her own pregnancy (Epstein & Walk, 2012). *Last Exorcism* also draws on *Rosemary's*

Baby (1968), a supernatural horror drama directed by Roman Polanski, in which Rosemary (Mia

Farrow) is desperate to bear a child. In one of the most crucial scenes, while under the influence

of a drug, Rosemary has a vision that she is raped by Satan in her sleep. Viewers later discover

that she gives birth to son of Satan. *Last Exorcism* draws heavily upon this film's material, as

Nell gives birth to a demon child. Cotton Marcus explains to Louis that the demon, Abalam,

defiles the innocent. Although Cotton seems to select arbitrarily which demon possesses Nell, he

is met with a demonic entity at the very conclusion of the film.

Finally, *Last Exorcism* used new media texts to implicate viewers and became the first

exorcism film to actively engage viewers via viral marketing strategies. Viral marketing is a

grassroots strategy to instigate consumer interest through its "self-perpetuating, self-propagating"

character (Rayport, 1996, para. 2). As Ott and Walter (2000) note, the Internet not only provides

fans an opportunity to participate in a kind of community, but has quickly become an arena for

texts to gain more momentum through identification: "Intertextual media encourage viewers to

identify with others in a manner that less consciously intertextual media do not" (p. 441). For

example, by integrating traditional and unconventional forms of advertising, *Blair Witch*

generated an unprecedented word of mouth attraction; users could explore the film's website and

gather more elements on the "backstory" to "propagate the notion of authenticity" (Telotte, 2001,

p. 35). Telotte (2001) goes so far as to call the online supplementary material coupled with the found footage approach as "a different sort of *attraction* than the movies usually offer" (p. 35, my emphasis). Similarly, *Last Exorcism* produced creative attractions to gain further interest.

Last Exorcism's viral marketing strategies invited viewer participation (consumption and sharing on social media) to increase brand awareness. The first strategy utilized Chatroulette, a social media website that randomly pairs users together in video chat. Marketing for *Last Exorcism* used a video in which a young girl seductively unbottons her shirt, but suddenly turns monstrous (Schroeder, 2010). The video ends with a link to *Last Exorcism*'s website. The strategy served doubly in the Chatroulette terrain and on YouTube, where viewers can revel in watching the varying reactions to the video and share links on social media. *Last Exorcism* also produced a St. Marks Church webpage featuring Cotton Marcus's picture and a brief letter introducing his blog (Turek, 2010). Years later, *Last Exorcism Part II* (2013) engaged similar marketing at a hair salon in which an evil girl (with an *Exorcist* green tint) briefly appears in the mirror as customers have their hair styled (Luippold, 2013). The real-life prank culminates in a scene where the actress "spider walks" across the salon—further reinforcing contortion as a main attraction of the exorcism film. A similar prank involving a girl with telekinetic powers in a coffee shop was used to promote the *Carrie* (2013) remake (Tepper, 2013).

Narrative Formula

The Last Exorcism's narrative sequence and content represent the baroque stage of the exorcism subgenre, which exhibits "increasing stylistic adornment and self-consciousness in which genre's conventions are sharply revised or inverted" (Worland, 2007, p. 19). The film's narrative adheres to the formula, but also *extends* established conventions through overt modifications and reversals. As I will discuss later, the film's documentary style impacts the

narrative's construction of reality. Crucially, *Last Exorcism* features a narrative chronicled entirely through subjective, point-of-view camera shots. Although a documentary may seek to neatly capture and narrativize evidence of a phenomenon, Nichols (1993) explains "History—embedded, corporeal history—is at odds with narrative and myth" (p. 174). Thus, isolating each narrative step is complicated.

The film *recognizes the normal body* through Cotton Marcus's family. Although he establishes a skeptical tone, Cotton's family life embodies the ideals of a traditional family—in part because it reflects familiar suburban life. Nichols (1993) writes "A politics of location inevitably poses questions about the body" (p. 184). *Last Exorcism* utilizes a politics of location to draw distinction between Cotton and Nell. Clover (1992) observes that the farther one is from the city, the farther one is from "social law" (p. 125). The narrative codes Nell as Other with an abnormal body. Although Nell initially appears normal, she is still fairly sheltered. The Sweetzer family history suggests a functional track record, but recent events have threatened their foundation.

Suggestion of invading force first manifests with the mysterious slaughter of livestock. As her dresses are marked with blood, evidence strongly suggests Nell is committing these acts. Yet, the suggestion of invading force is also apparent in the absent mother. For Renner (2011), the break-up of the family, such as divorce, creates fissures for a threat to invade. The death of Nell's mother has completely shaken the Sweetzers' foundation: the children have been kept in isolation from the secular world; Louis has developed alcoholism. Nevertheless, the slaughter of livestock is the first evidence of an invading force.

The first definitive instance of Nell's *body acting strangely* is when she mysteriously appears in Cotton's hotel room miles away from the farmhouse. As the camera crew attempts to

bring Nell out of her trance, Nell pulls Iris closer to her. She kisses and licks Iris's shoulder. Nell then begins to vomit. She is not herself. Over the course of the film, Nell behaves in a number of strange ways, but it is never clear when and if she is under supernatural influence. Her ability to foretell the future through her drawings seems to be the only definitive supernatural element. Throughout the film, Nell is hysterical, aggressive, and confounding. When she is locked in her bedroom, the crew picks up audio of two distinct voices, but only finds Nell.

Attempts to diagnose Nell's ailment fail due to Cotton's parodic performance. Cotton attempts to claim narrative control through pseudo-diagnosis of Nell's conditions and fake exorcism. He interviews family members, noting histories and symptoms. He performs the "exorcism" and the Sweetzer family thanks him. But his procedures are quickly undermined when events beyond explanation unfold. After Nell appears in Cotton's hotel room and the crew takes her to the nearest hospital, physicians run tests, but they cannot locate any physical ailment. Distinct from the McNeil's privilege of access to a barrage of testing equipment in *The Exorcist*, Nell is only put through basic screenings. Cotton is convinced that Nell needs psychiatric help, but failure to diagnose also stems from Louis's aversion to such methods.

Locating the threat produces profound degrees of disorientation for the camera crew. Nell is troubled, but the cause of her ailment is unclear. The narrative ontology oscillates back and forth from the secular to supernatural. While Cotton claims the situation as secular, Nell's strange behavior and lack of symptoms hint at the supernatural. The Sweetzer's familial dysfunction and psychological trauma read as secular, and in the final scene, all of the characters are forced to confront the supernatural. *Last Exorcism* generates anxiety through unrelenting ontological shifts. The narrative structure troubles any position of certainty or secular arrogance. Thus, characters and viewers do not effectively locate the threat until the final scene.

Methods to expel the threat come in a variety forms. After suspicious activity, the crew believes secular causes have produced the strange circumstances. Because Louis forbade psychiatry and the company learned of Nell's pregnancy, Iris suspects that Nell was raped by her father. As tensions rise, Louis threatens to kill his daughter (since "only through death is there salvation"). But Cotton agrees to perform a second exorcism. Rather than embracing exorcism as a means of spiritual warfare, Cotton uses the ritual is a way to placate his audience to confront their figurative demons. Cotton's confrontation with Abalam is dynamic: Nell contorts her body in peculiar ways, but like Emily in *Emily Rose*, she never exceeds beyond physiological limitations. A logical gap in Nell's possession performance (e.g. reference to a "blowing job") suggests that she may be faking her condition. As Nell becomes emotionally overwhelmed, Cotton becomes convinced that she is mentally disturbed.

A façade of restoration comes when Cotton believes he has located the real threat—Nell's trauma of carrying a child by a young man named Logan. Yet, after conferring with Logan, the crew is certain that Nell made up the story. Cotton vows to rescue Nell, but they find the farmhouse abandoned. Cotton's methods change from secular to supernatural in the final scene when he is confronted with the fire demon. Only then does he take up exorcism as a form of spiritual warfare.

Last Exorcism does not conclude with a *restoration* of the family, but with a direct confrontation with the supernatural—the reality that Cotton has attempted to ignore throughout the narrative. Viewers are left baffled from all the twists and turns. The abrupt ending leaves much consideration for whether Cotton Marcus, Louis, or Nell survives. Exorcism does not effectively serve its purpose in driving out evil. Cotton's parody of exorcism is punished when supernatural evil manifests itself and annihilates the main characters.

<center>**Analysis**</center>

Last Exorcism elaborates on notions of truth. The film fulfills the narrative formula of the exorcism subgenre in a highly paranoid fashion. Viewers never truly grasp a definitive sense of what is "actually" going on—echoing the skepticism and moral relativism of *Emily Rose*. In this section, I examine how spectacle horror is at work on two levels: First, I map out how *Last Exorcism*'s found footage style influences the construction of spectacle horror and spectator orientation. Second, I focus on Cotton and Nell as performative subjects and how their performances trouble the status quo of the exorcism subgenre.

Cinema Verité in *The Last Exorcism*

Last Exorcism's found footage style directly shapes the exorcism narrative. The film uses typical narrative elements of the exorcism subgenre, but the documentary style facilitates varying degrees of engagement between performer, film, and spectator. Heller-Nicholas (2014) recently dedicated an entire book chapter to the peculiar intersection of exorcism and found footage; she argues these "films rely on an appropriation of documentary codes and conventions then in turn expose their desire to expose a hidden 'truth'" (p. 152). However, *Last Exorcism* (and other applicable films) also anticipates audience familiarity with such conventions in order to facilitate particularly immediate and intimate spectactorship.

Typically, found footage utilizes one or more documentary modes for the majority (or the entirety) of the film. Nichols (1991) distinguishes four modes of documentary: expository, observational, interactive (participatory), and reflexive. Expository utilizes authoritative voice-over and aims to be descriptive and informative; observational aims to present a "slice of life" approach by effacing the filmmaker (Nichols, 1991). This section addresses both the interactive (participatory) and reflexive modes.

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First, *Last Exorcism* embraces the interactive (or participatory) mode of documentary, in which the filmmaker's presence is prominent, predominantly through the use of interviews (Nichols, 1991). The interactive mode highlights the subjective perspective of the filmmaker and/or cameraperson, which "introduces a sense of partialness, of *situated* presence and *local* knowledge that derives from the actual encounter of filmmaker and other" (Nichols, 1991, p. 44). Viewers are positioned through a point-of-view shot that necessarily encourages identification with the camera's gaze. Thus, viewers gather knowledge on a localized level and gain a sense of immediacy with the subject that other modes fail to facilitate.

The interactive mode emerged through the scientific community's impulse to provide empirical evidence—to suggest that visual confirmation was the ultimate "proof" (Renov, 1993). At the time, filmmakers conceptualized documentary as a medium to capture and showcase the exotic. Cinema verité's prevalence in the golden age of reality television is not surprising. In this time, cameras are at the hands of every smartphone owner, inculcating a new type of "citizen journalism," whose products, when reassembled, emerge as collections of footage. Scholarly discussion may benefit from more research explicating the aesthetics of found footage as it pertains to the horror genre.

Documentary also serves as medium and mediator between bodies. Nichols (1993) argues that the body is "the most local and most specific aspect of ourselves" (p. 184), and thus comes to serve as the primary mode of ethnographic representation for the documentary. Although *Last Exorcism*'s narrative highlights the instability of representing demonic possession, the style allows for more nuance than conventional filmmaking. Thus, the cinema verité style orients viewers in a more intimate proximity to bodies in the exorcism film.

The Last Exorcism's use of found footage style owes a debt to the success of *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), which was not the first horror film to utilize such style, but certainly popularized the aesthetic in the 21st century. *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) employs several tenets of Nichols' (1991) interactive mode. The camera crew interviews citizens of Burkittsville, Maryland and investigate the terrain through the subjective viewpoint of the camera.

The film also extends to the reflexive mode, which exposes the audience to conventions of representation, how subjects are filmed, and challenges in representing the real or truth (Nichols, 1991). Indeed, part of the horror in *The Blair Witch Project* emerges from the inability to capture the threats lurking in the woods and the gradual deterioration of the crew's sanity. Heather embodies the "metacommentary," which focuses less on the subject being filmed, and more on the "process of representation itself" (Nichols, 1991, p. 56). Throughout the movie, viewers overhear discussions on what to film and how to film it.

The reflexive mode extends beyond the interactive by turning the camera (figuratively or literally) toward the filmmaker, reflecting on the *process* of filmmaking itself. In a notable scene, Heather turns the camera on herself, apologizes to the families of the crew members, and takes responsibility for the project going awry: "And it's all because of me that we are here now. Hungry. Cold. And hunted . . . I love you, Mom. And Dad. I am so sorry" (Cowie, Myrick, & Sánchez, 1999). Typical for found footage, the film shifts focus from the subject to the *struggle* of apprehending the subject. Other documentary modes typically omit metacommentary elements from the final product, but the found footage aesthetic aims to present material in raw form to suggest a higher degree of authenticity.

Implicit questions of representation arise when viewing the film: Who assembled this collection of found footage? Who found it? *Blair Witch* highlights elements of post-production,

such as single narration overlaying several visual sequences. Although the interactive mode provides much of the foundation for the found footage style, the reflexive mode makes the found footage style distinctive and its immediacy provides a tantalizing opportunity for participatory intimacy between film and viewer.

Documentary as Spectacle Horror

The use of documentary style in *Last Exorcism* constructs distinct moments of spectacle horror. *Last Exorcism*'s found footage style begins with interviews. The camera follows Cotton Marcus, a local preacher who is coming to terms with his agnostic views. The approach unveils a backstage view of his sermon performances and a closer look into the process of being a local faith healer. The style supplements sequences of Cotton in action with narration from various interviews.

Last Exorcism also extends to the reflexive mode. Much of the film is recorded from camera operator Daniel Moskowitz's (Adam Grimes) perspective, under the guidance of "director" Iris Riesen (Iris Bahr). Cotton regularly confers with the crew (not just the camera) throughout the film on the struggle to apprehend Nell Sweetzer's story. The crew often encounters subjects resistant to being filmed (Caleb asks them to leave; Louis repeatedly asks to turn the camera off) and a heightened awareness of the camera's presence ("Are y'all filming a movie?"). Both elements contribute to the degree of authenticity the film produces for the viewer. The cinematic game is a type of tourism mixed with investigative journalism. The crew delves into the depths of Louisiana to bring an inside look into: the possessed girl!

The interactive mode also induces immediacy by encouraging viewers to experience the events from the camera's perspective. The documentary style allows more latitude in narrative construction by jump cutting (sometimes unexpectedly) from one scene to the next. In spectacle

horror fashion, spectators are actively presented with a series of views. Even though the mode is described as *participatory*, the film facilitates a violent power dynamic, *forcing* the viewer to participate rather than choosing. This violence is illuminated by several critiques that the "shaky cam" is not just off-putting but nauseating (Dee, 2013, para. 2). The structure of *Last Exorcism* shifts focus from invitation and gameplay to enforcement and manipulation. The cinematic game is accelerated to a rigorous pace, which fosters several tensions between identification *and* spectacle as modes of engagement.

Although identification is a limited framework for discussing the relationship between film and viewers, *Last Exorcism*'s cinema verité style exposes tensions worthy of discussion. First, the viewer is forced to identify with Metz's (1982) primary level of identification (with the camera). The interactive documentary style restricts viewers' abilities to explore beyond the camera's scope. Only in rare moments when the camera is still might viewers explore the scene. The camera guides the audience to look at particular elements rather than view the scene through a "fly on the wall" observational mode similar to techniques found in dramatic realism filmmaking. The participatory mode forces the viewer to see what the camera operator sees. Spectacle horror is constructed through a series of views.

Second, viewing in participatory mode also restricts identification on the second level (with characters). Participatory mode aggressively solicits viewers to engage spectacle. Yet, in terms of narrative, identification with Cotton Marcus comes most easily, as he occupies more on-camera time than any other character. Iris serves as "director" for the documentary, but her presence, while felt and sometimes explicated on camera, is not nearly as participatory as Cotton. Iris rarely operates the camera; she remains a facilitator and viewers never truly see what she

sees. The camera seldom catches her reactions to events, and Iris is still relegated to the same gaze as the other characters.

Third, although the participatory mode restricts possibility for the spectator, characters still locate innovative ways to engage the viewer. A particularly unique moment in *Last Exorcism* highlights these complex levels of identification: While the crew members are sleeping, the camera turns on to capture walking feet—the red boots Iris gave to Nell. The viewer realizes Nell has stolen one of the cameras. Suddenly the viewer is not just *with* Nell, but in terms of identification (both in camera and character) the viewer *is* Nell. She *possesses* the viewer. Nell (and the viewer) head toward the barn. Inside, they approach a white cat. Nell's voice (not the viewer's) creates aesthetic distance as she calls "Here, kitty, kitty." At this point, the viewer has become more camera than Nell and smashes into the cat. The viewer is not just smashing a camera into a cat, but the *viewer* (as camera) smashes into the cat.

The scene hyperbolizes from the reflexive toward what Nichols (2001) eventually calls a performative mode, which defects attention from the world and toward the subjective expressiveness of the film. The performative mode asks questions of epistemology, or how knowledge is constituted or attained. Distinct from traditional notions of message transmission, the performative mode apprehends knowledge through cooperative, personal, and embodied experience (Nichols, 2001). The cat-killing scene achieves performative status with Nell's ability to manipulate viewer participation. The viewer's involuntary participation and implication of killing the cat produces a violating effect that extends beyond the interactive to the performative. This moment showcases Nell's desire to destroy the very medium that seeks to understand and stabilize her. Her performance of recording the cat's murder is a cry for help. The performative is epitomized by Iris and Cotton later replacing the broken lens of the camera, which highlights the

reflexive struggle to apprehend the subject but also addresses the audience. The broken lens is an overt statement from Nell to the viewer: "Your perspective is broken. It cannot fully capture me." Nell uses performance to reclaim authority and authorship. As Bowman (1998) explains: "…demonstrating one's reflexivity is, more often than not, a device used to *establish* one's authority rather than disown it" (p. 137, emphasis in original).

The cat-killing scene provides an arresting reversal in terms of gender and identification. The "male gaze" is often used to describe the disciplinarity of the camera's scope; filming and capturing a subject attempts to stabilize that subject, and often, the presence of the woman offers the man visual pleasure (Mulvey, 1975). Rather than subverting, Nell manipulates viewers' gaze through both camera and character. Nell's possession of the audience's identification highlights the dialogic tensions between filmmaker, subject, and spectator—a special type of identification that bears associative and dissociative moments. The interactive mode privileges the subject by letting it take the lead in the filming process. Nell's performance actively resists notions of the male gaze by returning it and attempting to destroy it (smashing the camera). Williams (1996) finds that in many horror films, women are punished for returning the look, but *Last Exorcism* demonstrates that possession is a terrain and event by which the performer may punish those who look.

Fourth, the subjective viewpoint emphasizes localized knowledge and de-legitimizes the institutions that seek to stabilize meaning of the phenomena. Found footage emerged in relation to citizen journalism (through use of personal recording devices and social media), which brought to light localized accounts of some of the most active protests (e.g. Occupy Wall Street and The Arab Spring). The found footage subgenre gained ascendance through its remarkably consistent style and its capacity for further experimentation. Found footage seeks to identify the

ineffable, to capture the story not being told. Nell's claiming of the camera resonates with this attitude: to truly understand Nell's story, the viewer must understand from her point of view.

The subject's ability to share one's story is distinct from the first case. *Emily Rose*'s judicial approach with interviewing experts and family produces a remarkable distance between viewer and subject. Emily is unable to share her story for herself, which is perhaps why Father Moore is positioned as a sympathetic character. Although he attempts to convey Emily's story to the best of his ability, viewers are left without any sort of intimate connection with the possessed.

Last Exorcism's Nell establishes intimate connections with spectator through visceral spectacle horror techniques such as contortion, returning the look, and manipulation of the gaze. Nell shares her story not just through interview and observation, but through intimate, reflexive engagements with the camera itself. Viewers attain situated, localized knowledge, in which the subject fights back or takes over the filming process. Even more significant is that Nell resists being filmed while possessed. The crew struggles to locate definitive "proof" of her possession. Viewers are not able to witness her possession until Nell is able to take over filming herself.

Aside from a sense of immediacy, the cinema verité style produces a heightened state of paranoid horror, which Tudor (1995) argues is more of a larger discourse than a technique or mode. *Last Exorcism* moves back and forth between secular and supernatural throughout the narrative. As Ashley Bell notes in an extra features interview, the film's structure thrusts viewer into an "arena" in which threats may come in from any and all sides (Bliss & Stamm, 2010). Viewers are induced to experience paranoia because they know they are in close proximity to the threat and anything can happen. The effect of paranoia is extended to the film's very composition. Heller-Nicholas (2013) notes "it is often difficult in the finished products to distinguish which

'faked' footage is a 'real' low-budget, amateur product, and which is 'faked fake amateur' footage (pp. 67-68). Thus, paranoid horror permeates through *Last Exorcism*'s content and form.

Last Exorcism as Performative Documentary

Reflexive elements in *Last Exorcism* such as viewer immediacy and subject intimacy call into question notions of performative documentary that extend Nichols' (2001) definition. Bruzzi (2000) contends that performance has always been a part of the documentary and its filmmaking process, but several "new documentaries" foreground elements of performance (p. 155). The term performance is certainly tenuous—as it is an "essentially contested concept" (String, Long, & Hopkins, 1990, p. 183). However, Bruzzi (2000) outlines two types: 1) films that feature performative subjects and 2) films that are inherently performative due to the intrusive presence of the filmmaker. The emphasis on performative subjects is fitting for *Last Exorcism*—as bodily performance is central to the spectacle horror construction. Nell's almost superhuman corporeality highlights how contortion and the unruly body as spectacles threaten the disciplinary gaze of the camera attempting to organize, rationally interpret, and explain her behavior. The act of filming a subject demands that subject be somehow materialized and intelligible. Possession films extend this interest by materializing a threat through and on the female body and subjecting that body to examination under a number of experts and lenses (Clover, 1992). Thus, a documentary-style possession film doubly uses the female body to provide materiality and intelligibility to the inexplicable.

Bruzzi (2000) argues that the documentary, at heart, is a performance and ushers in a new notion of authenticity "that eschews the traditional adherence to an observation . . . and replaces this with a performative exchange between subjects, filmmakers/apparatus and spectators" (p. 6).

This new sense of authenticity recognizes spectators not as passive viewers but active participants; meaning is predicated on participation, not exhibition.

This playful, interactive notion of authenticity is embodied in the contemporary found footage film. First, found footage actively blurs the lines between amateur and professional filmmaking (Heller-Nicholas, 2013). The recent *V/H/S* anthologies (2012 & 2013) are not just current exercises of the found footage discourse, but showcases of young directors that provide exposure not easily found in other subgenres. Filmmakers may also play with notions of authenticity by using real-life actor names as character names. As a special nod to *The Blair Witch Project*, a majority of *The Last Exorcism*'s characters (Iris, Louis, Caleb, and others) utilize actors' names to playfully induce a further effect of "authenticity" in the film.

Second, this sense of authenticity—one in which subjects and viewers may co-create and interact—is a mode in which spectacle horror unfolds. *Last Exorcism* features elements of performative spectacle horror in one concise example: When the crew overhears Nell conversing with someone in the next room. Iris and Cotton hear two distinct voices from behind the door. Cotton unlocks the door to find Nell sitting on her bed alone. "Who are you talking to?" he asks. "No one." Just as he closes the door, Nell looks directly into the camera and smirks (see Figure 4.1).

Nell does not smirk at the *camera*; she solicits the audience directly. The gesture is typical for spectacle horror, wherein the performer is "willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator" (Gunning, 1986, p. 64). Nell communicates awareness of being watched and returns the look with direct address. By returning the look, Nell creates a definitive spectacle in *Last Exorcism*. Through its content and form, *Last Exorcism* utilizes spectacle horror to generate film-viewer immediacy.

Figure 4.1 Nell Sweetzer smirks to the viewer in *Last Exorcism* (2010). Courtesy of Lionsgate. [2]

Finally, the documentary style reminds the viewer that previous forms of documentary, such as the audio recordings and photography of Annaliese Michel, contribute to exorcism films. Similar to *Blair Witch's* conclusion, *Last Exorcism* reminds viewers that capturing and naming the ineffable comes with a price.

Performative Subjects and Spectacle horror

Although *Last Exorcism*'s performative documentary construction foregrounds the performance of documentary filmmaking repeatedly, Bruzzi (2000) argues that performative documentary is also defined by the *performative subject*—that is, a subject who inherently performs or is inexorably interpreted *as* performance. *Last Exorcism* may be a work of fiction, but its mockumentary construction compels audience members to read its fictional characters in the same fashion as real-life documentary subjects. Thus, it is appropriate to analyze Cotton Marcus and Nell Sweetzer as documentary performative subjects.

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[2] Figures 4.1 is a screenshot from *The Last Exorcism* (2010) and is protected under the fair use clause as it is used strictly for educational (and absolutely no commercial) purposes.

The most accessible example of a performative subject is Butler's (1993) analysis of

Paris is Burning, which argues the drag performers only seem to reinforce the status quo. Drag

performances have the potential to be subversive, but "drag is not unproblematically

subversive . . . .There is no guarantee that exposing the naturalized status of heterosexuality will

lead to its subversion" (Butler, 1993, p. 231). In other words, a performance that resists or

confounds the status quo does not always produce stable or viable effects. Both Cotton and Nell

are performative subjects in Iris's "documentary" because they function as cinematic showmen,

directing viewer attention to particular events as spectacle with performances that are

problematic. However, even though each seeks to subvert established systems by exposing them,

problems arise: Cotton cannot neutralize the supernatural, and Nell cannot evade the gaze of men

or the camera.

Performative subjects have the opportunity to influence several levels of representation in

the documentary. A singular body may contribute to multiple discourses in a given instance.

Nichols (1993) distinguishes three perspectives (*social*, *narrative*, and *vehicle*) that may all arise

from a singular body in documentary filmmaking. The body of the *social actor* "is agent and

subject of historical actions and events, situations and experiences" (p. 184). The social actor

refers to the "real life" Reverend Cotton Marcus and his active consent to be filmed for Iris

Reisen's documentary. Iris and Cotton, as social actors, are committed to constructing a

documentary that unveils the truth of contemporary exorcism. Nell, as social actor, is the

daughter of Louis Sweetzer, homeschooled at the farm, and agrees to be filmed for the purposes

of Iris's documentary.

The body of the *narrative character* "is the focus of actions and enigmas, helpers and

donors all propelling the narrative toward closure" (Nichols, 1993, p. 184). Iris and Cotton

function as narrative characters when the cameras are rolling. Early in the film, they engage in participatory interviews. Cotton's narrative character stabilizes a skeptic in a secular world. He plays devil's advocate to delegitimize exorcism as a supernatural phenomenon. Nell serves as the troubled young girl. The documentary collaborators Iris and Cotton are not necessarily interested in Nell as much as how much she can fulfill the filmmakers' preconceived notions of the troubled young girl. But those narrative characters are easily shattered when supernatural events begin to unfold. They quickly abandon their narrative characters and revert to social actors as they attempt to contain the historical situation. The nature of this documentary asks for the filmmakers to relinquish notions of stable narrative early in the film.

The third body is a *vehicle* or "a mythic, ahistorical persona, type, icon, or fetish which serves as the object of both desire and identification" (Nichols, 1993, p. 184). I extend Nichols's definition here to also include "desire and repulsion." Cotton and Nell function as vehicles most apparently during instances of spectacle horror. Spectacle horror recognizes the shocking as an ambivalent attraction wherein audience members, aware they are going to be stunned, are willing to subject themselves to astonishment. Body as vehicle functions metonymically where Cotton may represent the skeptic or act as a vehicle to rewrite discourse on contemporary exorcism, while Nell may represent the rebellious woman or use her body as vehicle to flout the camera.

Nichols (1993) notes that tensions form between these three bodily perspectives, and they often compete for ascendancy. Performative subjects then have opportunity for double-representation, or two layers of reality that depict: 1) what is happening and 2) what is "really" happening. Cotton performs the narrative character of the exorcist for the Sweetzer family (what is happening) to unmask how exorcism is not supernatural warfare but theatre that induces

psychotherapy (what is "really" happening). Viewers of the documentary have the benefit of knowing what is "really" happening in Cotton's parody of exorcism performance.

Last Exorcism begins with clear distinction between "real" and "performed" selves, but supernatural events shatter any consistency between narrative and social bodies. The film constructs Cotton and Nell as documentary subjects who perform in double-voiced fashion: first, to serve the interests of narrative characters and second, to solicit audience attention (or engage spectacle horror). As each interacts with Iris's documentary cameras, Cotton and Nell indicate that they are well aware of audiences beyond the immediate characters present. As I will demonstrate, Cotton and Nell use spectacle horror strategies; they figuratively wink or literally glance at the camera to draw audience attention to what is "really" happening. Each uses bodily performance as a *vehicle* toward social action. In this section, I explain how each character operates within the performative documentary to influence the gazes of characters and viewers. First, I explore how Cotton manipulates the gaze of the characters through parodic performance to solicit spectacle with viewers. Second, I show how Nell utilizes the camera to rupture her relationships with characters and viewers.

Parodic exorcism as spectacle horror

Cotton's determination to unmask exorcism as a scam embodies his crisis of faith. Distinct from Damien Karras and Father Moore, Cotton Marcus is not an ordained minister. He has received no training from the Catholic Church or similar institution. Rather, Cotton has lived his entire life as a performer. The narrative provides his true crisis in the last scene when he is confronted with genuine evil. Here, Cotton's faith is restored and he battles the demon.

Cotton, as performative subject, serves two critical purposes: first, to expose the inconsistencies of exorcism, and second, to claim ontological control. Lowenstein (2011)

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elaborates that spectacle horror construction may only be intelligible to target audience members. Cotton clearly orients the spectacle so viewers witness both valences of the exorcism: the pomp and circumstance of the performance and its concerted construction. From the onset, Cotton demonstrates smoke-and-mirrors theatrics. His rousing sermons encourage his supportive audience. Cotton demonstrates the extent of his influence through his "banana bread recipe" example, in which he successfully encourages the congregation to identify and support his sermon of how to make banana bread. Cotton explains that, as a child faith healer, he grew up well aware of the theater's transformative power on its viewers. For him, exorcism is not spiritual warfare, but cathartic drama that forces viewers to confront their own traumas:

> I help heal people from what ail them, and what ail them sometimes was the thought, in their brain, that they were possessed by a devil. And if I helped make that thought go away, and they felt better, so be it. (*The Last Exorcism*, 2010)

At heart, Cotton functions as a spiritual guide. He recognizes troubled individuals' agencies and encourages them to confront their own traumas. Cotton's "new exorcist" approach deviates from the overt spiritual warrior.

First, Cotton operates as a cinematic showman by specifically directing viewer attention to the spectacles of exorcism performance and to his ability to engage the family members. Cotton uses a double-voiced irony, which allows for the ritual to be doubly interpreted: viable for characters and put-on for spectators. He uses typical regalia and procedures popularized by *The Exorcist*. He even plays the role of pseudo-physician, noting Nell's collection of symptoms. *Last Exorcism*'s baroque tone emerges through Cotton's blatant signals toward the constructed nature of the ritual, going even so far to invoke Damien Karras's iconic line "Take me!" Cotton fulfills his duties by providing a memorable, theatrical performance for his characters, which is later affirmed by the camera crew: "That was impressive." This ironic performance generates

spectacle horror because it prompts viewers to consider the efficacy of the ritual, especially with its marked increase over the last decade. *Last Exorcism* revises the narrative formula by revealing the constructed and performative nature of the exorcism.

Cotton performs spiritual warrior and spiritual guide as needed throughout the film. While a spiritual warrior focuses on an aggressive, masculine, and theatrical approach to redeem a possessed woman who cannot save herself, the spiritual guide utilizes a more feminine approach to generate a cooperative exorcism in which the young woman may be able to participate in saving herself. Cotton performs a parody of the spiritual warrior in order to expose its hegemony and critique its inefficiency.

Cotton utilizes spectacle not to engage in spiritual warfare but rather spiritual guidance. Through sleight of hand maneuvering, Cotton uses the spectacle of exorcism to engage Louis and Nell. Cotton says, "Let's all close our eyes and pray to Jesus." He then throws a solution into the tub of water engulfing Nell's feet. The water begins to bubble, which shocks Louis and Nell. Caleb suppresses a smile. Cotton utilizes this special effect as "proof" that exorcism is necessary.

The preacher manipulates the gaze of his character audience to consume magical effects necessary to justify spectacular performance. He presents a series of views to astonish Louis and Nell, but Caleb, who witnesses part of Cotton's backstage production, is skeptical. Caleb aligns with Cotton once he gathers that the exorcist is not out to hurt his sister. In fact, Caleb later reaffirms Cotton's spectacle by congratulating him on a great show. Cotton induces the family to confront their demons by manipulating their attention and providing both the astonishment and the relief needed to purge them of their traumas. Cotton's exorcism functions as social-psychological medicine, not spiritual warfare.

Second, Cotton attempts to stabilize the ontology of Iris's documentary film. Although Cotton personally claims agnostic views, his parodic performance of exorcism in front of the camera determinedly claims a secular agenda for Iris's documentary film. By affirming that exorcism (and its presumed supernatural effects) has no actual bearing on the possessed beyond their own willpower, Cotton privileges the secular.

However, Cotton's mockery of exorcism comes with consequences. Nell is still subject to her episodes, which leads Louis to believe that killing Nell is the only way to her salvation. Narrative oscillations between secular and supernatural interpretations orient the audience to identify with Cotton's crisis of faith. Although Cotton does not believe in the power of exorcism or the supernatural, his second exorcism with Nell is much more dynamic and unstable. He begins not with the performance of spiritual warfare, but with spiritual guidance: "I didn't get the demon out. But if you can be strong, I need you to do it one more time. . . . I need you to be willing to bring him up again" (*The Last Exorcism*, 2010). Cotton oscillates his masculine and feminine approaches through the second exorcism. Ultimately, the scene reveals that Nell may be performing her possession just as much as Cotton is purporting to be a faith healer.

Spectacle horror emerges during the final scene, when characters (and viewers) are confronted with both secular (the cult) and supernatural (fire demon) evils. Spectacle horror draws the viewer in through a solicitation of possession and exorcism, and attempts to stabilize a secular position of privilege until the finale produces a jarring, paranoid conclusion in which Caleb decapitates the camera operator and the camera falls to the ground.

Rupture as spectacle horror

Men confine Nell. Her mother's absence only highlights her feeble attempts to establish autonomy. Indeed, Nell's body constantly exists in dyadic relation to men's bodies. *Last*

Exorcism's two main predecessors inform Nell's performance of possession: *The Exorcist* and *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*. Contortion as spectacle horror has enriched the vocabulary of the exorcism formula, and Nell's bodily performances contribute to contortion's status as an icon of exorcism.

Yet, as a documentary performative subject, Nell utilizes inconsistent behavior to deliberately confound Cotton, the Sweetzer family, and viewers. The peculiar scenarios, logical gaps, and Nell's bodily performances elude the camera. To better understand Nell's spectacle of possession, I turn to what Perucci (2009) calls "ruptural performance," a direct mode of performance activism engagement marked by four distinct qualities: "they are interruptive, becoming-event, confrontational, and baffling" (p. 2). Perucci (2009) theorizes based on avant-garde street performance protest. By using Perucci's (2009) vocabulary uniquely for Nell's performances of possession, I conceptualize Nell as an *active* contortionist, rather than a helpless victim of the supernatural. Nell calculatedly ruptures the agents and apparatuses that attempt to stabilize her meaning. Thus, a theory of performance activism—a theory that recognizes personal agency—is appropriate to demonstrate how Nell (and her writers) utilizes performance of possession—her personal agency—to create spaces of possibility. Because these performances are rooted in exhibition, shock, and solicitation, I read ruptural performance as a type of spectacle horror.

Performance as rupture is defined by its ability to shatter the status quo, to bewilder social conventions, and to draw attention to naturalized assumptions (Perucci, 2009). Ruptural performance may confound everyday, habitual behaviors by invading ordinary activities with extraordinary or excessive actions. Ruptures interrupt and "halt, impede, or delay the habitual practices of daily life" (p. 5). Episodes of possession are not only the result of family break, but

they also cause familial divide. Possession breaks up the daily familial practice. The Sweetzers cannot continue daily life because of Nell's erratic behaviors that come without notice or consistency.

Ruptural performances are also becoming-events with unstable and unfixed boundaries; they "tend to confound boundaries of the real and artificial" (Perucci, 2009, p. 9). Thus, audience members or bystanders may not initially realize they are part of the performance "Ultimately, though, the 'breakthrough' occurs that things aren't normal, they are strange, and we are in the midst of an event" (Perucci, 2009, p. 9). The fluctuation between secular and supernatural suggests that viewers are consistently put through a number of ruptural performances. Cotton's parodic performance and Nell's suspicious possession set up a put-on versus put-on scenario that culminates in a confrontation with an authentic supernatural threat—a punishment for mocking its power and influence.

Third, ruptural performance is confrontational. Although its entry into the public sphere may initially emerge as covert, intervention performance bears the potential of unmasking hidden truths: "Ruptural performance is thus less a critique of ideology or false consciousness, and is more about the experience of the encounter of returning one's gaze to that which one avoids to maintain acceptance of the inequities of the contemporary social orders" (Perucci, 2009, p. 11). The practice of exorcism is confrontational, and confronts in an overtly transparent way. Ruptural performance, however, confronts by breaking up the normal habitual order and prompting consideration of the order in the first place.

Finally, ruptural performance is baffling and confounding. Perucci (2009) primarily defines these qualities through unnecessary activities of the body—behaviors not aligned with the clarity of determined resistance, but in their perceived excesses. The ruptural "embraces the

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notion that the political message is sometimes not immediately clear" (p. 14), and rather, focuses on confronting the spectator's sensibilities (Perruci, 2009, p. 14).

Scholars have asked how the possessed woman's body rebels, but not how it deliberately confounds. Nell purposely confounds her viewers with her body not only to reclaim it, but also to create a space in which she may draft authoritative possibilities. Ruptural performance seeks to "escape the tyranny of meaning" (Barthes as quoted in Perucci, 2009, p. 16) and exceeds the boundaries of what is known or can be known. Perucci (2009) argues the performance of rupture welcomes a response of "I don't know" that other frameworks avoid (p. 16). Accordingly, Nell utilizes a strategy of rupture in order to combat the organizing lens of Iris's ethnographic documentary. Nell refuses to be ordered or stably represented. Ruptural performance provides both a venue for resistance and a terrain in which her meaning is not finalized.

As ruptural performance exceeds any singular or stable meaning, it is not as productive to ask what such ruptural performance *means* as much as what it *does*. Rupture performs doubly in *Last Exorcism*. Nell's possession performances unveil patriarchy, feminine presence, secular/religious arrogance, and familial trauma. But *Last Exorcism*'s cinema verité style further applies ruptural performance to the exorcism *narrative*. Indeed, the documentary style performs rupture on audience viewing experience. *Last Exorcism*'s highly paranoid tone is constructed in anticipation of viewers' familiarity with the exorcism narrative. Just when viewers are able to get "on track" with the narrative, ruptural performance emerges with the unrelenting ontological shifts—revealing the troubling dichotomy of secular and supernatural. *Last Exorcism*'s ruptural performance challenges audience to rethink the distinction between the secular and the supernatural as it pertains to exorcism—a concept that continues to confound contemporary public citizens and film viewers. This particular exorcism narrative suggests that secular

problems must be negotiated through the supernatural, rather than the supernatural negotiated through the secular.

Spectacle horror incorporates strategies similar to ruptural performance. In the cinema of attractions, actors violate narrative enclosure and extend outward toward acknowledged spectactors (Gunning, 1986). Such strategies tease and trouble the process of narrative documentary filmmaking. Thus, I extend Lowenstein's notion of spectacle horror to include performances of rupture, which may not bear as clear of solicitation to audience but certainly employ attraction-style strategies of interruption, confrontation, and bafflement. I also extend spectacle horror as a becoming-event, in which boundaries are not as fixed. Lowenstein's (2011) theory, while productive in recognizing the constructions and emergences of spectacle horror, does not offer clear parameters on "eventness" and its limitations. Although ruptural performance's boundaries are difficult to discern, the performance's "eventness . . . as a singular in time and space . . . enables the presencing that the spectacle confounds" (Perucci, 2009, p. 9). Instances of spectacle horror, including ruptural performance, emerge as particular types of events within *Last Exorcism*'s structure of performative documentary.

Perhaps one way to distinguish spectacle horror and ruptural performance is the nature of the solicitation: For spectacle horror, the sideshow is apparent, stable, and begs for consideration. Ruptural performance, however, invades in a covert manner. The becoming-event nature of ruptural performance allows performers to invade with subtle entry.

Thus, I propose that the exorcism *film* features elements of spectacle horror, while the exorcism *narrative* depends on ruptural performance. Indeed, the disorientation main characters experience emerges from the ruptures that interrupt daily, habitual activities and confront family members with deeper consideration. The eventness of viewing a horror film is stable. Viewers

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expect a great show, which spectacle horror acknowledges. But ruptural performance within the narrative refuses a stable "wink" or gesture to reassure audiences what is "really" happening. Thus, *Last Exorcism* utilizes forms of spectacle horror, including ruptural performance, to solicit audience attention and generate anxiety through paranoid narrative and confounding bodily performance.

Interactive strategies employed in *Last Exorcism* also beg consideration for relationships with new media. Through supplementary material, public stunt, and viral marketing, new horror films continue to locate innovative ways to engage the viewer. Hahner, Varda, and Wilson (2013) argue that contemporary horror films with multiple endings (in DVD releases) "invigorate audience investment," and position the audience "as participants in the creation of the films," promoting consumption of the film *and* related texts (pp. 364-371). As related new media texts of a new scary movie accumulate, the horror film may be more effectively read as *becoming-event* than singular text: "In an era that has become practically defined not only by the effects of 'mass media' but by the interweaving of many media, films today seldom really stand alone" (Telotte, 2001, p. 32). *Last Exorcism* not only positions the audience in participatory terms, but anticipates viewers' investment in related cultural capital.

Conclusion

The Last Exorcism's (2010) documentary style acts as a critical mode of inquiry by which filmmakers can exercise new possibilities with relationships between performer, text, and audience member. The films engage interactive, reflexive, and performative modes of the documentary filmmaking and feature performative subjects who solicit instances of spectacle horror and engage ruptural performance. Cotton Marcus manipulates character gaze through parodic exorcism to critique and expose the inconsistencies of exorcism. Nell utilizes ruptural

performances like contortion to create liberatory spaces in which she may temporarily transcend

male-established power structures. Finally, participatory structures in the film encourage viewer

consumption of the related texts, including references creatively appropriated into the film.

CHAPTER 5
CASE #3: *THE CONJURING* (2013)

The Conjuring (2013) is a supernatural horror film directed by James Wan (*Saw*, *Dead Silence*, *Insidious*). *The Conjuring* was the most successful horror film of 2013. The film earned over $137 million in domestic box office sales and nearly $180 million internationally (a grand total of over $317 million), which exceeded sales of *Emily Rose* and *Last Exorcism* combined, and as of 2014, the film ranked fifth in all-time supernatural horror (The Conjuring – Box Office Mojo, 2014). The film received an 87% rating from Rotten Tomatoes: "Well-crafted and gleefully creepy, The Conjuring ratchets up dread through a series of effective old-school scares" (The Conjuring – Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.). *The Conjuring* received praise for its well-crafted suspense and frights, despite heavy influence from previous "old school" horror films.

Marketing sold the film in terms of its dramatization of real events. The tagline, "Before there was Amityville, there was Harrisville," suggested that a familiar reference point, *The Amityville Horror*, offered audiences a way to interpret and navigate their viewing experiences. Utilizing interviews with real life members of the Perron family, trailers for *The Conjuring* framed the film as a heavily researched rendering of the "true" story of *The Amityville Horror* (McNary, 2013). Distinct from *The Blair Witch Project* and *The Last Exorcism*, *The Conjuring* placed emphasis on dramatizing reference materials and historical events.

Despite its box office success and "true" story approach, *The Conjuring* received several criticisms for relying on familiar tropes. More interesting, though, was how critics *interpreted* its use of familiar elements. Some hailed *The Conjuring* as a success despite its conventional elements, while others read the film as direct tribute to earlier successes of the horror genre. One review even went so far as to call *The Conjuring* the "Ultimate Fighting Champion of haunting movies. It is all of the movies. Every single one" (Dunks, 2013, para. 1). The film was also noted

for conjuring to mind several elements of *The Exorcist* (Moore, 2013; Puig, 2013; Schwartz, 2013). However, other reviews reviled its familiarity and cast the practice as "blatant thievery" (Davis, 2013, para. 3). Critics and scholars continue to wrestle with the value and pleasure of familiar materials. Thus, I utilize *The Conjuring* as an opportunity to better understand the contemporary use of intertextuality and its relation to spectacle horror. In this chapter, I offer a film synopsis, a historical context, and a description of the narrative formula of *The Conjuring*. I then draw upon previous literature on intertextuality to demonstrate how the incorporation of familiar elements facilitates feminist possibilities and constructs moments of spectacle horror.

Synopsis

The film opens with paranormal experts Ed and Lorraine Warren interviewing a trio of friends who were terrorized by the Annabelle doll. The group learns that Annabelle is possessed not by a human spirit, but by something that has never walked the earth.

In 1971, Roger and Carolyn Perron and their five daughters move into a grand but decrepit country house in Harrisville, Rhode Island. The move goes off without a hitch, but the family dog, Sadie, refuses to enter the house. Later that day, while playing a game of hide and clap, one of the daughters discovers a hidden cellar. The next morning, Carolyn finds a large bruise on her leg. Shortly after, the youngest daughter, April, finds Sadie dead outside of the house. Roger explores the cellar.

The film cuts to Ed Warren who guides a reporter through a room full of haunted and cursed artifacts in the Warren household. Ed explains that a priest blesses the room once a month to keep the forces contained.

Over the next few days, the Perrons experience a number of paranormal events. Daughter Christine swears someone was in her room, and Carolyn notes that the clocks keep stopping at

3:07. While Roger is away on a business trip, the activity amplifies as family pictures fall off the walls, and Carolyn is locked in the cellar. The family reaches a breaking point when daughters Andrea and Cindi see a woman's spirit on top of the wardrobe.

Meanwhile the Warrens establish their expertise of paranormal activity during a local university lecture. Carolyn locates them afterwards and begs for their help. The Warrens reluctantly investigate the house and conclude that the house may need an exorcism, but they must receive approval from the Catholic Church.

The Warrens continue gathering evidence of paranormal activity. When delving into the history of the land, Ed and Lorraine learn that the house belonged to an accused witch named Bathsheba who attempted to sacrifice her children to Satan. She killed herself in 1863 and cursed any who would take her land, which spanned across 200 acres. The Warrens dig deeper into the history and discover a series of murders in other homes that once belonged to the acreage.

The Warrens use cameras, motion sensors, ultraviolet lights, and recording devices to capture more evidence for the Catholic Church. Cindi's sleepwalking reveals a secret hiding place behind the wardrobe. Lorraine investigates, but falls through the wall to the basement cellar. Lorraine then sees a crying woman who (once possessed by Bathsheba) had killed her son. Minutes later, one of Carolyn's daughters, Nancy, is pulled by her hair across the room by an invisible force. Bathsheba begins to invade Carolyn.

The Perrons take refuge at a nearby hotel while the Warrens continue gathering evidence. The Warrens' daughter, Judy, is attacked at home by the spirit of Bathsheba. Ed and Lorraine arrive home just in time to save her.

Meanwhile, Carolyn, now possessed by the spirit of Bathsheba, takes Christine and April back to the house. The Warrens, Roger, and a police officer, Brad, hurry back and find Carolyn

attempting to stab Christine with a pair of scissors. They manage to restrain Carolyn and bring her down into the cellar. Carolyn escapes and attempts to kill April. The Warrens decide they cannot wait for approval from the Catholic Church. Ed begins performing the exorcism, during which Lorraine beseeches Carolyn to resist the spirit's influence and to focus on her special memory (a day at the beach) of her family. Ed calls out Bathsheba's name and successfully drives out her spirit: "I condemn you back to hell!" Carolyn and her daughters are saved.

In the final scene, the Warrens return home to find a message from the Catholic Church. They have approval to proceed with the exorcism. Additionally, the priest has another case for them to inspect in Long Island.

Historical Context

The Conjuring primarily draws on two films: *The Amityville Horror* and *The Exorcist*. In fact, Sragow (2013) argues that *The Conjuring* featured two distinct halves: "an exhilarating haunted-house thriller and a grueling post-'Exorcist' horror film – but they don't come back together in a living, breathing whole" (para. 1). Davis (2013) echoes a similar recognition: "It might as well be retitled *The Amityville Exorcist*" (para. 1). Thus, *The Exorcist* and *The Amityville Horror* served as two primary texts by which viewers may interpret *The Conjuring*'s intertextual composition. Yet Schager (2013) clarifies that "*The Conjuring* . . . doesn't emulate demonic-infestation and possession tales like *The Amityville Horror* and *The Exorcist* so much as operate as a veritable compendium of their myriad tropes" (para. 1). The term "compendium" suggests that the film functions more like a reference guide to previous horror texts.

A majority of the film's criticism noted (for better or for worse) that *The Conjuring* used several familiar and formulaic elements. The formula in the horror film continues to remain a significant point of discussion for the genre, particularly the use of pastiche. Pastiche films were

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remarkably successful for the years 2012-2013. *Cabin in the Woods* (2012), *ParaNorman* (2012), *This Is The End* (2013), and *The Conjuring* (2013) all feature overt references to previous horror films. In one particular case, pastiche was used toward performative means: For one reviewer, *Cabin in the Woods* attempts to perform an "exorcism" on the horror genre (Buckwater, 2012). Viewers have achieved a sophisticated understanding of the horror genre, and as such, horror films not only replicate formulaic elements but also incorporate cultural references with a critical slant. Thus, the cinematic game is not predicated on just formula but engages in intertextuality that rewards literate and savvy viewers. In this way, *The Conjuring* reads as a pastiche film built on the cultural capital of familiar constitutive elements that utilizes techniques of the exorcism subgenre and still manages to break new terrain.

The Conjuring's historical context includes the director's ethos. Despite turning his recent focus toward a successful action franchise, *Fast and Furious 7* (Jagernauth, 2013), a steady line of horror films garnered James Wan credibility not only as a director, but specifically as a horror director. Wan's previous works include *Saw* (2004), *Dead Silence* (2007), *Insidious* (2010), and *Insidious: Chapter 2* (2013). Although these films have little to do with *The Conjuring*'s material, Wan's history of creating fairly successful horror films facilitated more exposure for *The Conjuring* and ultimately generated more box office sales. Further, Wan has previous history with cinematic "games" including *Saw*, in which the threat, Jigsaw, places individuals in deathtraps to confront their pasts or fears. *The Conjuring* comes as a different type of confrontation—to reconsider history.

The Conjuring's narrative context—set in 1971—calls to mind Jancovich's (2002) remark on the 21st century's return to the 1970s. *The Conjuring*'s 1971 setting rests between the releases of *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and *The Exorcist* (1973), both of which deal with the

demonic's relationship to children. Remarkably, these were crucial years for public discourse

regarding women's reproductive rights. In just five years (1968-1972) under new law, the rate of

abortions skyrocketed, including a 2000% increase of abortions sought and performed in

California (Luker, 1984). Further, 1971 was the first year the Supreme Court heard oral

arguments in the *Roe* case (Balkin, 2005). By the release of *The Exorcist* (1973), *Roe v. Wade*

was decided: "guaranteeing a woman's right to choose an abortion" (Phillips, 2005, p. 109). *The

Conjuring*'s narrative setting marks an undeniable discursive point of contest between the

traditional family and a woman's right to terminate her pregnancy.

Although set in the past, *The Conjuring* necessarily implicates its contemporary audience,

their cultural context, and public discourse on reproductive rights. The film's narrative prompts

viewers to consider, over 40 years later, their standpoint in abortion discourse. Women's bodies

have become more politicized than ever. Strasser (2013) notes that in just the first quarter of

2013 "states have proposed 694 provisions related to a woman's body, how she gets pregnant, or

how she chooses to end that pregnancy" (para. 1). The film's contemporary historical context

also includes the wave of anti-abortion legislation in the last three years. From 2010 to 2013,

over 200 bills dealing with various bans on abortions were passed in the United States (Lohr,

2013). Rhetorically, *The Conjuring* suggests that terminating a pregnancy is necessarily evil

because only witches and the possessed would want to exercise choice. In this reading, horror

emerges from the desire to kill one's children or the threat of the family's dissolution. Rather

than echoing *Rosemary's Baby* by asking "Is God dead?", exorcism films demand an answer.

The Conjuring's style and content suggest a *cinematic* return to the 1970s and a

continued fascination with the apocalypse. Jancovich (2002) noted that many early 2000s films

drew upon a number of demonic themes explored in 1970s horror. The 1970s witnessed a decline

in the American family: a dramatic increase of divorce, a significant decrease in birthrates (Slocum-Schaffer, 2003), and a fear of children stemming from overpopulation and famine (Phillips, 2005). *The Exorcist* (1973) is noted in particular for its apocalyptic tone and engages "the question of the end of humanity as we know it" (Phillips, 2005, p. 102). As scholars (Gunn, 2004; Jancovich, 2002) have noted, several contemporary events contributed to the surge of new interest in the supernatural and the demonic, including the turn of the millennium, Y2K, and the September 11th attacks. Films produced in the first decade of the 21st Century not only draw upon the 1970s but return to a fascination with the apocalypse.

The Conjuring's historical context also includes the sustained growth of interest in exorcism. Since 2000, the demand for exorcists in Poland increased from four to 120, and the country has even developed a magazine solely dedicated to exorcism (AFP, 2012). The Catholic diocese in Italy started an exorcism hotline because demands for exorcists were so frequent (Brown, 2012). Although not a causal relationship, Pope Benedict XVI stepped down—the first to do so in 600 years—just hours before the release of *The Last Exorcism Part 2* (Gillin, 2013). Activity with exorcism and the Catholic Church has continued to fuel interest in the box office.

By 2012, critics began explicating a history of exorcism cinema. Gleiberman (2013) claims that contemporary culture began its "exorcist moment" as early as *Emily Rose* in 2005 (para. 1). Towlson (2012) also characterizes *Emily Rose* as a particular turning point: "*Emily Rose, Requiem* and *The Last Exorcism* . . . have also shown that the social evils associated with possession – religious hysteria, family abuse, medical negligence – can provide exorcism movies with a serious subtext to explore" (para. 63). Such films solidified a formula to the exorcism subgenre—a formula that could easily be replicated and incorporated with other elements and styles. *The Devil Inside's* (2012) opening weekend top spot at the box office signaled:

the demand for exorcism shows no sign of slowing. With *The Last Exorcism 2* and *The Possession* in the pipeline, 2012 could well turn out to be the biggest year for exorcism movies since Blatty's original set the trend in the 1970s.(Towlson, 2012, para. 62)

In 2013, *The Conjuring* became the most commercially and critically successful exorcism film since *The Exorcist*. Viewers, critics, and filmmakers have clearly gained a new awareness of exorcism cinema, but the central question remains: "Can films featuring demonic possession continue to break new ground?" (Towlson, 2012, para. 63).

Narrative Formula

The Conjuring establishes *the normal body* through familial stability. The Perrons are cast as functional and happy. There are no typical signs of death or absence associated with the establishing narrative. They exhibit familial bonds through games (e.g. hide and clap), and the narrative even suggests Roger and Carolyn have a healthy sex life. From the onset, both the family and Carolyn's body are normal.

The Warrens stand as a secondary family crucial to *The Conjuring*'s narrative. Ed and Lorraine enrich their relationship through their secular and spiritual work. Lorraine and her daughter, Judy, share a loving relationship. Thus, before these sets of characters even meet, the narrative juxtaposes two happy, healthy families: the secular Perrons and the spiritual Warrens.

Although *the suggestion of invading force* typically comes with an evil external force entering the home, the first sign of invasion is the Perron family's arrival to their new home. A move into a new house suggests permeability. This theme of invasion is marked three times in the film: Roger's entry into the cellar, Bathsheba's invasion into Carolyn's body, and Lorraine's susceptibility to psychic invasion. First, invasion does not come from a masculine demonic force entering the permeable home, but from the family's invasion of Bathsheba's terrain. They enter

her arena. This level of invasion is highlighted by the family's discovery of the hidden cellar. The family breaks through the wall to the lower level of the house.

In turn, as the family settles into their new home, Bathsheba's invasion into Carolyn's body manifests with bruising and progresses to more severe symptoms (e.g. vomiting, encounters with the paranormal). The final level of invasion deals with Ed's compulsion to protect Lorraine due to her susceptibility to psychic invasion. During a prior exorcism, Lorraine was psychically invaded and driven to madness. Other scenes demonstrate Lorraine's abilities to receive psychic insights. These three distinct levels of invasion highlight the woman's body and feminine space as permeable—terrain that is easily influenced and *influencing*.

The Conjuring also suggests the invading masculine forces are not demons, but patriarchs (Ed and Roger). First, Roger invades and explores the cellar—the womb of the house. Then, Ed insists on dealing with the exorcism alone, while the women (Carolyn, Lorraine, and the children) remain closer to the border between spiritual and secular.

Finally, work life creates fissures between parents and their children (echoing *The Exorcist's* Chris's commitments to her acting work). Roger must take on an extended truck driving job—during which Bathsheba reveals herself and terrorizes the family. Only when he returns is the family able to regain temporary solace. Further, the Warren's work estranges them from their daughter. In fact, it is precisely when the Warrens are preoccupied with helping the Perrons that Bathsheba invades the Warrens' home and attacks Judy. *The Conjuring* interweaves both secular and supernatural elements that threaten the family.

The closer female characters venture toward the supernatural, the more their *bodies act strangely.* For example Cindi's bouts of sleepwalking return upon settling into their new home. Haunted house/possession narratives foster a metonymic relationship between the human body

and the house as they function as stand-ins for each other. The house haunting the children neatly parallels the haunting of Carolyn's body. Carolyn does not convulse or contort, but her bruising and other symptoms worsen. Her behavior becomes more peculiar, and eventually, she is fully possessed and behaves as the primary threat.

As characters are terrorized by their close proximities to the supernatural, they *attempt to diagnose (with failure).* For example, the hospital diagnoses Carolyn's strange bruising as an iron deficiency, and she begins taking medication. Yet the hauntings grow worse. After the daughters are terrorized by the spirit of Bathsheba, Carolyn beseeches the Warrens' help. The Warrens have established an exceptional ethos through extensive experience, but also in their abilities to share their knowledges—via university lecture or private consultation.

The Warrens' *location of the threat* marks a turning point in *The Conjuring*. After the initial screening and further research, they confirm the dark entity is a witch from the 1800s named Bathsheba who attempted to sacrifice her child to the devil. The relationship between the house and the female body is significant because they are both structured to contain life. Because Bathsheba is intent on killing her children and the house represents her terrain or her residential body, it is no surprise the house attempts to kill or expel those living inside. With the film's historical context in mind, Carolyn's attempt to kill her daughter in the house's cellar overtly casts abortion as monstrosity.

Bathsheba's gender is also significant because she is the first distinctly female threat in an exorcism film. Although Creed (1993) argues that the demon possessing Regan is female, *The Exorcist's* narrative never confirms this interpretation. Further, because a witch (not a demon) possesses Carolyn, the battle is not exclusively spiritual. Bathsheba's curse of the land reflects her body politic: If she is not able to claim ownership of her land (residential body), she curses

anyone who attempts to invade or occupy it. *The Conjuring* distinctly casts ownership of the female body as monstrous.

Bearing knowledge of Bathsheba as threat, the Warrens *administer methods to expel the threat.* Their request for exorcism from the Catholic Church still pending, they decide to act without consent. Ed's exorcism adopts a traditional masculine approach toward the spirit of Bathsheba. Lorraine, however, directs a talk therapy approach toward Carolyn. Roger provides relational support by addressing both Bathsheba and Carolyn. Officer Brad's law enforcement role puts more significance on the contest over Carolyn's body. Although Lorraine is clairvoyant, her role in the exorcism is remarkably secular, placing emphasis on Carolyn and her needs, while Ed engages in more of the spiritual warfare.

The Conjuring's exorcism scene departs from typical exorcism processions. Although the "team" of exorcists hails back to *The Exorcist*, this particular scene features a woman's active and essential role in the exorcism. Past exorcism scenes typically involve a possessed woman surrounded by men: Emily is surrounded by a doctor, a priest, her father, and significant other. Nell is surrounded by Cotton, her father, her brother, and the camera crew. Iris is the first woman present in the room during an exorcism. Yet, her role is not participatory, and she is instead relegated to onlooker status, as she does not want to compromise the material for her film.

The Conjuring offers a unique element in this analysis because a woman has a fundamental role in the exorcism alongside a man. Clover (1992) noted many possession films that suggested the idea of a female exorcist, but those are distinctly cast as possession narratives—not exorcism. Lorraine petitions repeatedly to be included in the exorcism. *The Conjuring* exposes the previously gendered nature of exorcism and argues that a woman may step in and be just as successful.

Finally, the film concludes with several layers of *restoration.* Unlike *Emily Rose* and *Last Exorcism*, but similar to *The Exorcist*, *The Conjuring* restores the established order; the family regains cohesion; Carolyn returns to her old self. This restoration performs an ideological function and suggests: 1.) that evil threatens the state of the family, and 2.) only evil people terminate their children. The film uses narrative to privilege the institution of the family and constructs horror from the Perrons' struggle to maintain cohesion and stability. Although Ed tries to protect Lorraine, their teamwork ultimately suggests that a male and female figure (of God) are both necessary in providing stability for the family. Since the film is set in 1971, a time when the traditional family saw a marked decline (Phillips, 2005), one must consider how the film implicates and comments on its own 2013 context. Film critic Gleiberman (2013) writes:

> It wasn't until I saw *The Conjuring*, though, with its heavy emphasis on families being torn apart (and coming back together), that I began to realize what the hidden appeal of this genre may be . . . beneath the occult shock theater . . . The fantasy that drives exorcist movies is that if the Devil is here, then God is going to have to reveal Himself to beat the Devil back. (para. 3)

The Conjuring features a man and woman of God (the Warrens) who prevail over evil. The film ensures that the restoration stage features a family restored to a position of privilege and affirms those who do not identify with the nuclear (and heteronormative) family are monstrous.

<div align="center">

Analysis

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New possibilities do not emerge from complete originality. Rather, innovation comes from the collision of familiar ingredients and structures. After providing a synopsis, historical context, and narrative formula for *The Conjuring*, this section demonstrates how the producers utilize intertextuality to generate new possibilities within the exorcism film subgenre. First, I review relevant discussion of intertextuality and elaborate on how it applies to *The Conjuring*. Second, I demonstrate how the intertextual practice of *integrating foci* facilitates generative

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gender possibilities for the exorcism subgenre. Third, I demonstrate a definitive instance in

which James Wan, through intertextuality and solicitation, successfully creates spectacle horror.

Ultimately, I argue that while repetition of familiar elements is often reviled in horror criticism,

creative integration of formulaic elements expands the cinematic language of the exorcism genre.

(Inter)Textuality in *The Conjuring*

The Conjuring's intertextuality, although rarely reflexive, foregrounds the cultural capital

of horror cinema. Reviews described *The Conjuring* as a "throwback to early-'70s real estate

shriekers" (Burr, 2013, para. 2); an "old-school freak out" (Chang, 2013, para. 1); "with a bold

retro vibe" (Hartlaub, 2013, para. 3); that "uses every stock scare in the horror movie playbook"

(Brown, 2013, para. 1); and "doesn't try to reinvent the tropes of horror movies" (Duralde, 2013,

para. 5); which points to a "throwback horror genre has been percolating for years in art houses"

(Hartlaub, 2013, para. 4). One review bemoaned: "[Wan's] entire film is possessed – by other

films" (Whitty, 2013, para. 7). For better or for worse, nearly all of the critical feedback noted

familiar tropes and elements.

To recognize familiar elements in exorcism films is to acknowledge, in some capacity,

that genre and genre markers mutually inform each other. As referenced earlier, critics tend to

utilize the term "pastiche" to describe the borrowing, stealing, incorporation, or reference to

other cultural texts in one's own. Jameson (1983) notes pastiche as one of the most significant

features to arise from postmodernism.

> . . . where as modernist texts often took a particular critical position vis-à-vis earlier
> textual models, ridiculing specific stances or attitudes or offering a sympathetic, comic
> perspective, postmodernist works tend to take the form of pastiche, which lacks any clear
> positioning toward what it shows or toward any earlier texts that are used. (Kaplan, 1992,
> p. 270)

Pastiche embraces the reuse of materials and shirks any modernist obligation to comment on these materials. Yet, the concept has been criticized for its theoretical limitations, particularly its inability to describe *processes* of intertextuality. Critics also resort to the term "pastiche" and, in turn, produce vague criticism. Respondents may account for *what*, but not always *how* or *why*. Similarly, Ott and Walter (2000) contend that with the rise of postmodern texts and critical discussion, scholars often use intertextuality as a catch-all term and such "conflation undermines the explanatory force of intertextuality as a theoretical tool" (p. 430). Perhaps by pushing discussion beyond the limited term, pastiche, scholars may produce more nuanced and complex criticism.

Ott and Walter (2000) describe intertextuality in two primary ways: an *interpretive practice* of readers and a *stylistic device* incorporated by authors. The former is a process of decoding, while the latter refers to encoding. Ott and Walter (2000) contend intertextuality as "textual strategy" deserves further nuance and offer three distinct types: parodic allusion, creative appropriation, and self-reflexive reference (p. 431). Briefly, parodic allusion refers to a "stylistic device in which one text incorporates a caricature of another, most often, popular cultural text. The parodic text imitates or exaggerates prominent or representative features of the 'original' text and incorporates those features as part of its own textuality" (p. 435). Creative appropriation refers to a stylistic device in which "one text appropriates and integrates a fragment of another text" (Ott & Walter, 2000, p. 437). Creative appropriation may come in the form of sampling or raw material inserted into a larger context. "Whereas parodic allusion creates an approximation or copy of the original text based upon its defining features, inclusion actually reproduces a portion of the original text" (Ott & Walter, 2000, p. 437). Self-reflexive reference is a stylistic device in which a text may refer to work itself—its very constitution. Self-

reflexive references are often "subtle gestures that to be appreciated require specific knowledges of the text's production history, the character's previous credits, or popular reviews" (Ott & Walter, 2000, p. 439). Thus, self-reflexive references indicate an aspect beyond the narrative's realm—not necessarily an overly stylistic constitution.

The Conjuring is a hybrid film that engages constellations of family horror, haunted house, detective story, possession, and exorcism. *The Conjuring* uses "every stock scare in the horror movie playbook" (Brown, 2013, para. 1) and encourages the viewer to make sense of all the references. Although the film's style may be neutral in its assemblage of numerous horror cinema elements, the content is overtly political, treading the conservative side of discourses regarding the family and reproductive rights. Jameson (1983) argues that, amidst all the references and nostalgia, consumers tend to fail to innovate present day aesthetics. Yet, because *The Conjuring* is set deliberately in 1971, the narrative implicates *us* historically in 2013, the 40th anniversary of *The Exorcist* (1973).

Hybridity is also a common feature of postmodern works: "For many, postmodernist works can only be hybrid, stylistically mixed, and indebted by resemblance to its predecessors" (Butler, 2002, p. 117). Wan uses hybridity and stylistic mixing with respect. Wan does not ridicule or use humor to recognize his predecessors. By effectively assembling a number of familiar styles and artifacts, Wan unlocks a few avenues of consideration. One of those avenues is the integration of approaches to exorcism. Because intertextuality is a process of interpretive analysis, one could exhaust oneself mapping out all the references that *The Conjuring* makes (intentionally or unintentionally). I will not do that here. Rather, I argue against a fatalist attitude that dismisses repetition as inherently regressive:

> contemporary or postmodernist art is going to be about art itself in a new kind of way;
> even more, it means that one of its essential messages will involve the necessary failure

of art and the aesthetic, the failure of the new, the imprisonment of the past. (Jameson, 1983, pp. 115-116)

Although many have mourned the stagnation of the horror genre, I do not think the genre is imprisoned in the past. Rather, horror filmmakers negotiate the past. Their works historicize.

> . . . culture is a process of making meanings in which people actively participate. . . . [T]he mass-produced text can only be made into a *popular* text by the people, and this transformation occurs when the various subcultures can activate sets of meanings and insert those meaning into their daily cultural experience. (Fiske, 1987)

Thus, every allusion or creative incorporation implicates not only the past but the viewer's standpoint to the artifact and its respective culture. Indeed, viewers, not just filmmakers, participate in the production of culture.

Grappling with intertextuality

Not everyone likes horror or even "gets" it. But several *Conjuring* reviews suggest viewers interpret its use of repetition in very different ways. Some read the film as a "shoutout" while others bemoan it as outright "thievery." Rather than totalizing an abstract concept of the audience or "horror fans," I wish to draw attention to how viewers value intertextuality. For example, with ample experience in the genre, horror fans have an easier time decoding and interpreting intertextual work. However, they may also see certain films as merely repeats, rather than extensions, elaborations, or recasting of prior texts. Culler (1981) outlines the potential of intertextuality for a particular culture:

> Intertextuality thus becomes less a name for a work's relation to particular prior texts than a designation of its participation in the discursive space of culture: the relationship between a text and the various languages or signifying practices of a culture and its relation to those texts which articulate for it the possibilities of that culture. (p. 103)

Intertextuality is a medium by which to participate in culture. Certain "intertextual" films provide horror devotees opportunities to experience the rich history of the horror film. Yet, scholarship rails against the remake. For example, Kenneth Chan (2009) calls the remake a "film

form of secondariness: one removed from its 'original' text, but exploited for its box office potential" (p. 8). Other scholars embrace the remake's nature. Benjamin employs the term "afterlife" to describe the translation of an "original" text. Barthes (1977) reminds us that although there are no absolute origins, a work may still be read as "a finished object" (p. 39). Wong (2012) writes that: "Translation is to overcome this boundary of the original and become the afterlife of the original" (p. 23). I argue that reiteration is not simply sampling by which audience members merely consume the exact same material. Rather, films that engage strategies of remake, pastiche, or the intertextual reflect on the film's construction, form, and viewer engagement as viable elements worthy of consideration.

Scholars must radically reevaluate how to address intertextuality in the horror film. Thus, in the following analysis, I wish to draw more attention to the axiological elements (the values) that impede the discussion of recurrent ingredients and assemblage. Ott and Walter (2000) argue that those who regularly encounter intertextual works are better equipped to make sense of them, which suggests that horror fans (who draw upon horror history) may have better appreciation of the intertexts in *The Conjuring* than a viewer who might just see "the same old story." Brophy (2000) reminds us that the horror film is highly aware of itself. Very little evidence suggests that viewers are supposed to seek originality or to become completely absorbed in the narrative.

Critics may share negative reactions to familiar elements in horror films because they may not value how repetition participates in a larger network of discourse. Critics engage stock feedback about the familiarity of the storyline and produce lazy evaluations predicated on false assumptions of originality. Postmodern theory (Barthes, 1977; Jameson, 1983) cautions that locating originality is impossible. Scholars should examine how the horror film participates with other texts, including larger cultural and historical contexts. The horror film knows about itself; it

knows about you; and it knows its history. Because the genre is built on the past, the horror film

cannot present an isolated, original narrative that does not have any connection beyond its film

boundaries. Like all films, but perhaps to a more reflexive degree, the horror film always exists

within a larger network of texts.

To appreciate the cultural capital of intertextual works like *The Conjuring*, scholars

cannot productively analyze in terms of originality. Plagiarism of older plots is a feature of

pastiche (Jameson, 1983). When postmodern texts are inevitably composed through hybridity

viewers may begin to appreciate not just the content, but the work's presentation and assemblage.

Brophy (2000) points to collision and contaminations of various texts with the 1979 release of

the American magazine *Fangoria*, a bi-monthly periodical dedicated to horror films:

> The title speaks volumes: gore, fantasy, phantasmagoria, fans. It simultaneously expands
> a multiplicity of cross-references and contracts them into a referential construct. This
> semantic effect strangely echoes the relationship between the emergence of *Fangoria* and
> the development of the contemporary horror film, whereby an ever-growing cult journal
> expands and contracts a critical voice for a mutant market – that of the contemporary film:
> a genre about genre; a displaced audience; a short-circuiting entertainment. Another word
> is invented. More pretentious in tone and more theoretical in intention: 'Horrality' –
> horror, textuality, morality, hilarity. In the same way that *Fangoria* celebrates the re-birth
> of the Horror genre, 'Horralilty' celebrates the precise nature of what constitutes the films
> of this re-birth as texts. As neologisms, both words do not so much 'mean' something as
> they do describe a specific historical juncture, a cultural phase that is as fixed as the
> semantic accuracy of words. (Brophy, 2000, p. 277)

As indicated above, intertextuality points to a discourse of pleasure. The text is constructed in

such a way to reward those who understand the amounts of capital within the certain field of

relations, while simultaneously legitimizing the composer. Pointing to other theorists, Hills

(2005) argues that literary/cultural theory has done well to recognize the use of intertextuality,

but has not fully questioned its functions, nor its pleasures. Hills (2005) argues that scholars may

better understand intertextuality in horror films through Boudieu's cultural capital. Intertextuality

may then function as a sort of spectacle of cultural capital, in which audience members find

pleasure in how much of their cultural stock participates in the film. The attraction, then, is the concerted celebration of texts: "Audiences who regularly engage with intertextual devices not only become more sophisticated in reading them, but also more sophisticated at deploying them" (Ott & Walter, 2000, p. 442). If cultural capital is a means of gaining particular ethos in a particular culture, then scholars may better understand why horror directors and writers continue to incorporate such capital into their own works.

Returning to Schatz's (1981) language analogy, the common language or capital develops as members of the culture participate in the economies therein. Intertextuality emerges as a type of game or communal ritual: "Fans gather online (and in the case of television, often while the program is in progress) to share their intertextual observations, exchange 'insider' information about production history, and discuss related media texts" (Ott & Walter, 2000, p. 441). The horror film knows you have seen it before (Brophy, 2000).

As I proceed with my analysis of *The Conjuring*, I find intertextuality generative both as an interpretative practice and a stylistic device. In the next section, I distinguish a particular intertextual construction present in *The Conjuring*.

Integrating Foci in *The Conjuring*

Possessed by the spirit of Bathsheba, Carolyn attempts to kill her children. When the rest of the party restrains her, Ed Warren declares that they must proceed immediately with an exorcism. For a moment, Ed attempts to bear the exorcism alone, but as the scene unfolds, viewers witness the characters employ a variety of approaches to combat the spirit. The Warrens, Roger, and the local police officer, Brad, function metonymically; they stand in for larger attitudes. Although Ed and Lorraine are both spiritual leaders, they perform exorcism in distinct ways. Ed approaches exorcism with a highly masculine brute force, while Lorraine embodies a

feminine style similar to talk therapy, or even psychoanalysis, in which she tries to reach Carol

through her personal memories of her family. Meanwhile, Roger participates through both

masculine (ordering the spirit to stay away from his wife; "Let her go!") and feminine

(encouraging Carolyn; "Come back, Carolyn!") tones. Finally, the police officer, Brad, uses his

handcuffs to restrain Carolyn, to suggest that her desire to kill her children is a not only immoral

but illegal. Every character involved in the exorcism addresses distinctly separate elements, but

the approaches complement each other. These complementary approaches suggest that there are

multiple ways of engaging exorcism, rather than one distinct process.

The Conjuring showcases several approaches to exorcism that appear to cooperate

despite philosophical differences, a process Bailey (1997) calls *integrating foci*. Gollnick (2005)

elaborates ". . . the plural form 'foci' precludes the assumption that an individual or body will

only have one religion, thereby recognizing that person or people may use different religions for

different purposes depending on the context. (p. 20). Thus, one religion does not necessarily take

exclusive focus or ascendance over another. A concise example is Laycock's (2011)

historiography of Ginsberg and Hoffman's attempt to "levitate" the Pentagon. Crucially,

performers had disparate beliefs: some considered exorcism as street theater or symbolic protest,

while others believed they could *actually* levitate the Pentagon through supernatural forces.

Despite differences, thousands of performers strategically integrated foci toward a common

cause (Laycock, 2011).

Integrating foci is not only significant because of its metaphorical potency with the

concept of exorcism, but it points to exorcism as a discursive knot, in which seemingly disparate

philosophies may flow together in simultaneity to effect social change. Ginsberg believed reality

is constructed through language, and "that ritual utterances could be a powerful tool for social

change" (Laycock, 2011, p. 308). Thus, integrating foci within the performance of exorcism

sought to engage "suprapolitics" or "direct, holistic change" (Laycock, 2011, p. 314). This mode

prompts consideration of exorcism as a particular type of performance, as the nature of

performance (and here, exorcism) is an "essentially contested concept" (Strine, Long, Hopkins,

1990, p. 183). Exorcism may be rendered as having multiple natures and functions depending on

the performer and the audience. Although institutions such as the church or the hospital attempt

to stabilize exorcism's constitution and function, the exorcism film continues to make exorcism

an essentially contested performance through integrating foci. Thus, as I will demonstrate,

characters in *The Conjuring* integrate various foci to reach Carolyn in the final exorcism scene.

The curious case of Lorraine Warren

The Conjuring integrates disparate, but complementary foci to breed new possibilities for

the exorcism film. Although Wan's *Conjuring* employs a remarkable amount of references, they

never take on a parodic or satirical tone. Rather, the film reads nostalgic (or dare I say,

hauntingly familiar), and reflects the *refinement* stage of the exorcism subgenre since it

embellishes the established conventions (Worland, 2007). Screenwriters Chad and Carey W.

Hayes incorporate an extensive cinematic history into *The Conjuring* and still manage to draw

attention to previously overlooked elements of the supernatural horror film. A primary example

is Lorraine's participation in the exorcism. References to exorcism typically involve head-

spinning girls and men in Roman Catholic garb. But Lorraine's participation points to a line of

"female-engineered" exorcisms. Clover (1992) writes:

> The séance that follows is an all woman affair, very much the counterpart of the female-
> engineered 'exorcisms' of *Poltergeist, The Entity, Making Contact,* and a variety of other
> possession films. (It is also the counterpart of the exorcism in *The Exorcist*, reminding us
> again that Roman Catholic priests and women are functionally one and the same in horror.
> (p. 74)

I appreciate Clover's attention to these details, but I have trouble believing women and Catholic priests are one and the same. Clover (1992) remarks that character distinction by gender is typical: females in expert positions are relegated to mystics of Black Magic, while the white male exorcists tend to establish a different caliber of ethos. Remarkably, despite Damien's crisis of faith, Moore's questionable judgment, Cotton's skepticism, and Ed's lack of training, all of these men demarcate the exorcism film featuring a male in crisis still burdened with saving and protecting women. Even in *The Conjuring*, Ed is compelled not only to help Carolyn immediately, but also to protect his wife Lorraine, even as Lorraine fights for her legitimacy. She insists they work as a team. As the scene unfolds, two very different types of exorcism happen.

Lorraine is significant for the film and the subgenre because she takes an active and irreplaceable role in Carolyn's exorcism. Much like Legutko's (2010) findings, Lorraine's approach does not vest in the ceremony, costume, and theatricality that priests and evangelicals utilize. Rather, Lorraine's exorcism is a stripped-down, interpersonal approach. Her clairvoyance is an extension of sexual difference. She speaks directly to Carolyn and asks her to focus on her personal memories of her family, to remember what she is fighting for: "This is your daughter! You can't give in!" Lorraine functions as a *spiritual guide*, rather than *spiritual warrior*. I further distinguish these two terms to describe how possession films may, in fact, be a feminine "counterpart" to traditional masculine exorcism films.

Lorraine functions as a spiritual guide—steering Carolyn toward loving thoughts of her family—not unlike *Poltergeist's* Tangina reuniting Carol Anne with her family. The character names Carolyn and Carol Anne draw attention to this similarity. While female "exorcists" usually play mediums, rather than anointed leaders of the divine, the spiritual guide and the spiritual warrior are not relegated by sexual difference. Yet, men do lead a number of the films

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through theatrical, masculine exorcism. Legutko (2010) also remarks that feminist possession narratives ridicule the theatricality or "shows" traditionally used by the male exorcist.

A feminine approach to exorcism not only focuses on guidance rather than force, but also focuses on a "joint effort" (Legutko, 2010, p. 14). Legutko (2010) specifies this effort as typically between the company and the dybbuk, but the emphasis on cooperation between those present is significant for *The Conjuring*. Lorraine insists on teamwork and does not focus on berating the spirit inside Carolyn. Rather, she focuses on Carolyn herself. Yet, in brief instances, Lorraine does raise her voice and become forceful, which may suggest a sway toward engaging exorcism from a spiritual warrior mode.

Lorraine embodies an interesting polemic. Although psychic mediums are typically relegated to the occult or secular belief systems, Lorraine still believes in the presence of God and practices an active spiritual life. Lorraine revises the established order and through re-ordering the structure of how exorcism is constructed and performed, she claims more legitimacy for the female spiritual guide, or what some may call "the female exorcist."

Although Creed (1993) claimed Regan was actually possessed by a woman, the previous case films do not feature or suggest female-in-female possession. *The Conjuring* explores fairly new elements in the line of exorcism films. Legutko (2010) believes female-in-female possession could be a form of the mother-daughter relationship "which may be interpreted as a psychological mutual female-in-female possession" (p. 17). With previous discussions of males in crisis and females possessed, scholars may produce more fruitful results by examining mother-daughter relationships in exorcism films.

The Conjuring demonstrates that even though men have dominated the role of the exorcist, cast as warriors looking out for women's bodies, women should also play an active role

in protecting their bodies. Lorraine's exemplary behavior prompts Roger to not only curse

Bathsheba, but also to support his partner. Lorraine encourages Roger not to make a decision for

Carolyn, but to help Carolyn find strength within herself to fight the invading force.

Lorraine's ability to participate in the exorcism points to a tradition of "female

engineered" exorcisms that may have been discounted from the subgenre. "God brought us

together for a reason? This is it." While Lorraine reaffirms her relationship with her husband and

her integral role in the exorcism, a larger, reflexive moment emerges here that Lowenstein (2005)

referred to as the allegorical moment:

> a shocking collision of film, spectator, and history where registers of bodily space and historical time are disrupted, confronted, and intertwined. These registers of space and time are distributed unevenly across the cinematic text, the film's audience, and the historical context . . . shock emanates from the intermingling of a number of sources. (p. 2)

In other words, these collisions create greater historical, cultural, and rhetorical shocks for

attentive viewers. Lorraine's line takes on greater significance as it implicitly refers to the greater

"God" or "gods" of the film—writers, Chad and Carey W. Hayes, and director, James Wan. The

creators have engineered this moment. The gods have brought the Warrens together for a reason:

to remind viewers that women *also* have a place in these narratives. By analyzing *The

Conjuring*'s final exorcism, I recognize the confluence of complementary but distinct modes of

exorcism as a form of integrating foci whereby Wan and the Hayes brothers engineer an

allegorical moment that performs genre work and redrafts the discursive lines of gender,

possession, and exorcism film.

Spectacle Horror in *The Conjuring*

The Conjuring utilizes elements of cultural capital and intertextuality to produce

moments of spectacle horror. As Lowenstein (2011) notes, spectacle horror also depends on

viewers privy to the information behind the content and form of what is presented. Thus, the

Hayes brothers and James Wan collaborate to produce spectacles within *The Conjuring*. To shed

light on the use of spectacle horror in *The Conjuring*, I dissect one particular scene for its use of

both intertextuality and cinematic attraction.

Wan's spectacle, game, & consumption

As the title suggests, *The Conjuring* alludes to the power of summoning through

invocation or incantation. Wan's spectacle horror is founded upon a haunted house of tricks and

"conjuring" familiar images established through decades of cinema. This celebration of cultural

capital is reaffirmed by the vast number of reviews that point to the film's pastiche style that

foregrounds its intertextuality. *The Conjuring*'s pastiche style conveys a strong nostalgic tone

and a resounding "retro vibe" among viewers (Hartlaub, 2013, para. 3). Jameson (1983) argues

nostalgia may signal lack of creativity and uses the "nostalgia film" as an access point into

fleshing out a practice of the pastiche (p. 116). Nostalgia films typically cast dramas within a

particular time period equipped with a number of cultural artifacts of that time period,

respectively:

> It seems to me exceedingly symptomatic to find the very style of nostalgia films invading
> and colonizing even those movies today which have contemporary settings: as though,
> for some reason, we were unable today to focus on our own present, as though we have
> become incapable of achieving aesthetic representations of our own current experience.
> (Jameson, 1983, p. 117)

This description of nostalgia films is rooted in notions of originality. Relegating artifacts or

styles to particular time periods assumes innovation (in content or form) cannot emerge through

productive use of repetition, sampling, or integration. This analysis of *The Conjuring* indicates

the horror film exists within a network of texts and seeks to engage *event* with the viewer, rather

than presenting "original" material.

The Conjuring engages viewers in two ways: first, through Ott & Walter's (2000) concept of creative allusion, and second, through subtle, but direct solicitation to audience members. Wan creates spectacle horror through a variety of gestures predicated on consumption of the horror film. One concise film-viewer interaction in *The Conjuring* rests heavily on the structure of contemporary possession films. Hahner et al (2013) argue abject consumption—the drive to fulfill the material want—is what generates the motif of the *Paranormal Activity* possession films. In turn, the films produce a similar want for viewers—to materialize the invisible threat. In this section, I demonstrate how Wan depends upon previous possession films and clever camera work to engage audience members to generate moments of spectacle horror.

One concise example emerges during Christine's late night encounter with an unseen force. Christine and Nancy share a bedroom. While each is asleep, an unseen force grabs Christine's leg, nearly identical to an infamous scene from *Paranormal Activity* (2009).
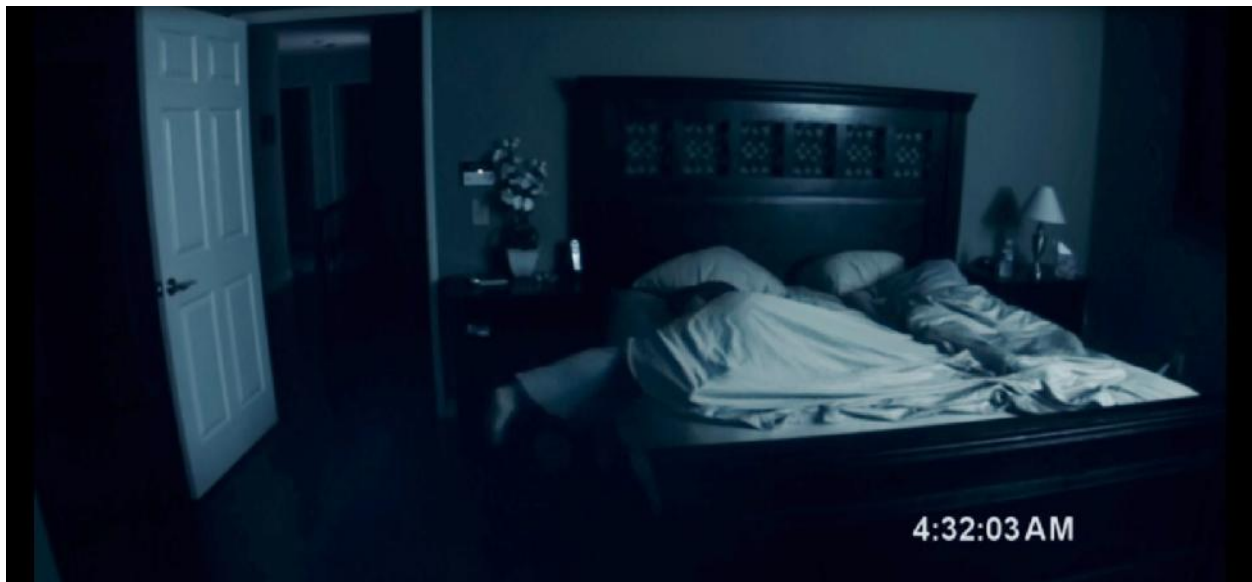

Figure 5.1 A demon grabs Katie's leg in *Paranormal Activity* (2009). Courtesy of Paramount. [3]

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[3] Figures 5.1 and 5.2 are screenshots from *Paranormal Activity* (2009) and *The Conjuring* (2013) and are protected under the fair use clause since they are used strictly for educational (and absolutely no commercial) purposes.

Wan creatively appropriates a fragment of *Paranormal Activity* (2009)—Katie being

pulled by the leg by the demon—and weaves it into *The Conjuring*'s narrative.

Figure 5.2 Something grabs Christine's leg in *The Conjuring* (2013). Courtesy of Warner Bros.

This appropriation is unnecessary, but Wan does so not only to provide intelligibility for

the present scare, but also to echo the past—to point to the particular text's previous use. This

recurring image, a young woman's leg grabbed by an invisible force, is a particular piece of

cultural capital—part of the ensemble of possession film iconography.

Christine eventually wakes and begins surveying the room. Her fixation on the unseen

force (which she claims to see clearly) prompts viewers to take on a role of vigilante to locate the

unseen force through its effects on family members' bodies and the house. Hahner et al (2013)

note that the *Paranormal Activity* films created anticipation by allowing viewers to survey the

area vigilantly. The unseen force incites vigilance in the audience, impulse to identify symptoms

or signs of the threat, and desire to name the ineffable.

Yet, aesthetic distance comes with a particular—and peculiar—camera movement in this

scene. When Christine suspects a threat is in her bedroom, she cautiously checks underneath her

bed. Viewers adopt her upside-down point-of-view orientation. Viewers survey the area in

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accordance with Christine's oscillating head. She focuses, and, in the background of the scene, she sees the front door move on its own. Christine's eyes grow wide, and she slowly turns right-side up, turning to her left. The camera turns simultaneously with Christine, but the camera's frame waves around the *opposite* way—to the right. The camera's gaze deliberately departs from Christine's orientation and waves in reverse. Wan adopts this camera movement to foreground *his* presence in order to solicit audience attention to the spectacle. In this scene, Wan, quite literally, waves at his audience.

James Wan adopts the strategy of early magic films, which includes odd orientations that implicate the audience. The magic or trick film showcased transformation by making something disappear or by making something materialize. Christine and Wan share a joint effort to compel audience consumption—to satisfy the material want—by soliciting attention toward an invisible entity that may eventually materialize. Christine is positive there is a dark entity behind the bedroom door. Nancy does not see it. In fact, Nancy goes directly to the area behind the door to prove there is no threat. Suddenly the door slams closed on its own. Christine wails and the family regroups to make sense of what transpired.

Although subtle, and easily overlooked by the unknowing viewer, Wan's clever use of the camera is a form of solicitation, a definitive gesture prompting audiences to engage in the next game of consumption. Christine functions as an accomplice, or magician's assistant. She asks Nancy (and the viewer): "Do you see it?" Christine's remarkable reaction compels viewers to survey the area and to see what she sees. (Her performance hearkens the hysteria of Abigail Williams, who claimed she saw a witch in the middle of the courtroom.) Hahner et al (2013) explain that the *Paranormal Activity* series prompts audience members to locate the threat; they are hailed to engage in consumption and to survey areas for signs of the demonic.

Here, I extend the concept of spectacle horror to an event in which performer, text, and audience may celebrate a particular collection of cultural capital. In *The Conjuring*, spectacle horror is generated through the overwhelming number of references within the film. Spectacle emerges, then, when viewers are privy to the capital presented. A brief cinematic game materializes between Wan and the viewer: Name that movie. The references are everywhere: the white noise on the television (*The Ring*), poltergeist grabbing feet during sleep (*Paranormal Activity*), the open window (*The Exorcist*), offering a child to Satan (*Rosemary's Baby; Last Exorcism*), Bathsheba's flock of crow familiars (*The Birds*), 1970 retro-vibe plaid shirts (*Amityville Horror; The Stranger; The House of the Devil*), the child with the invisible friend (*The Shining*). The ability to draw connections to previous works is infinite—because *The Conjuring's* constitution is dependent on this network of horror cinema. The horror film features narratives about its own cinematic past.

Wan constructs *The Conjuring* as a genre film, a way of honoring the tacit contract between the film industry and the audience (Feuer, 1992). Viewers who have accumulated enough cultural capital with horror cinema are able to participate in some of *The Conjuring*'s cinematic games. Yet, the Warrens also provide substantial context to facilitate the cinematic game for less-informed viewers. Their research and expertise effectively equip the viewers with the necessary cultural capital. "[The Warrens'] understanding of the occult world is so rigorous and methodical (they debunk several misconceptions early on)" (Chang, 2013). Thus, the necessary cultural capital to pry open meaning is provided within the text itself.

This analysis of *The Conjuring* draws attention to the overwhelming need for horror scholars to relinquish notions of originality, and rather, embrace the established scholarship of intertextuality—especially when analyzing intertextual works. Writing on horror remakes, Wong

(2012) claims: "There is no original in the absolute sense of the term." (p. 22). She builds off of the work of Roland Barthes (1977), who identifies the text as part of a network, or always interconnected with other texts, somewhere in "the text-between of another text" (p. 15). The practice of intertextuality is "always leading on to other signifiers, and the 'trace' (Derrida's term) of signifying chain" (Allen, 2000, p. 66). Even Dika's (1990) work on the stalker film recognizes the use of pastiche as a necessary factor and symptom of formula-related works. Thus, exorcism films that employ the formula are more likely to participate in forms of intertextuality.

James Wan utilizes intertextuality and cleverly deploys the camera in order to extend viewing experience from mere identification to participatory spectacle horror. Although *The Conjuring* is ultimately cast as an installment of the refinement stage of the exorcism subgenre, the film's construction still lends itself to interactive moments between director, text, and viewer.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided a description, synopsis, historical context, and narrative formula for James Wan's *The Conjuring* (2013). I then drew upon previous research on intertextuality related to aesthetic communication in order to demonstrate how determined incorporation of familiar elements was able to: first, facilitate feminist possibilities within the subgenre; and second, construct interactive moments of spectacle horror.

The Conjuring participates in discourses that uphold the family and cast abortion as monstrosity. Bathsheba's rule of her own residential body is rendered as a destructive influence on the family—evidenced through Carolyn's possession. Although the narrative constructs Bathsheba's autonomy as monstrous, deeper implications lie with the family's invasion into her terrain. *The Conjuring*, through clever use of integrating foci, elevated Lorraine Warren as a spiritual guide and a model for the woman exorcist.

CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION

The Exorcist (1973/2000) served as a paradigmatic example to guide my analysis of three contemporary exorcism films: *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005), *The Last Exorcism* (2010), and *The Conjuring* (2013). Each case study allowed the opportunity to analyze each film's unique contributions to the exorcism subgenre. This chapter draws attention to recurring patterns throughout the collection of films. I also refer to other relevant films that further inform the connections between the case studies. Thus, this chapter concludes this study.

Separation Anxiety: The Mother-Daughter Split

All three case studies show the mother-daughter relationship to be significant in exorcism films. Creed (1993) argues that horror emerges from Regan and Chris's (*The Exorcist*) unwillingness to detach. Possession is a product of Regan's unusually close, dyadic relationship with her mother. Contemporary exorcism films continue to focus on the mother-daughter dyadic relationship. All three case studies insist that the daughter's separation from the mother is a *source* of horror. Emily's transformation emerges after separation from her mother and relocation to the university. The film highlights maternal bonding and features the specific moment when Emily reveals her college scholarship letter. Her mother responds "You'll be leaving us." Emily responds, "It's okay. I'll be okay" (*The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, 2005). But Emily's adjustment to college does not come easily. Separation anxiety is amplified in *Last Exorcism* with the death of Mrs. Sweetzer. Nell refers to her mother as her "best friend," suggesting that the fissures in the family have come from her mother's recent death. *Last Exorcism* features separation of the mother and exposes the overwhelming presence of men.

For both films, horror emerges from the absent mother and overbearing patriarchy. Men are consistently in the bedroom with the possessed woman, attempting to restore her to a normal

state. The films relegate the mother to stand aside. Just as Chris is left outside of Regan's bedroom in the *The Exorcist*, Mrs. Rose manages the rest of the family outside of Emily's bedroom. The absence of mothers is overwhelmingly apparent. Not until *The Conjuring* do viewers witness active, authoritative female participation in exorcism.

 The Conjuring presents a different kind of mother-daughter split: a loving mother, possessed by the spirit of an evil witch, sets out to murder her children. The children experience a temporary separation—if not alienation—from their own mother while she is possessed. Carolyn's madness drives her to reject her maternal instinct and to annihilate her offspring. She attempts (quite literally) to "cut the cord" with a pair of kitchen shears. In *The Conjuring,* horror emerges from the *termination* of the mother-daughter relationship—a rejection of the child. Sobchack (1996) notes a similar turn in the 1970s with films that shift focus from terrorizing children (like Regan) to children terrorized. The child is no longer the threat. The parents are. The thematic material is not coming of age, but abortion—the desire to terminate one's pregnancy. Breakdown of the family comes not from the failures of parenting but the *refusal* of parenting and the collapse of the family. But unlike *Emily Rose* and *Last Exorcism*, normal order is restored when Carolyn is saved and re-establishes connection with her daughters.

 The contemporary exorcism film privileges the stable mother-daughter relationship and hyperbolizes separation anxiety. Similar to Creed's (1993) claim that Regan's unwillingness to separate from the mother is the repressed source of horror, this study confirms that recent exorcism films construct mother-daughter separation as a primary site of horror. In turn, this privileging of the family upholds a conservative politics that insists on the stability of a traditional nuclear family. The family is not necessarily evil, but the family threatened is the source of horror.

The Conjuring engages abortion discourse through three sets of mother-child relationships: Carolyn and April, Lorraine and Judy, and Bathsheba and Rory. Carolyn attempts to kill one of her daughters with shears, which viewers learn is a reiteration of Bathsheba's attempt to kill Rory. *The Conjuring* necessitates not just a mother's detachment, but also an annihilation of her offspring. The influence on Carolyn is not a typical masculine demon but a witch. The Warrens explain that witches often sacrifice their children to Satan as an ultimate flout toward the "God given" ability to bear children. And because Carolyn attempts to kill her youngest daughter, April, who symbolically hides under the floorboards of the house, the narrative suggests that April may have been an unplanned pregnancy (which perhaps prompted the family to move to a large house).

Lorraine's relationship with Judy represents mother-daughter relationships threatened by the spectre of mother's work—like Chris's acting career, which introduced her to Burke and formed a wedge between Regan and her. Yet, Judy attempts to maintain connection to Lorraine through a pair of necklaces: "This way we'll always be together. You'll be with me and I'll be with you" (*The Conjuring*, 2013). These shared necklaces, or symbolic cords, suggest Judy's unwillingness to separate from her mother. The Warrens are sporadically absent from Judy's life. Their call to help other families threatens the stability of their own, and a malevolent spirit in Lorraine's work literally strips her symbolic connection to her daughter. But after Carolyn is saved, her youngest daughter, April, returns Lorraine's missing necklace. Viewers do not see Lorraine reunited with Judy, but the symbolic gesture suggests that the normal order is restored. Thus, exorcism films prioritize the mother-daughter relationship as a source of stability for the normal familial order.

The mother-daughter relationship appeals to female audience members. Although the horror film is notorious for attracting a presumably young male audience, Nowell (2011) finds that from 1978 to 1981, slasher films were actively constructed to reach female audiences through three key elements: independent female protagonists, female bonding, and heterosexual courtship (Nowell, 2011). *The Conjuring* may appeal to a wider audience since the narrative foregrounds Carolyn's struggle, bonding between Lorraine and Carolyn, and healthy marriages among the Warrens and the Perrons.

In the exorcism film, female bodies continue to remain in dyadic relation to other bodies. Whether it is mother-daughter separation or overbearing patriarchy, these films provide no symbolic room for an autonomous woman that is not monstrous. Nell is most monstrous when she is alone. Bathsheba is the only autonomous figure in *The Conjuring*, and she is cast as monstrous because she seeks ownership of her residential body and curses the families that invade her terrain. Even *Emily Rose's* Erin Bruner, an agnostic lawyer who tries to maintain her own stability with no apparent relational connection, becomes open to spiritual possibility by the end of the film. In exorcism films, autonomous females are monstrous. They achieve normality through healthy relational connections.

Emily's introduction into the secular world proves difficult. Emily is most monstrous when she is alone: in her dorm room, in the hospital, in the church, and in her bedroom. Proxemics do not necessarily dictate monstrosity. A tempting claim would be that the further the young woman is from family, the more monstrous she becomes. This claim is just not true. Monstrous autonomy is cast through open resistance to any sort of connection or support; monstrosity seeks independence. For example, when Jason approaches possessed Emily in the

chapel, she says, "Don't touch me!" She collapses. Viewers then hear Emily's voice, "Jason.

Don't leave me." Monstrosity is coded through autonomy.

Order-Disorder-Order: Ordering, Ordered, New Order

Tudor (1989) identifies the basic structure of a horror film as *order-disorder-order*. The

plot constructs normality. Then, a monster or threat compromises that order to a state of disorder.

Finally, through confrontation with the threat, order is restored. In more paranoid and dystopic

narratives, order is not restored, and the state of chaos or disorder remains. The model is

ideological because it compels viewers to value what is orderly and disorderly.

A typical exorcism film begins by identifying the normal established family or body, or

by the suggestion that the body has already moved to a state of disorder. Disorder comes on two

levels: the collective (such as the family or home), and the individual (such as early signs of

possession). Much of the film is spent locating the source of the disorder and implementing

methods to restore the individual and the collective back to a state of order.

This *order-disorder-order* necessitates that viewers privilege the family over the

individual. The horror film's very structure codes performances of possession as horrific.

However, horror may come from the oppression caused by institutions. Rebellious performances

may be a state of natural order.

A queer reading of the exorcism film may offer a generative way of conceptualizing

values that extend beyond the typical reading. Although the exorcism narrative privileges a state

in which men save helpless women, the spectacle of the contortionist suggests that the woman

has always been in control of her body and does not require the assistance of a man to make

decisions as to what she should do with it. Legutko (2010) describes similar moments in feminist

dybbuk narratives as negative performatives, in which the possessed challenges the "authority

wielding" performatives uttered by men (p. 12). Her bodily performance opens up ruptural space for new orders or a new ordering to emerge.

A queer reading may identify the rebellious spectacle performances of the contortionist as orchestrations of a *new* order. The performer may then render the family or the disciplined body as peculiar and excessive. *The Last Exorcism: Part 2* (2013) is a curious anomaly in the exorcism subgenre because it reverses the values inherent in the order-disorder-order of exorcism narratives. *Last Exorcism 2* focuses on Nell's readjustment to the secular world after escaping from the cult near her farm. Over the course of the film, her supernatural abilities become more salient (such as her midnight levitation). Nell is convinced that she is possessed again and seeks the help of a group home, a hospital, a priest and a form of voodoo ritual. But she finds that that no institution or expert can "save" her because, in fact, her supernatural abilities may be inherently a part of who she is. Her evil is internal and inherent. Even the term "evil" is troublesome. Nell does not need fixing. The film ends with Nell using her telekinetic powers to set the streets on fire and driving into the night.

Nell drafts a new order for the exorcism film. Evil is not something that invades or comes from the exterior, but is found within. Even the notion of "evil" is up for debate. Further, Nell's story is liberatory: she locates and embraces the self that is not defined by another. She is not dyadic, but autonomous.

Autonomy plays a significant role in the exorcism subgenre. So many narratives bind women to other bodies, particularly men. If the woman is not dyadic to the man, she is almost certainly dyadic to a mother or child. *The Last Exorcism: Part 2* creates a symbolic order that does not require men, or rather, the order codes the male force as unnecessary, invading, and

oppressive. Can Nell really be coded as the monster in this film? The film suggests that religious allegiance to institutions continues to cause disorder in the natural (and supernatural) world.

Tudor's (1989) framework prompts consideration of not just states of order and disorder, but the processes of ordering, becoming ordered, or drafting a new order. A rebellious woman who fights back against the oppression of man is nothing new to the horror genre. Clover's (1992) "final girl" describes the model behavior in which a young woman uses her inner strength to fight back at the oppressor. Even in *The Conjuring*, Carolyn's inner strength toward Bathsheba is not as definitive as Ed's authority-wielding performative that brings Carolyn back to a normal state. Their combined efforts created a successful exorcism. In this way, Carolyn is not autonomous; she is not able to make choices for herself. But Nell Sweetzer asks viewers to consider a new order for the exorcism film: a supernatural woman who transcends dyadic connection.

Gendered Exorcism

The terms *spiritual guide* and *spiritual warrior* productively distinguish types of performances associated with exorcism. The exorcism film is often coded through the dual narrative of a male in crisis and a female possessed (Clover, 1992). The cleansing process itself prompts reconsideration for horror cinema history toward feminine approaches to exorcism. Following Legutko (2010) and Clover's (1992) observations on gender and exorcism, this study invests in developing a useful vocabulary to understand how gender is crucial to the exorcism narrative in terms of bodies and bodily performance.

Thus, these terms, spiritual guide and spiritual warrior, hold significance not because they are dictated by a performer's particular gender, but because they refer to particular modes of performance an exorcist engages. Clover's (1992) dual narrative is decidedly sexist (male in

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crisis, female possessed), but spiritual guide and spiritual warrior are not predicated on sex. An

exorcist may move back and forth between approaches. For example, in Cotton Marcus's first

exorcism, he attempts to replicate the masculinity exemplified in *The Exorcist*, engaging in high

volume spectacle, confronting the demon with brute force and concentrating on eradicating the

threat. But in a later exorcism, he operates as spiritual guide, focusing more on Nell's journey

and her ability to fight from within, even though the appearance of Abalam brings out the return

of Cotton's spiritual warfare. Thus, this study posits the gendered nature of exorcism.

Spectacle Horror in the Exorcism Film

Exorcism films are better suited for analysis through spectacle horror than identification.

Scholarly attention to spectacle re-orients analysis so that scholars may approach possessed

bodies (and exorcisms) as solicitation to engage viewers. Several scenes in exorcism films are

designed as attractions or theatrical invitations, which invite and compel the spectator to engage

in more ambivalent terms with the horror film.

Reading the exorcism film as a form of spectacle horror is appropriate, particularly

because the subgenre privileges *visibility* and *interactivity*. First, taking strong focus on the act,

exhibition, and harnessing of visibility, the cinema of attractions revels in the ability to *show*

something, or to present "a series of views to an audience, fascinating because of their illusory

power (whether the realistic illusion of motion offered to the first audience by Lumière, or the

magical illusion concocted by Méliès), and exoticism" (Gunning, 1986, p. 64). The emphasis on

showing is central to the exorcism film. The three case studies indicated that much of the

exorcism narrative thrives on the pursuit of locating the threat and showcasing the threat's

destruction through the female body. As discussed before, Clover (1992) observes that

possession films are strikingly similar to what Doane (1987) refers to as medical discourse films, in which the female body is made to materialize itself, to make itself known.

The insistence on materializing or showing the female body echoes features of spectacle horror. Further, the act of showing the body is also a method of providing visibility to the abstract, or what Gunn (2004) referred to as "naming the ineffable" (p. 5). Although the threat itself is invisible, demonic possession manifests through peculiar behavior of the young woman's body. Spectacle horror, then, uses the female body's ability to provide evidence of demonic presence—a way of materializing the invisible. Thus, exorcism films possess spectacular techniques of showing and naming.

The concept of spectacle horror also allowed me to conceptualize the possessed woman as an embodiment of exorcism's discursive knot, or the sign of interactivity of various discourses and institutions through the young woman's corporeality. Thus, contortions are not just indicative of the narrative's demons, but also solicit viewer attention to the perplexing nature of exorcism as it pertains to disparate interests. Rather than reading exorcism films solely in terms of narrative, scholars should focus more on the series of attractions that extend beyond simple thematic elements.

A spectacle horror lens allows scholars to better ascertain dynamic, performative film-viewer relationships. The exorcism film invites viewers to advance from passive voyeur to active collaborator. Rather than upholding the conventional, distinct divisions between performer and audience member, the film's construction anticipates viewer participation. The horror film is aware of the audience: "The contemporary horror film *knows* that you've seen it before; it *knows* that you know what is about to happen; and it knows that you know it knows you know" (Brophy, 2000, p. 279). Film viewers collaborate in the construction of meaning during a

screening, and they reciprocate long term engagement with producers through various forms of feedback (Feuer, 1992; Schatz, 1981). By recognizing the active engagement between performer, text, and viewer, horror scholars may better conceptualize a horror film viewing as an *event* that thrives on reciprocity, symbiosis, and the inescapable awareness of the film-viewer relationship.

Change in Aesthetics

Study of the exorcism film prompts a re-orientation that asks questions of spectacle horror and attractions, rather than vesting in identification or a singular text. For instance, Powell's (2006) work demonstrates how psychoanalytic approaches to horror films neglect the aesthetics of horror and makes a case of film viewing as a visceral, embodied event. The framework of attractions unpacks how exorcism films form generic expectation through familiar, spectacular elements. The three case studies indicate that spectacle horror in exorcism films emerge in three ways: performance of possession, performance of exorcism, and film construction. For example, the makers of *The Conjuring* construct spectacle horror through clever incorporation of cultural capital related to horror cinema and through subtle camerawork to solicit viewer attention beyond the scope of the narrative.

To reconsider the reflexive and performative possibilities of the exorcism film, scholars must adopt an appropriate orientation toward its aesthetics. Bodily contortions as attractions suggest that viewers are supposed to look *at* Regan, but most scholarly discussion has been historically entrenched in notions of voyeurism, or the form of looking at someone who does not know they are being watched (Mulvey, 1975). The cinema of attractions, however, *knows* it is being watched; it begs to be watched. Characters' bodies have dyadic relationships one another, but they also have dyadic relationships to viewers.

This study calls for re-evaluating spectator relationships with possessed characters. The exorcism film does not facilitate voyeurism in the way that viewers might peek at a busty cheerleader in a slasher flick. Audience engagement is derived not through scopophilic titillation (Mulvey, 1975), but from an ambivalent phenomenon emerging from what Paul (1994) referred to as "gross out aesthetics," which highlights the "ascendancy of the physical over the conceptual" (p. 293). Viewers look to Regan for bodily spectacle and transformation. They expect her body to transform from well-mannered young woman to monstrosity.

Some scholars embrace these aesthetics. Paul (1994) draws attention to film-viewer tensions through gross out aesthetics: "If disgust inevitably involves an ambivalence, a simultaneous attraction and repulsion, then the comedies play to the positive pole of disgust, the horror films to the negative" (p. 292). Paul (1994) describes how fear is constructed alongside curiosity and amusement. Gross out aesthetics feature appeals where repulsion and attraction are closely aligned, giving weight to reading Regan's body as what Carroll (1981) identified as a fusion character, a character embodying conflicting themes or feelings. Clover (1992) notes a similar trend with audiences' reaction to the slasher film and argues that the explicit nature of violence is constructed in such a way that it elicits just as much "uproarious disgust" as it does fear (p. 41). The work of Clover (1992) and Paul (1994) suggests that scholars may be overlooking crucial, ambivalent constructions. Regan's green bile vomit scene is infamous not only because of its disturbing qualities, but also because of its excessive nature to the point at which it may amuse. Amusement may come from the shock and awe of the gross out techniques. Exorcism filmmakers create attractions and spectacle horror to amaze, to shock, and to gross out through various performances of the young woman's possession. Spectacle horror solicits; it

begs for consumption. Thus, the contortionist exists to be seen. By recognizing that aesthetic, researchers may open up further discussion.

Studies like this may develop the aesthetics of the exorcism film by looking to the interactive influences of attractions. Gunning (1986) points to Marinetti's comments on variety theater, a substantial influence to the cinema of attractions. Marinetti praises variety theater for its

> esthetics of astonishment and stimulation, but particularly its creation of a new spectator who contrasts with the 'static,' 'stupid voyeur' of traditional theater. The spectator at the variety theater feels directly addressed by the spectacle and joins in, singing along, heckling the comedians. Dealing with early cinema within the context of archive and academy, we risk missing its vital relation to vaudeville, its primary place of exhibition until around 1905. (Marinetti as quoted in Gunning, 1986, p. 66)

Spectacle horror implicates the audience in terms of an event in which spectators are compelled to take part. Participation extends to a variety of forms, from mere individual bodily reactions to the audience's collective gross out.

Following its popularity, the cinema of attraction did not vanish, but moved toward obscure avant-garde practices "and as a component of narrative films, more evident in some genres (e.g., the musical) than in others" (Gunning, 1986, p. 64). The horror film houses characteristics of the cinema of attractions; it solicits a visceral confrontation with the audience; it participates with viewers in ways that extend beyond conventional modes (Lowenstein, 2011). As Brophy (2000) puts it: "It is this mode of *showing* as opposed to *telling* that is strongly connected to the destruction of the body" (p. 281). Scholars should invest more critical attention to the ways spectacle horror engages dynamic film-viewer relationships.

Spectacle horror does not require the absence of identification. The ambivalence from gross out aesthetics suggests that the viewer engages not just an intimate viewing mode of identification with characters, but also (in specific moments) an aesthetic distance that confronts

the viewer to look *at* attractions that are designed specifically for her attention. Exorcism films are constructed to engage audience in visceral fashion. The contortionist unsettles the audience. Reading the possessed body as contortionist provides a fruitful and concise means to re-conceptualize relationships between performer, text, and audience member.

Finally, although the contortionist moves her body unnaturally, she is always in control. Exorcism films conceptualize control in various ways. A main area of contention is whether the young girl is influenced to move her body or that she has complete control. Feminist readings suggest that the woman engages in misbehavior to open a liberatory space of possibility. Paul (1994) argues that such a body is coded as revolting "precisely because it revolts and begins to act autonomously" (p. 296). The contortionist solicits an audience and claims control of her body. Thus, the contortionist is a potent framework to expand notions of spectactor relationships.

Even More Paranoid Horror

Historical time may influence narrative patterns, but it does not dictate them. Worland (2007) characterizes the horror film's evolution as a genre developed through strategies employed rather than through time. Pinedo (1996) and Tudor (1989) echo this argument as they both note discursive shifts in the "postmodern" and "paranoid" horror films. Although *The Exorcist* is often categorized as a paranoid horror film, it is easily the most secure of the films analyzed in this study. Contemporary exorcism films have a heightened degree of paranoia. As a distinct departure from *The Exorcist*, where Regan is undoubtedly possessed and then redeemed, *Emily Rose* and *Last Exorcism* engage in new levels of paranoia. *Emily Rose* allows multiple interpretations of Emily's behavior. *Last Exorcism* suffers from a secular arrogance that believes it knows better. Viewers cannot discern whether the possessions are genuine. But *The Conjuring* features a return to a secure narrative in a 1970s setting. Viewers can be certain that Bathsheba is

influencing Carolyn because of her newfound supernatural abilities to levitate and her superhuman strength. Further, Lorraine is able to confirm Bathsheba as threat through her psychic abilities. Thus, a film's respective time period does not necessarily dictate the narrative ontology or the horror discourse (modern vs. postmodern; secure vs. paranoid) the film engages.

All four exorcism films occupy varying locations on the continuum between paranoid and secure horror. *Exorcist* and *Conjuring* take up more secure tones because of the irrefutable evidence of possession, such as Regan's and Carolyn's supernatural levitations. *Emily Rose* and *Last Exorcism* take up more paranoid tones in narrative and performance of possession. These films leave viewers guessing. Experts are unable to provide indisputable evidence. Nell is endowed with supernatural powers of foretelling the future, but the film never establishes whether these powers are inherent or come from an invading force. Thus, the exorcism narrative is not effectively encapsulated in one particular discourse or style. Rather, exorcism is distinguished through emplotment, or particular narrative and content elements.

Film Construction Shapes Narrative

The three case studies revealed that although a consistent exorcism narrative formula was identified, those elements were negotiated through each film's construction. *The Exorcist* utilized a closed narrative; *Emily Rose* combined the horror film with the courtroom drama; *Last Exorcism* employed an ethnographic cinema verité mode; and *The Conjuring* reveled in intertextuality. In each case study, I describe how the film's composition impacts the narrative formula. For example, *Last Exorcism* provided the most open-ended incorporation of the exorcism narrative formula because its very construction impacts how the story is conveyed. Identification with the camera's first-person viewpoint and its exceedingly mobile qualities create possibilities that come from all sides. Viewers are thrust into a dynamic, arena-style

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orientation. A threat might approach from any angle. Further, *Last Exorcism*'s documentary style allows for more jump cuts and gaps in the narrative. Filmmakers are not bound to the conventional narrative storytelling of what Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger (1985) call Classical Hollywood Style. Thus, I contend that exorcism films with more open-ended compositions are more likely to elaborate on the narrative formula, such as adding developments, leaving steps implied, or re-ordering the narrative sequence. Exorcism films that commit to closed narratives are more likely to replicate a more predictable sequence.

Toward a Working Definition

From the three case studies, the following aspects of the exorcism film seem to be consistent: Women are possessed more often than men because female bodies afford more possibilities of body representation. Exorcism is one type of the possession film. The possession film may engage haunted house formulas and discourses, but the exorcism film marks itself through the performance of purification. Yet, the exorcism film cannot exist without themes of possession or hauntings. The performance of exorcism is also gendered. I have defined and provided evidence for the terms *spiritual warrior* and the *spiritual guide*. Clover's (1992) terms male-in-crisis and female possessed remain useful, and Renner's (2011) reference to parental crisis deserves further inquiry.

Like most horror films, exorcism films deal with history: of the real world and of the film's own cinematic history. The horror film often functions reflexively. Films like *Emily Rose* illustrate, elaborate, and extend discourse on contemporary exorcism through the established iconography of previous films. Thus, monstrosity is constructed through bodies' relationships to other bodies—historical, familial, and institutional. Young women are cast as monstrous when they reject the family, the church, the hospital, and the state.

Thus, I define the exorcism film as a film that engages the seven-stage exorcism narrative formula (the performance of purification) and incorporates some degree of relevant iconography: a male in crisis, a female possessed, a parental crisis, a spiritual warrior, a spiritual guide, a continued contest between the home, the hospital, the church, and the state, and tell-tale signs of the supernatural such as a cold room, the smell of something burning, windows and doors opening, objects moving on their own, the possessed speaking in other voices or languages, apparitions, and 3 A.M. The exorcism film also incorporates the use of spectacle horror primarily through contortions of the possessed body, celebration of familiar texts, and performance of exorcism.

Through analyzing *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005), *The Last Exorcism* (2010), and *The Conjuring* (2013) based on the paradigmatic example *The Exorcist* (1973/2000), this study confirms the exorcism film is a subgenre of the horror film. Through careful consideration of formulas and spectacle horror, I have demonstrated that further work must be done beyond notions of originality and identification to better understand this collection of exorcism films. Although traditional renderings in the exorcism film have depicted the possessed young woman as a helpless victim of an invading demon's destruction, this study suggests that there are so many more possibilities than just the Devil that made her do it.

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APPENDIX: A TIMELINE OF EXORCISM FILMS

Exorcism film is a subgenre of the horror film, marked by the institutions and practices associated with exorcisms. Domestic lifetime gross box office information retrieved from BoxOfficeMojo.com. Critical acclaim ratings retrieved from RottenTomatoes.com.

1937
The Dybbuk
1961
Matka Joanna od aniolów (Mother Joan of the Angels, Poland)
1963
Il Demonio (The Demon) (Italy)
1973
The Exorcist (USA)   *$232, 906, 145*   *87%*
1974
Abby (USA, blaxploitation)
Exorcismo Negro (The Bloody Exorcism of Coffin Joe) (Brazil)
L'anticristo (The Antichrist)(The Tempter) (Italian)(Exorcist knockoff)
Magdalena von Teufel Besessen (West Germany, Exorcist knockoff)
 eytan (Turkey, Exorcist knockoff)
1975
The Devil Within Her (UK) (Rosemary's Baby knockoff)
La Endemoniada (The Possessed, Spain)
Exorcismo (Spain)
Un urlo nelle tenebre (The Return of the Exorcist) (Italy)
1976
1977
Khake Sar Beh Morh (The Sealed Soil) (Iran)
Alucarda (Mexico)
Martin (USA, vampire)
Exorcist II: The Heretic (USA)   *$30,749,142*   *22%*
The Possessed (USA, TV movie)
1978
1979
1980
1981
1982
Amityville II: The Possession (USA)   *$12,534,817*   *7%*
Devil Returns (China)
1983
1984
Ninja III: The Domination (USA)
1985
1986

1987

Nightmare Sisters (USA, direct to video, low-budget, erotic comedy)

1988

Beetlejuice (USA)	*$73,707,461*	*81%*
The Unholy (USA)		

1989
1990

The Exorcist III (USA)	*$26,098,824*	*55%*
Repossessed (USA, spoof)	*$1,382,462*	*0%*

1991

Teenage Exorcist (USA, comedy)

1992

Listopad (French)

1993
1994
1995
1996
1997
1998
1999

Stigmata (USA)	*$50,046,268*	*22%*

2000

The Exorcist: Version You've Never Seen	*$232,906,145*	*87%*
Lost Souls (USA)	*$16,815,253*	*7%*
Possessed (TV, USA)		

2001

Scary Movie 2 (USA, spoof)	*$71,308,997*	*15%*

2002
2003

The Order (USA)	*$7,660,806*	*8%*
Exorcism: The Movie (USA)	*$1,303*	
Chakushin Ari (One Missed Call, one scene) (Japan)		

2004

Exorcist: The Beginning (USA)	*$41,821,986*	*11%*
Saved! (USA, Exorcist parody scene)	*$8,940,582*	*61%*

2005

Constantine (USA)	*$75,976,178*	*46%*
The Exorcism of Emily Rose (USA)	*$75,072,454*	*44%*
Dominion: Prequel to the Exorcist (USA)	*$251,495*	*30%*

2006

Requiem (Germany)	*$9,600*	*88%*
Blackwater Valley Exorcism (USA)		
Costa Chica: Confessions of an Exorcist (Legion: The Final Exorcism) (USA)		
Exorcism: The Possession of Gail Bowers (USA)		

2007

REC 2 (Spain)   *69%*
Exorcist Chronicles (USA)

2008

1920 (India, Bollywood)
Semum (Turkish)
Chronicles of an Exorcism (USA)
One Missed Call (USA, remake, one scene)   *$26,890,041*   *0%*
Home Movie (USA)

2009

The Unborn (USA)   *$42,670,410*   *11%*

2010

The Last Exorcism (USA)   *$41,034,350*   *73%*
Exorcismus (La Posesión de Emma Evans) (Spain)
The Shrine (Canada)

2011

Anneliese: The Exorcist Tapes (USA)
The Rite (USA)   *$33,047,633*   *20%*
Season of the Witch (USA)   *$24,827,228*   *10%*

2012

The Devil Inside (USA)   *$53,261,944*   *7%*
The Possession (USA)   *$49,130,154*   *39%*
Séance: The Summoning (USA)
When the Lights Went Out (UK)
Hellbenders (USA) (comedy)
Devil Seed (Canada)
Torture Chamber (USA)
Beyond the Hills (Romania)
Supernatural Activity (USA, parody)

2013

The Last Exorcism II (USA)   *$15,179,302*   *16%*
A Haunted House (USA, spoof)   *$40,041,683*   *10%*
The Conjuring (USA)   *$137,400,141*   *86%*
Hell Baby (USA)   *$8,785*   *34%*

VITA

Charles Austin McDonald II, from Prattville, Alabama, received his bachelor's degree in communication studies at the University of Alabama in 2008. He continued study at the University of Alabama, and received his master's degree in communication studies in 2010 (Roll Tide!). Austin expects to receive his doctoral degree in August 2014 (Geaux Tigers!). He is thrilled to serve as Associate Director of Forensics and Instructor of Communication Studies at Hastings College this fall (Go Broncos!).