Possessed: New Horror Films in the Era of Neoliberalism

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DEDICATION

For my grandmother, Mary Ruth, who taught me to never turn a blind eye to suffering.

For my grandmother, Carrie, who showed me how to live through suffering.

For my friend, Amber, who laughed heartily despite suffering.

And

For my mother, Missy, who suffered and died while I wrote.

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ABSTRACT

Since its inception, the horror genre has been reflective of cultural fears. In neoliberal society, horror cinema has experienced a cultural revival that has challenged the conventional boundaries of the genre and expanded our current understandings through a convergence of neoliberalism and gothic horror with unprecedented popularity in the cultural imaginary. The conjuring universe, one of the highest grossing and most popular horror universes to date, presents a key space for cultural criminologists, like horror and film fans, to engage with the terror of the neoliberal world through mediated new gothic images, resulting in a gothic criminology. Through an ethnographic content analysis of the conjuring cinematic universe, this dissertation addresses three primary questions: 1) What emerging cultural anxieties can we discern from new patterns in horror related to demonic possession as it relates to the neoliberal era? 2) How can existing understandings of horror be elaborated in ways that extend gothic criminology? 3) What do demonic horror films teach us about criminological understandings of neoliberalism?

I use the conjuring universe as a case study to analyze how neoliberal social formations have changed the face of American horror with a focus on the revival of possession. The cultural revival of gothic metonym and tropes, coupled with an explicit link to true crime genres, culminates in a neoliberal gothic criminology centered upon the tension of declining social institutions in relation to personal responsibility as a key response to neoliberal logics.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: NEOLIBERAL DEMONS

Demons are real. They loom large in the cultural imaginary as entities seeking to remake our world through violent possession and perversion. Demonic language and imagery infect our cultural, political, and domestic spheres as individuals view themselves as wrapped in an inescapable gloom. The anxieties around cultural demons have generally been most saliently communicated through fantastic metaphysical horror films. Those anxieties, like the shifting forms of the horror film itself, have always been cyclical in nature (Smith, 2017).

To address the defining characteristics of changing horror as it relates to images of the demonic, this research asks three primary questions: What emerging cultural anxieties can we discern from new patterns in horror related to demonic possession as it relates to the neoliberal era? How can existing understandings of horror be elaborated in ways that extend gothic criminology? What do demonic horror films teach us about criminological understandings of neoliberalism? To answer these questions, I perform an ethnographic content analysis on films within the conjuring cinematic universe.

The Resurgence of Cinematic Horror

Defined by the creation of cinematic universes, sub-genres of horror have come to determine the patterns of feast and famine for market shares in film. However, despite waxing and waning years in box office popularity, horror is the fastest growing genre in cinema (Malvern, 2017). During the decades between 1910 and 1980, no more than 100 horror movies were released per year. However, beginning in 2000, there

have been no fewer than 200 films within the horror genre released annually. In 2015, 1,066 horror films were released and in 2017, horror had its biggest year in history, earning $733 million in ticket sales (Murphy, 2017). Since 2010, thirteen of the top thirty films by return on investment (ROI) have been horror. NPR found that horror movies are the best financial bet in film making due to high ROI. They require minimal marketing and are incredibly popular, making them more profitable than any other genre. As its own category, the top five horror films have an average of 2,000 percent ROI compared to 1,200 percent ROI for top films in comedy. However, horror movies are not the most profitable. For example, *Jurassic World* (2015) made $1.6 billion in profits with an ROI of 533 percent. When we compare this to the profits of *Paranormal Activity 2* (2010), we see that the horror film paled in terms of profit at $236 million. However, the film had a total ROI of 2,510 percent, meaning that was a more successful film in terms of profitability based off investment. This research considers the ongoing horror renaissance of the twenty-first century through a cultural criminological lens that also theorizes the potential for a more fully developed gothic criminology based on neoliberal anxieties. In doing so, I assert that the concepts deemed foundational to modern criminology are embedded in forms of media that are not crime centered. This embeddedness serves to reinforce and normalize harmful structural patterns that provide the fodder for criminal behaviors and shape our understandings of them through neoliberal terms. The horror genre in the current phase of neoliberalism reveals a universe of organizing logics specifically oriented toward the trope of possession, a subgenre of horror in which a character is controlled or is fighting against control efforts,

of a human or inhuman spirit OR in which other characters or the audience believe a character is possessed or likely to become possessed.

This orientation is apparent in the financialized aspects of horror. Many possession-based horror films, including but not limited to those in the conjuring cinematic universe, my object of study, have recorded some of the highest ROIs within the genre. Recent continued growth in the horror industry has been attributed to several factors including the potential for high ROI (Follows, 2017). Scholars and fans contend that, alongside the profitability of horror, now more than in previous generations, audiences need an emotional release through fear (Smith, 2017). Others report a new boundary shift in horror that is drawing in wider audiences. This new boundary shift is characterized by evolving character archetypes through empathy for the transgressor or sympathetic villains, and the evolution on the “final girl,” a virginal figure that transforms into a monster herself for the sake of survival (Clover, 2015). The boundary shift has also been understood through the debate around the creation of meta-horror or elevated horror, which are films that are seen to be more artistic in value due to their social and contextual awareness (Crucchiola, 2016). Despite the shifting narratives embedded within horror films that are producing huge returns on investment and drawing in new audiences, we see gothic elements continuing to permeate the cultural imagination in horror, often rooted in female suffering and isolation - as is the case within the gothic genre. The horror revival beginning in the late to mid-2000s and continuing to today, is part of a much larger trend concerned with cultural fears that move beyond distinctions made within the stylistic shifts of the genre. Rather, these

stylistic shifts alongside the revival of classic tropes indicate that certain monsters are resonating with wider audiences more than ever before.

Since the first horror film was released in 1896, monsters and monstrosity have relied on rational enlightenment to thrive. Horror has provided an outlet for feelings related to the dark side of industrialization and changing social forms in modernity, making them of distinct sociological interest. Until recently, the monstrous and dangerous took the form of unsympathetic villains - zombies, werewolves, or deranged unknown killers. Monsters were used to show us what should be considered marginal, deviant, and abject. (Donovan, 2011). Today, we are seeing a trend in horror that reflects changing cultural anxieties as we move away from horror influenced by the events of 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror. As part of these shifts, the genre has begun to move away from extreme violence in favor of more traditional and gothic stylistic devices. However, these tried-and-true devices resonate across consumer culture in unprecedented ways. The cultural revival that the gothic lens is experiencing in horror is mainly linked to nostalgic needs in the face of overwhelming systems of violence.

Among the flurry of torture porn films with their cycles of prolonged ultra-violence and sustained torture (Edelstein, 2006) and neo-grindhouse aesthetics (Wharton, 2013) during the post-9/11 years (Graham-Dixon, 2019), we have seen the emergence of a new kind of evil. The introduction of sympathetic transgressors in films such as *Us* (2019), *The Blackcoat's Daughter* (2015), and *The Curse of La Llorona* (2019) plays to one of the most important aspects of monstrous horror: we do not always recognize the most dangerous entities immediately. These villains share a subaltern status, seeking to

speak back to the histories of white supremacist, patriarchal, and capitalist power. The introduction of these sympathetic villains into horror films asks audiences to be sensitive to the suffering (Tamborini, Stiff, & Heidel, 1990) of the oppressed “other.”

In addition to the introduction of the sympathetic transgressor, we see other notable changes, including the removal of hope. In years past, horror movies often provided room for success; though half of your friends may die, there is a chance that you will survive and defeat evil, as seen in films like *Scream* (1996), *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006), and *Vacancy* (2007). However, horror cinema since 9/11 presents itself as increasingly nihilistic (Wetmore, 2012). With villains that are not always obvious and no sense of hope, modern horror allows viewers to sit in full existential dread. For example, in *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) there are no monsters for viewers to engage with. Rather, the witch and the threat that she presents remains off camera until the very end of the film. The simple snapping of a twig or breathing of a companion achieves a new kind of cinematic sense of dread and terror. Furthermore, the fear in the film also rests in unseen worldly dangers in a dark wood, such as the possibility of a cliff or an encounter with a wild animal. *The Blair Witch Project* was a groundbreaking film that reminded viewers that indeed, we may not always see our enemy, and we may not win. The overtly nihilistic tone within the horror genre, alongside the emergence of sympathetic villains is one that troubles the boundaries of the genre. However, what emerges at the intersection of these two seemingly incompatible story arcs is that evil in modern horror may wear a familiar face, but it remains largely inescapable. The changing face of evil in horror films is reflective of an incredibly high profile of evil on a political stage (Hayden, 2009).

In addition to the introduction of sympathetic transgressors and the removal of hope, modern horror is also defined by the evolution of the final girl. This transformed virginal monster, who has defied all odds and won against the evil she faces, has direct ties to the evolution of popular feminism (Karras, 2002). The emergence of the final girl began in the 1980s as the second wave of feminism focused on women's sexual liberation and neoliberal logics rapidly expanded into the domestic sphere (Berlant, 2011), creating a crisis related to the normative orders of families that we see very little change in to date (Cooper, 2017). Some of the most culturally iconic final girls of this era, including but not limited to Nancy Thompson in *Nightmare on Elm Street* and Laurie Strode in *Halloween II*, are all presented as young women on the cusp of sexual freedom demonstrated in a form that was sexually desirable at the time. In each of these films we see that despite the evolution of the final girl, her family always remained in precarious positions, which continues one of the genre's most powerful devices: the assault on the American family (Williams, 2014).

As the third wave of feminism emerged into popular culture in the late 1990s, we began to see a distinct turn in the way women were presented in horror. The slasher phase of horror that dominated the 1980s presented women in a way that was responsive to desirable traits of femininity. Female characters were presented as passive victims who were punished and frightened for failures to return male feelings of lust (Meehan, 1983) thereby encouraging the audience to revel in their suffering. The more modern final girl is typical in her feminine features and more level-headed than her counterparts. Femininity in horror acts as its own form of transgression, serious enough to warrant suffering and death. Therefore, the final girl must shirk traditionally feminine

traits (Clover, 2015). The final girl is still alive and well in the cultural imagination but her evolution, beginning with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Karras, 2002), highlights a continued shift in the horror paradigm. This can be seen in films such as *Jennifer's Body (*2009), *Happy Death Day* (2017), *Ready or Not* (2019), and *American Mary* (2012*)* where horror heroines are led out of a virginal innocence and rationality to an area of moral ambiguity that has never been afforded to female characters in horror.

Since this evolution, much of horror's criticism has moved away from gender politics. This trend has also been impacted in the post 9/11 world as much of gendered narratives around terror represent men as hero's and women as passive victims and widows (Wetmore, 2012). The emergence and evolution of the final girl has also shifted with these changing narratives. While the final girl has been central to horrors recent revival, the boundaries around gender in horror films have come more permeable. Like our larger cultural identity on the silver screen, gender in horror is deeply rooted in our history but is always evolving. This research seriously considers the ways in which gender boundaries are challenged by the revival of gothic tropes within the horror genre as related to neoliberal demonization (Kotsko, 2018). Traditionally, gothic works have centered on helpless women in the face of male eroticism and the male gaze (Kahane, 1980) or treated women as inherently sexualized persons (Wolff, 1979), both of which stand in stark contrast to the evolution of the modern final girl. Interestingly, recent scholarship around the horror genre has neither been as critical as it might of these more nuanced depictions of gender in relation to larger social formations, nor has it further tracked the evolution of the final girl. Yet some of the most popular horror of the new century has challenged both gothic understandings of womanhood and popular

cinematic depictions of femininity through a nostalgic portrayal of women's roles in relation to domestic spaces, family, and tropes of innocence. The boundaries of gender as it relates to larger social institutions, such as the family, are permeable in modern horror productions but are always reflective of larger patterns related to desirability and conformity.

The permeability of boundaries related to the horror genre are not limited to narrative work and messaging within the films. Rather, as part of the horror renaissance, the genre has experienced different kinds of boundary work through the emergence of what some have called "elevated horror." Elevated horror, in contrast to low horror slashers and body horror (Colver, 2015), is considered more artistic in nature. The artistic value of elevated horror lies in a discontinuance of horror rooted in bodily pain, suffering, torture, and a renewed focus on storytelling. This has allowed for horror to reach beyond its traditional fans and therefore provide us a deeper look into what scares the collective "us." *The Witch* (2015), *A Quiet Place* (2018), *Us* (2019), and *Hereditar*y (2018) have been touted as examples of elevated horror. These films achieved box office highs unlike horror films produced in the early 2000s. Research argues that elevated horror has occurred largely in response to the torture porn subgenre and its representation of cultural anxieties of suffering and xenophobia post 9/11 (Gislason, 2021). However, little work has been done to define the boundaries of what constitutes elevated horror with critics being quick to point out what it is not rather than what it is. In addition to these observations, the reemergent focus on storytelling and symbolism within the horror genre presents us with an opportunity to reconsider what horrifies.

Referencing back to the idea of cultural shifts within horror, the delineation between torture porn and other subgenres, such as elevated horror and possession-based horror, represents a distinction between what gothic studies considers horror, which evokes a bodily response, and terror, which is genuinely aesthetic and operates within the imagination (Picart and Greek, 2003) and boundaries of the genre more broadly. While horror has certainly undergone changes, this does not necessarily indicate that new horror is more artistically valuable or culturally in-tune. Rather, the genre is responding to neoliberal social formations that represent a dystopian universe (Giroux, 2008) where hopelessness is pervasive in the decline of social provisions and logics of capital are given primacy. As culture evolves in response to the ripples created by 9/11, horror has become a way to deal with decades of despair and fear across American culture in which certain social conditions are seen as so abhorrent that they deserve the utmost condemnation (Hayden, 2009). “Elevated horror” is reflective of new cultural anxieties and ideas of monstrosity that can no longer be effectively communicated through body horror. However, that does not mean that the role of the body is absent in horror films that rely on terror, but rather that the body itself becomes a symbolic and aesthetic tool. The presence of physically nonnormative bodies in horror no longer signifies monstrosity, but highlights vulnerability, while the role of pain in horror films has been expanded to include forms of biopolitical control rather than discipline as a new salient harm.

Gothic Criminology in the Neoliberal Moment

Using “popular criminology” (Rafter and Brown, 2011) to understand what was once considered the lowest genre of entertainment, we can recognize the importance of

subverting normal boundaries of social desirableness and what constitutes “good” cinema. Far from being just low-brow public entertainment, the focus of my dissertation, horror, specifically possession films, offers a window of insight into commonly shared anxieties and experiences specific to key structural moments in historical social orders. My research follows work that highlights various cultural anxieties which have been expressed through horror, ranging from ubiquitous dangerous others and various forms of female empowerment, most often associated with the slasher era of horror (Trencansky, 2001), xenophobia often invoked by the zombie subgenre (Cussans, 2017), religious paranoia in films such as *The Omen* (Stone, 2001), and authoritarianism as represented by Jigsaw in the *Saw* franchise (Goodall, 2020). However, my findings reveal that possession horror films such as those in the *conjuring universe*, *Incarnate* (2016) *Hereditary* (2018), and *Ouija: Origin of Evil* (2016) give us a glimpse of a deeper fear that is central to all others previously explored: a *complete loss* of the self specific to fears within a neoliberal order. With some of the highest ROI ratings, a cultural following, and their recurrent popularity at the box office and on streaming services, the conjuring universe is a site ripe for the study of neoliberal fear. Unlike films such as *Hereditary* (2018), the films that constitute the conjuring universe are neither considered elevated horror, nor do they follow newer stylistic guides within the genre such as the final girl or overt nihilism. The nostalgic nature of the films, coupled with their ability to tap into larger cultural anxieties, position them in a space apart from other horror films at the time of their release. In a time shaped by growing precarity, austerity, political turbulence, and the rise of white supremacy and authoritarian nationalisms, we see, in keeping with late capitalism, a loss of control of

the self emerge as the primary social anxiety, which is shown through the fantastic fear of monstrous dispossessing violence. By turning our attention to this new salient and inescapable possessing evil, we can understand how the boundaries of horror cinema both subvert and reinforce social formations.

In the post 9/11 world Americans have experienced domestic terrorist attacks, natural disasters, global pandemics, the threat of market crashes, and political upheaval that has heightened our collective sense of vulnerability and precarity. Horror films, despite evolving characteristics, rely on old cliches like dangerous others, being alone in a dark house, dead cell phones, conjured evil, and mirror scares and jump cuts to engage a context of fear (Fahy, 2010; 3). The continued evolution of horror, even with its reliance on old symbols and ways of creating terror, consistently reveals a cultural self who's most horrifying fears are historical and ever-changing (Bishop, 2010). As neoliberalism consumes all aspects of our public and private lives for the sake of capital, the emergence of cultural demons has not been limited to the silver screen; rather demons have come to possess the public imagination in economic language, academic works, and political discourse.

Demonology and possession have become more common place in academic research and public discourse (O'Donnell, 2020; Kotsko; 2018; McKittrick, 2006; Althaus-Reid, 2004; Wynter, 2003). In academia, the language of demons and the demonic play important theoretical roles, often signifying opposition to neoliberalism and the subjectivity it brings. However, in popular culture, demons and their possessing power are used to express cultural anxieties related to the impositional force of neoliberal logics in subject making. The language of spiritual warfare, a predominant

discursive force in the current moment, shapes and is shaped by the media we consume and the political battles we undertake. This rise in demonic language, coupled with the industry success of possession horror films, indicates that possession as a subtype of horror and ideological discourse is fertile ground for analysis. The reintroduction of demonology and its tropes into popular culture requires us to move and reorient our attention away from more commonly explored representations of criminality and harm, such as the rogue cop, the serial killer, and the vampire, to allow for a more nuanced and responsive analysis of crime and its current monsters in media and images more broadly.

Gothic criminology, with attention to mediated images of society, has focused on actual horrors, or things coded as horrific, that dominate the public sphere: the hyper masculinized rogue cop, pedophilic priests, rapists, abusive husbands, drug addicts, white collar criminals, vampires as an allegory for unbound capitalism (Picart and Greek, 2007), and the monster as a figure for the dispossessed (Steven, 2017). However, gothic criminology limits us to known horrors such as the rapist, or overly fanatical fears such as stranger violence, and clings to old symbols like vampires and monsters, while overlooking the changing nature of fear in response to postmodern life. Gothic criminology as a subset of cultural criminology is, nonetheless, with development, well poised to use in an analysis of cultural anxieties around social structure, including possession-based horror and the new cultural anxieties expressed within. Gothic works have long helped “us address and disguise some of the most important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety, from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural” (Hogle, 2002; 4).

Gothic criminology and its attention to aesthetic choices highlight how new anxieties can be expressed through more traditional lenses. This requires a deeper attention to the symbolism presented in films that are not overtly related to crime and criminality, in addition to a more macrolevel analysis of cultural anxieties and the conditions that produce them. As noted previously, horror has relied on enlightenment to thrive by bringing the darker sides of modernity to the light and expressing them. Unlike horror, the gothic genre has traditionally shirked enlightenment principles (Anolik, 2014) and its subsequent creation of monstrosity (Donovan, 2011) in favor of mystery and intrigue. The juxtaposition between rational enlightenment related to horror and the gothics disregarding for rationality highlights that the emergence of classic gothic tropes in horror is an interesting new development in the history of the genre. Applying a gothic criminological lens to possession-based horror films allows for an understanding of how mediated images related to harm and suffering can be understood as correlates of crime and larger sociopolitical forces that surround it within a genre that seeks to make visible all the monsters it has created.

To fully utilize gothic criminology in relation to deconstructing possession-based horror films, we must understand the film as both an image and as an exercise in boundary maintenance and construction. To do this, we must both contextualize cinematic history related to horror and position the genre in relation to larger social formations. Postmodernist approaches seek to delineate a new economic and social order (Hill, 1998) in which fear is given new weighted attention. Media and image outputs under this new social configuration constitute a major form of production, significantly reshaping the social experience by influencing the spaces that contribute to

the definition of our social views, so much that the real versus the image is increasingly difficult to distinguish. In a society that is saturated with images, it is important that analysis occurs at the level of the image (Flisfeder and Willis, 2014). Rather than seeking out the structural root of ideologies, scholars can engage with those ideologies as social realities rather than symbols of it. For Žižek, truth is structured as fiction (2). When exploring images as our mediated reality, films allow for us to experience the social reality that is commented on within the story while also understanding that ideology and reality is foundational to the structure of film itself. Applying a postmodernist lens to possession-based horror in the neoliberal era allows for a full contextualization of the genre as it relates to changing social formations, while also providing intellectual freedom to explore how gothic symbols are embedded within the narrative work and assumptions of a cinematic universe.

Cultural criminologist Keith Hayward writes, “crime is inseparable from the image” (Ferrel, Hayward, Morrison, and Presdee, 2004). Just as crime is inseparable from the image, so too are all facets of life in neoliberalism. As one of the defining aspects of postmodernity, the heavy weight of neoliberalism comes to define all our mediated representations of our world. The application of principles that value individualism, free markets, and small government (Clark, 2003), but more significantly the ways that both make the individual responsible for their own survival in increasingly precarious economies as social safety nets are removed, creates a deep sense of recrimination and insecurity that is displayed through media. The invocation of gothic narrative and metonym in the current political moment calls to mind the importance of old cultural symbols and fears related to religiosity. These gothic techniques makes real a kind of

violence against the self that brings together criminological themes of interpersonal and structural violence in the form of an abstract demonic entity.

Neoliberalism, a peculiar form of reasoning that frames everything in economic terms, has been eroding the base of liberal democracy in favor of economic capital (Brown, 2015) and has created conditions in which individuals are abandoned. The intrusion of the invisible hand, an expression of fundamental economic balance (Ingrao, 199), into forms of governance (Williamson, 1994), public services (Le Grand, 2009), and individual psychology (Bettache and Chui, 2019) has reshaped every facet of our lives. The erosion of our affective lives in favor of economic logics (Dardot and Laval, 2019) has impacted institutions, individuals, and culture. The work of Foucault on neoliberalism was largely concerned with the emergence of biopolitics which impacts "governing subject[s] themselves and every institution on the landscape: schools, hospitals, prisons, families, human rights organizations, nonprofits, social welfare agencies, youth culture, and more" (Brown, 2015; 121). As neoliberalism progressed, postmodernism arose within the confines of the neoliberal state to critique existing power structures and the culture produced under the biopolitical neoliberal regime, rather than focusing solely on economic institutions. Postmodern theories focus on the ever-changing and constant renegotiation of social reality and the disappearance of social narrative (van Zon, 2013), making it an ideal medium for understanding the importance of film and recurrent cinematic horror universes.

To put it broadly, under biopolitical neoliberalism, a culture of fear has been created in political and religious terms (Giroux, 2005). While religion has always held significant cultural space for many Americans, religious conservative movements have brought

religion back to a place of political prominence. Through supporting religious organizations and providing a range of social services for religious organizations, conservative political movements have undercut the traditional distinction between church and state while providing a veer of government legitimacy to religious based services. The religious commitment to war and the further degradation of the poor in the nation state, coupled with forces of intolerance and bigotry, has aligned the dissolution of government services and the resulting precarity in individual life with faith based political projects. Neoliberal ideologies and practices coupled with religious fervor in public life have created a breeding ground for dissident profiling, militarism, and rapacious profiteering (Giroux, 2005). As our social life is redefined in neoliberal terms, and fear has become the primary means by which we engage with the world, horror as a genre has more to offer us, popularly and analytically, than ever before.

Horror in the Neoliberal Moment

Neoliberalism and its correlated economic principals first emerged into society during the 1940s and was characterized as distinct from the personal sphere (Berlant, 2011). During the late modern era, ending with the re-emergence of neoliberal ideology during the 1980s, American society was characterized by Keynesian economics. This economic model was an attempt to strike a balance between capital, government, and labor to promote growth, stability, and peace. Modernist concepts of rationality and order were applied with broad strokes (Clark, 2003) and it seemed that the heyday of American society was well underway in the post war years with the public and private sphere's operating separately. During the later modern era, only 106 horror films were released, beginning in 1931 and ending in 1969. However, the films allowed for the

horror genre to begin taking shape in popular American culture. Horror during this period was not defined by a single subgenre, but rather explored concepts around monstrosity, the paranormal, and dangerous others. It often relied on classic gothic stylistics and narratives which were largely removed from the genre in our post 9/11 years as horror came to focus more on the body and monstrosity. However, the emergence of neoliberal ideology, rising unemployment, and economic stagnation began to change the face of American society in the 1980s as a shift in our projected fears could be seen displayed on movie screens across the nation.

In the current moment, as we face rapid time and space constriction (Harvey, 1989), individuals feel more anxiety than before (Twenge, 2000). The introduction of the twenty-four-hour news cycle (Rosenberg and Feldman, 2008), frequent moral panics (Thompson, 2005), environmental degradation (Doherty and Clayton, 2011), a society where market values and family values are synonymous (Galioto, 2016), and global health crises present themselves as new stressors defining the post-modern condition. As in years past, these new stressors and their accompanying anxieties are on full cultural display through film. Unlike the emergent years of neoliberalism, which saw an explicit focus on dangerous others in horror, our current cultural anxieties are less focused on crime and its correlates and instead on something that is far more intangible, yet equally destructive in nature. The total erosion of our public and private lives for the benefit of global capitalism through the role of labor and consumptive practices (Freeman, 2011) based on neoliberal logics has remade our world by responding to its own parasitic logic, transforming every aspect of society, even our personhood, into a shell of itself (Fine, 2010). The alienation produced by the infection

of neoliberal logics into all facets of our life has been represented by films such as *Taxi Driver* (Clapp, 2005), *The Piano Teacher* (Wyatt, 2005), and *The Matrix* (Dahms, 2005). However, it has rarely appeared within the horror genre. The emergence of alienated ways of being as a source of horror, rather than horror focused on death and bodily suffering, is a new development within the genre that taps into cultural anxieties that are a direct product of neoliberal logics.

Michael Barkun (2011) argues that Americans have developed a fixation on unseen dangers since 9/11, stating that “dangers ought to be posed by invisible adversaries who might wield invisible weapons” (141). These unseen forces were embodied in the terrorist, the migrant, and the pandemic. Even our cultural representations of neoliberalism have taken the forms of dangerous others with images of zombies being used to communicate undead ways of being (Fine, 2010). Economic turmoil and capitalism at large have also been represented as fantastic underworld horrors, such as vampires (Frimpong-Ansah, 1991) or the devil itself (Taussig, 1980). When considering these forces as a collective, they represent the patterns of “pollution and defilement” that restructured the collective conscious of America in the early twenty-first century. The imagery of pollution and defilement being inflicted onto what was conceptualized as a previously untroubled community meant that the defiling agents had to be expelled; they had to be exorcised. (O'Donnell,2020).

The transition from horror media largely concerned with victimization from killers such as Freddy, Michael Meyers, Jason, Leatherface, and Jigsaw, to media concerned with paranormal attacks and possession, represents a shift in how we understand ourselves in relation to larger social forces. Our current horror films suggest that most

Americans are no longer preoccupied with dangerous others or physical monstrosity, rather they fear the invisible forces that move among and within us, influence our actions, impact our bodies, and determine the longevity of our souls. The demon represents the oldest form of the unseen adversary, with notions of both the dangerous stranger and a pandemic (O'Donnell,2020). It combines the dangers of an outsider into one single entity. Understanding the demon as a broad notion of monstrosity is crucial as Bivins (2012) discusses it being a threat to the sovereignty of the body that signals its epistemic limits. However, the body need not be an individual body but can be that of a community or even a nation. For example, the War on Terror's promise of a global exorcism of unseen terrorist evils replaced former military actions that would allow for recovery through the removal of something previously unseen and hidden (Christerson and Flory, 2017). By aligning larger social forces that reshape our lives with primordial evil (Katz, 1990), we begin to see possession horror as a site that contends with the ruination of our social formations as a cultural anxiety, which resonates just as much, if not more, than our previous focus on dangerous others and bodily harm.

Chapter Summary

Just as Robert Park once claimed, "A new figure looms large on the horizon of Europe! A figure strange, fantastic, and ominous…" (Park, 624;1906), and as Marx declared, "A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of Communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this specter" (Marx and Engeles, 1; 2002), the figure of neoliberalism haunts the American psyche and is expressed through the form of possession. The embeddedness of neoliberalism into every facet of our lives can be partially understood through the mediated

representations of neoliberal concepts across our vast mediascape. Situating new images related to possession-based horror within the context of neoliberal social formations allows us to understand how fear related to all-encompassing financialization and economic logics come to define the current moment. Remaining largely unquestioned yet ever present, in both image and practice, we all toil under the weight of individual responsibility and the good of the free market. Our bodies and labor have come to be understood though market terms, with humanity being a commodified good in and of itself. The ever present, dominating, and all-consuming nature of neoliberal logics across society represent an erosion of self-determination. In essence, neoliberalism comes to possess our minds and social being to the point that there is little, if anything, that remains of ourselves.

Possession based horror is an excellent site to understand how media both expresses anxieties related to neoliberal logics while also serving to reify their position within society. My research builds off two distinct yet intertwining areas of research: gothic criminology and mediated representations of reality through horror cinema. Bound together by horrific and fantastic images, these intellectual traditions combined allow for a clearer understanding of how neoliberalism is represented through one type of image. Mediated images in horror no longer rely on long standing fears, such as xenophobia and monstrous others, and newer elements of the genre simply do not have the full staying power of previous iterations. Rather, the rapidly changing neoliberal moment and all its correlates, such as the focus on individual responsibilization in the face of market forces, now requires a new focus in film.

Gothic criminology, as a subset of cultural criminology, is founded in the belief that real world horrors can be presented as mediated fantastical horrors to express their significance. The emergence of a neoliberal gothic criminology asserts that the inverse is true; we can understand real world horrors by giving weighted attention to the mediated horrors we consume. These fantastic horrors are reflective of the social conditions in which they are created. Images of the gothic associated with harm and social ills have experienced a cultural revival that has received scant attention from criminologists. The history of horror is one that allows cultural scholars to track cultural fears represented through mediated images, and the emergence of gothic images often used to express criminological concepts is a new development within the genre that cultural criminologist, gothic scholars, and scholars concerned with neoliberalism should give considerable attention to. My work, with its attention to gothic images and criminological concepts, adds to this growing body of literature and troubles previously defined aspects of the horror genre, such as the emergence of the final girl and overt nihilism while pushing the boundaries of gothic criminology as it situates neoliberalism as the fear of our time. In the following chapter I will provide a brief overview of cultural and gothic criminology, which provides the foundation on which I build my analysis before explaining my methods, ethnographic content analysis. Next, I will provide an overview of the conjuring universe before I explore my findings in a set of chapters focused upon neoliberal gothic criminology's relation to true crime, institutional decay, and the self as a site of neoliberal horror. The findings of my research highlight that we are experiencing an unprecedented fear in neoliberal society that is best expressed and communicated through the horrific promise of demons.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE: TOWARD A NEOLIBERAL GOTHIC CRIMINOLOGY

This dissertation considers how the horror genre, specifically the new fascination with possession-based horror, has emerged in response to and changed to reflect current social conditions under neoliberal postmodernism. It does so through an adapted lens of gothic criminology, a school of thought born under cultural criminology and borrowing from gothic sociology. The focus of this chapter is to provide an overview of the interrelations of gothic themes in cultural criminology (Appendix D), gothic criminology, as well as interdisciplinary literatures related to horror, biopolitics, and neoliberal possession (Appendix E). The convergence of these various schools of thought point to the emergence of a neoliberal gothic criminology in which fear of world reshaping evil is communicated through possession. Since the horror genre has always been a tool for expression related to cultural anxieties, turning our attention to neoliberal social formations helps us understand our new evil, and how that evil is situated within and beyond society. As a communicative tool horror position itself as a prime site for the expression of anxieties related to inevitability, disruption, and nihilism. The absence of hope within the genre, coupled with its responsiveness to social conditions provides viewers with opportunity to engage with the conditions of modern life without conscious reflection or the possibility of salvation. In this dissertation, I make a case for the importance of a neoliberal gothic criminology in a framework that relies upon key elements of postmodern neoliberalism. The interrelationships of these areas point to how my work modifies and extends the existing research scope of gothic criminology,

demonstrating how elements of the theory are incredibly applicable to the study of horror in ways it has previously not addressed.

This work is informed by using elements of Baudrillard's (1985) postmodernist analysis as a model to understand how the destruction of the real allows us to begin seeing the real horrors that are embedded in imagined monsters. Baudrillard (1985) famously indicates that it is pointless to endlessly study film in relation to objective social crisis and argues that contemporary discourse and social life is itself arranged as a script for a disaster movie. The construction of the real as film marks the destruction of reality. This destruction occurs in four phases. The first phase is that images perform traditionally and offer a "basic reflection of reality" (Connor, 2004; 43). The second phase relies on a Marxist conception of mass culture, in which images serve as medium for ideologies that distort social reality. The third phase occurs when the image comes to replace basic reality, while the fourth phase is one in which the image has no relation to reality but is its own simulacrum. For example, *The Nun* (2018), the fifth installment in the conjuring universe that explores the origin of the universes most notable and horrifying evil, uses overtly sacrilegious imagery to unsettle viewers but speaks largely to the waning power of the church as a source of social and political control. By offering a character whose sole purpose is to deceive and manipulate while presenting as an agent of The Church and whose powers cannot be controlled by what it mimics, *The Nun* (2018) calls into question the power of religion to offer salvation in the face of suffering.

As a site defined by technological rationale, media and image production as mass art is defined by the consciousness of the production team, leaving little to no room for

consumers to engage with the subject matter. From the beginning of a film, it us usually quite clear how it will end. This sanitized and predictable formula in film leaves no room for imagination, but viewers are unable to deviate from the details presented within, lest they lose the thread connecting the story. In this way, consumers must view the film as reality (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002). For this dissertation, I will be focused solely on fantastic horrors as understood through a biopolitical lens on neoliberal logics that underpin our current constructions and representations of crime, suffering, and physical pain. Because this work is focusing on a cinematic universe that aligns itself with truth and reality despite its horrific fantastical nature, postmodern conceptions related to the destruction of reality through cultural mass production are given the highest attention.

Demons are real in neoliberal society, just as they are real for viewers of possession-based horror. While demons on our screens remake the possessed into a perverted version of their selves, demons in the social world remind us of what ought to be and what is impossible. Neoliberalism acts as a form of political theology that seeks to reshape the world, in part, by imposing moral orders (Kotsko, 2018). O'Donnell (2020) highlights that America's brand of "messianic imperialism['s]" (5) invocation of demons and demonology is at the core of narratives around national and moral decline. Dark forces are to be blamed, and those who can be demonized come to serve as visual reminders of what "should not be." Demons on screen represent a dangerous and unknowable other. In neoliberal society, the geographies of black womanhood, because of colonialism, racism, sexism, and legacies of slavery, inhabit a demonic ground, a place where existing in the margins becomes a genre of human difference (McKittrick, 2006) and the category of "other" becomes inescapable. In many instances, black has

even become the color associated with mystical evil (Wynter, 2003), which so often lacks a body of its own. For demons in film, the perversion of religious dogma is key to the way they come to possess the living. In sexual theology, demons come to represent rebellious spirits associated with gay men (Althaus-Reid, 2004). Across all spaces, we see the demonic emerging in the way we categorize others and the spaces they inhabit. As demonology and demonic forces have emerged as tools to communicate the power of black refusal and sites of claiming oppositional identities, conservative American political thought continues to evoke language related to holy wars and defeating evil, just as demons and their metaphysical horrors have emerged more visibly in popular culture as evil entities whose sole aim is destruction and violence. With these observations, studies, and analyses in mind, this research is concerned with how demonic power and violence is represented as a neoliberal construct made available for consumption to a wide audience.

In this sense, possession horror films retain aspects of the real, albeit not in a spiritual nature. The real social forces behind the “reel” world consumed by movie goers are far more insidious, which is its own horror film universe, than the demons that plague the world of screens. To explain how spiritual demons in horror films are coded to align with real life demons in American political thought, I rely upon key concepts of cultural criminology and how they illuminate cultural understandings of physical pain and suffering. Moving notions of the demonic away from subaltern spaces (McKittrick, 2006) into the light cast by neoliberal logics allows for us to understand what demons’ society fears and what evil is truly manipulating our lives. In *The Nun*, viewers eventually learn that a demonic evil, Valak, has been the arbiter of reality that

characters experienced. While they sought to destroy the evil, they were only operating within the confines it offered them. Similarly, the conditions of neoliberal life- alienation (Mészáros ,2006), exploitation of our bodies (Harrison, 2008), disciplining of our labor (Liu, 2011), the increasing importance of affective labor (Freeman, 2011), the ever-pressing weight of individualization (Mackenzie, 2011), social control (Coleman, 2004), constant categorization (Monboit, 2016), increased focus on property (McIntosh, & Hatcher, 2010), and the disappearance of our private lives (Garrett and Voela, 2016)-all present themselves as part of a monstrous evil that, at once, remakes our worlds but controls the boundaries of the world before it is yet fully remade.

Cultural Criminology

Cultural criminology is relatively new in its inception. Ferrell and Sanders (1995) put forth the perspective due to increasing analytical attention given by criminologists to issues of cultural construction, especially images of crime and crime control in the mass media (Ferrell, 1999). Endeavors that sought to understand how crime is constructed by a wide range of actor's leads scholars to employ a cultural criminological lens to focus more on the "symbolic" aspects of sociology's symbolic interaction tradition by highlighting mediated representations of crime (Best, 1995).

Cultural criminology refers to a broad increase in analytical attention given by criminologists to popular media constructions of crime and crime control. The growing body of literature that began in the late 1990s and continues through today is indicative of media's seepage into traditional criminology. The blending of contemporary criminological inquiry with cultural studies means that much of cultural criminology

draws from the British Birmingham School of cultural studies and the “new criminology” (Taylor et al, 1973) put forth by the same school.

The foundations of cultural criminology as a byproduct of cultural studies and new criminology are greatly informed by work beginning in the 1970s that highlighted the importance of symbolism, style, and situated dynamics in creating deviant subcultures and identities (Ferrell, 1999). By virtue of having its foundations in cultural studies with a keen eye to identity, style, and social space, cultural criminology draws from a reorientation of the postmodern perspective. Rather than assuming that the form of an object of inquiry must be stripped away to get to the true meaning, as is the case with modernism, cultural criminology views form, content, and stylistic differences as substantive, thereby allowing meaning to be present in the presentation and representation of ideas.

This means that to study and understand crime, researchers must move beyond individual instances of harm, victimization, and criminal events and rather investigate the spectacle and the “carnival of crime” (Pressdee, 2003) beyond media coverage of criminals and acts of crime itself. Crime is consumed in a variety of forms with story arcs based on criminal subcultures, state control, media involvement, societal institutions, and the audience’s personal experience. To date, cultural criminology has taken to heart the myriad of ways crime and many of its correlates has dominated our media landscape. However, this research identifies some the forms of crime hidden in media that are not considered part of the cultural carnival and thereby add to the growing body of literature concerned with crime in the gray areas beyond false dualisms of facts and truth distortion.

This research assumes that the carnival of crime extends beyond all the various forms of crime consumption and extends into all media and image consumption more broadly. Concerns about the total loss of the self embedded in possession-based horror taps into feelings often associated with crime and its mediated correlates. The "transgressive excitement" (Presdee and Carver, 2017) of the chaos taps into the same performances and articulations of pain that make the carnival of crime so salient in pop culture. The carnival, as a "senseless time full of senseless irrational acts" (Presdee and Carver, 2017), represents a world that is restructured and upside down. Similarly, demonic possession taps into a senselessness and irrational danger that exists in the cultural imagination. Messages consumed through media and images regarding monstrosity and morality serve to teach about and negotiate lines around deviant behaviors and populations, even when crime is not a primary consideration. Just as social control of the poor is rooted in both workfare, the penalization of welfare, and prisonfare, the welfarization of prisons, (Wacquant, 2010), messages regarding moral order and crime are not limited to one obvious arena. Ideas around the proper order of our social and personal worlds are not only reinforced within the films through consistent invocation of demonic perversion, but the conjuring universe also creates a second layer in which horror and the horrific become commonplace, thereby positioning itself within the carnival of crime.

As phases of welfare reform and expansion have begun penalizing aspects of everyday life, such as unemployment or lack of childcare, we have seen a dedicated political shift to enforce work norms and push populations back into the labor market to maintain social order. This shift to add coercive measures to state welfare policies is

simply one example of how non-criminal behaviors come to be understood as crime correlates and moral failures. The biopolitical regulations inherent in this kind of subject-making have been normalized and we have begun to see how the logics of coercive and punitive social control have begun to enter our domestic spheres and daily lives, considering individuals are seen as development projects (do Gay, 1996). As coercive citizen-making has taken deeper roots in areas outside of crime and crime control, the same feelings of transgression and irrationality poised by the carnival of crime have also become embedded in the fabric of everyday life.

In crafting a system based on neoliberal ideologies around work and the body, we have effectively criminalized a lack of personal marketability in the labor market. Pairing coercive public aide with incarceration has created the tools necessary to control and manage those who do not fit social norms, regardless of criminal activity. The state, in service to the market, can administer life conditions and chances through a system solely focused on the control of demonized populations. This can be seen in discussions around crime and criminality, which have historically been rooted in the desire to control and manage deviant populations. However, the tools necessary for managing these populations have expanded greatly. This ever-growing toolbox has created path dependence for institutions concerned with control and individuals caught within those systems (Brenner, 2005). Rooted in moralistic language and tied directly to public discourse around the decline of the national community, crime and its correlates act as true American demons- something to be controlled and expelled, frequently understoodd as invisible but ever present-while institutions and path dependency are seen as a source of salvation, control, and expulsion.

Despite being of public concern for some time, crime has made a grand entrance into American media and culture (Dowle, Fleming, & Muzzatti, 2006) rather than remaining a strictly political concern. Cultural criminology understands modern media as "a circulating fluidity that challenges any certain distinction between an event and its representation, a mediated image and its effects, a criminal moment and its ongoing construction within collective meaning" (Ferrell, et al., 2015:55). In this vein, research utilizing crime media within cultural criminology has often given precedence to issues that overtly touch on carceral themes: the creation of monstrous others (Linnemann, 2014; Ferrell, 2001;), serial killers (Jarvis, 2007), and the horrors of the police (Linnemann, 2017; King, 2013; and Rafter, 2006). However, monstrosity and its relation to evil and criminality extend well beyond the confines we have created for it.

The ever-expanding world of monstrosity in American culture has created a form of public orthotaxy in which correct, nondeviant patterns and social orders become privileged over correct beliefs and behaviors (O'Donnell,2020). The cultural demons and monstrous others that emerge from this system are not individual criminals or even deviant subgroups but are rather ideas or representations of ideas that stand against willful subjectivity. Crime and crime control have often been used as stand-ins for larger social concerns. In some of our most popular horror films, we see that while the villain might commit crime, such as Jigsaw kidnapping and confining his victims, the real evil in the film is not the crime itself but rather the suffering that is correlated with the crime, not caused by it. Similarly, demons in films wreak havoc and cause suffering that is not linked directly to crime, but rather to the deviance that subverts control and self-determination. Ideas around what monsters stand against willful subjectivity are, of

course, embodied in some instances through crime and criminality. However, in other instances, we see that resistance of willful subjectivity among our heroes. Possession based horror films trouble the idea that resisting subjugation is aligned with evil. In a time where all aspects of our lives are dominated by neoliberal logics, we see that the ideas and norms that possess identities are a form of evil themselves. Ideas around correct and incorrect behaviors and beliefs are consumable through various forms of media that are not bound by traditional areas of criminological inquiry. However, the foundational ideas around crime in media are useful tools to examine media productions concerned with orthotax understandings of our social world, even as these messages are communicated through non-crime centered mediums. One of the most powerful ways we have seen non-crime media align itself with issues or criminality and harm is through an invocation of principles related to true crime. In making fantastic metaphysical horrors objects of truth, possession-based horror allows for viewers to discontinue instances of disbelief and accept the subject matter of the film.

In his 2014 article, Linnemann offers insight into Truman Capote's groundbreaking novel, *In Cold Blood*, as formative for the true crime genre. He explores the notion that true crime reporting acts as a modern form of ghost storytelling in that they offer violence and horror of human creation across generations. Furthermore, ghost stories of true crime offer a phenomenology of place or "a lasting presence of those who are not physically there." (Bell, 1997; 813). Possession based horror understood through the conjuring universe shares a similar phenomenological experience with its viewers. The inaugural film of the universe, *The Conjuring*, presents itself as a true story set in the same time period as the rise of true crime. However, the experience that viewers of the

conjuring universe have is a phenomenology of the self rather than a phenomenology of place. The transgressive horror that is embedded in places related to true crime comes to be inscribed on the body and the self of an individual who is possessed. Gordon (2011) explains that ghosts of past violence create an animated state that makes “itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely” (2). The ghosts within the conjuring universe, distinct from the demonic entities, represent a past that remains in an animated state in the American psyche. It conjures a time where neoliberalism and concerns about subjectivity did not impact every facet of our lives. The timing of both the Clutter family murder from *In Cold Blood* and the possession of Carolyn Perron in *The Conjuring* represents a turning point in American culture where the boundaries between fact and fiction became more permeable. For many years, cultural ghosts stood by in dark shadows, remaining open and accessible to those inclined to relive horror from American battlefields to sites of the Holocaust. However, the introduction of the true crime genre brought to light ghosts of dangerous others to a voyeuristic American culture. Once the ghosts of crime were unleashed, all their correlates were soon to follow.

The world of true crime presents an abnormal new normal (Seltzer, 2008). Ordinary days that promise nothing unusual give way to “the normal accident” (Perrow, 2011), the “sudden but always imminent, unforeseen, and endlessly previewed shock to system” (Seltzer, 2008; 12). Similarly, true horror creates room for a “para”normal accident in which soul-inhabiting, world-reshaping evil is ever present and ready to infect the lives of individuals and destroy families. True crime is growing as one of the most popular genres in the American public and serves as a model for modern referred

pain in that it presents as works of fiction that trouble the boundary between real and "reel." It highlights the grey region between truth and narrative on pain in an area that we can call referred belief. Mass media is the necessary infrastructure for referred pain and referred belief which allows for true crime to serve as a modern form of self-reflection that exposes and effects the reality of our world. True horror also relies on mass media in a similar fashion to communicate the endless possibility of demonic harm and ruin.

In a similar vein, true crime represents a broad arm of contemporary wound culture or a "cult of commiseration" (Seltzer, 2008; 13). In a world where we feel helpless to do anything about terror, violence, and trauma, we can all at least commiserate with it, so we operate as a national support group. True crime is a "registration and revelation of reality [that makes] a difference… It becomes a different reality consisting of itself plus its registration and revelation" (Baecker, 1996; 561). Consuming the emergence and sometimes boundless growth of demonic monstrosity within true horror constitutes a similar revelation. Viewers are introduced to a world of flexible monstrosity that moves beyond the bounds of our human evils- such as the rogue cop and serial killer. Now, in an age plagued by systematic disruption and upheaval, we must understand evil beyond the confines of personhood. Coupling mass violence with observation makes an act of theatre for consumers. Self-evidence and banality through cliched words and pictures within the genre creates a sense of community that turns interiors and bodies into communication, sequesters self-reflection, and creates an entanglement of violence and technical media (Seltzer, 2008). This research is concerned with true crime only in that the distinction of true crime and crime fiction presumes that crime, as a genre, is

one that must “bend fiction towards fact by adding the word ‘true’ to crime.” (26). The conjuring universe engages in a similar bending project that presents itself as “true horror” where fantastical horrors become just as real as crime. This points to modern society existing somewhere between truth and fiction. The blending of fantastical narratives into public policy and discourses emphasizes that the emergence of demonology and political spiritual warfare into the public consciousness, also pointing to the same thing. The demonic is as real as we allow it to be, and we when align demons with social problems to be exercised, we bring these fantastical horrors into being. Furthermore, when we project demonology onto people or communities, we tie them to ideas of monstrosity and crime.

Ferrell (2001) offers a glimpse into how dangerous others are created via mediated images of crime and criminality by focusing his work on the victimless crime of street graffiti. His work highlights how cultural criminology can be used to understand both the mediated images of crime, but also how subgroups come to experience criminalization and its social effects. To create sanitized and commodified cityscapes for “normal” residents, urban design and its champions focusing on quality-of-life crimes unwittingly created in response to an entire subculture dedicated to preserving public space and public art. While distinctly different than the work of Linnemann regarding true crime, when taken in conjunction, these two pieces highlight two sides of the same cultural coin. Criminalizing everyday activities and the telling of modern ghost stories both act to create and maintain the images of a dangerous other. Within possession-based horror, we see that the dangerous other moves beyond crime itself and asks viewers to consider what larger metaphysical forces move among us. In *The Conjuring*, the

primary goal to the possessing evil is to have mothers commit filicide. However, the crime of murder is not what the fear is. Rather, the family and the victim of possession fear the ways in which their world and their selves will be co-opted and remade. Crime, as a transgression committed after possession, becomes a tool for a controlling entity rather than something to be feared.

It is of little importance, for this research and cultural criminology, to know if the dangerous other- the demon- is real or a figment of cultural imagination. Rather, this research is concerned with the communication of the idea of the demonic. Communication, in this instance film, is meant to happen in and create reality (Baecker, 1996); therefore, what is real is what is communicated. Film is the embodiment of two forms of communication, fantasy communication and mass communication, that does not lend itself to error correction. Errors within fantasy communication occur when someone misinterprets their own messages, while errors in mass communication occur when an individual is not able to see the effects their messaging has on others. In both instances, cause and effect become blurred and correction in messaging cannot occur in any meaningful time frame. For this reason, films create an anticipation of communication that create an “impression of reality” (Baecker, 1996; 564) that lies at the intersection of mass communication and perception. When popular discourse can be coupled with mass communication that relies on individual perception of the fantastic, in this case demons and possession, the meaning behind the film and the nature of the “true” story matters very little. Rather, what matters is the reality that exists outside the theater doors and how it relates to individual movie goers through strange and horrific worlds.

Cultural criminology, as a school of thought, often prioritizes explicit images of criminality, pain, suffering, and the role of the state. However, limiting our analysis of crime and punishment to explicit mediated representations of crime overlooks the ways in which we normalize and reify notions of punishment, the role of the state, the role of the individual body, and the embodiment and affect**.** Pfohl (1990) has stated that one of the most intimate cultural spaces in which crime and control intersect is in and around the physical and emotional self. Ferrell (1999) has suggested that this aspect of cultural criminology calls for a criminology of the skin- one that can account for crime and crime control in terms of both pleasure and pain. However, when we draw upon the work of Scarry (1985), it becomes clear that pain is not simply an issue of the skin but rather a project in subject making. The notion that we must base subject making on the body is rooted in an imbalanced research body on issues of subjectivity (Gill, 2008). Subjectivity and culture are interrelated in complex ways that have received scant attention from researchers due to an inability to specifically name the direction of the relationship. Further, research that emerges around subjectivity and culture beyond the body is often treated with hostility as it is seen as overly simplistic (Gill, 2008). Treating the body and the self as two distinct sites of subject making plagues research across disciplines. However, the body is always present, even in spaces more concerned with the self. Scarry (1985) states that pain inflicted on others flickers in our mind before vanishing, but the presence of pain renders our realities fundamentally different. Pain is at once unsharable and undeniable. Furthermore, to hear that someone else is in pain is to doubt the existence of their pain because it is fundamentally outside the realm of the hearer's physical perception. Language, which is transcended by pain, is aided by

images of weapons and damage. These images help render pain more shareable. Mediated language that shares in both bodily pain and the pain of the self, such as possession-based horror, allows for us to bridge the gap between a criminology of the skin and a criminology concerned with metaphysical suffering wrought by structural conditions.

In addition to this, romanticizing pain in popular culture alleviates the burden of disbelief presented by Scarry. In forms of media, especially paranormal media, the pain of the victim, be they victims of a ghost, demon, or other entity, is often discussed at length, but unlike the assertion of Scarry, there is little disbelief, if any, from the viewer. Should disbelief in the pain of the victim exist, it is often met with the cult of commiseration; while we may not actually believe the pain, it is possible we can at least commiserate with the fact they are presenting pain. The disbelief regarding pains of the paranormal in popular culture is presented to the audience via other characters' disbelief in the possibility of the protagonists suffering. However, demonology and possession act as a form of performative violence that makes the truth (Jacques, 1993) and imposes itself forever to become an uncontested truth.

Paranormal media reminds the viewers that to understand the pain of others, you must first be willing to accept that the pain they are experiencing is within the realm of the possible. Pain and isolation are fundamental to the paranormal and its interaction with the living world. Without the presence of pain, the idea of retribution, and notions of salvation, the power of the dead and the subaltern world would be less effective in creating social solidarity. The relation of demons to social solidarity is best understood

when we conceive the ideal social world as Paradise which relies on demons, the threat that their existence poses, and their strategies for exorcism as a mode of cohesion.

My research extends the work of cultural criminology by taking to heart the centrality of the body and the self in our cultural fears and the media spiral within which those fears are perpetually at play. By exploring issues of the paranormal with attention to the role of the nonnormative individual body, this research moves beyond traditional notions of why we fear crime and the types of crime we fear. Instead, it addresses underlying social formations that bring the body and the self to the forefront of the collective consciousness while simultaneously overlooking the issue of pain. Importantly, the notion of the body and pain is not simply about the individual body when we relate it to demonologies; rather the body of the possessed comes to represent the boarders of “flesh and nation” (O'Donnell,2020; 5) that are perceived as ruptured. The social formations that were at the heart of democratic socialism in the twentieth century have begun to crumble (Donzelot, 1997) under the weight of omnipresent evil, leaving individuals and their pain to stand against systematic evil alone. The cultural body that seeks salvation, and the soul that bears the force of the demonic, remind us that subjectivity and subject making extend far beyond our bodies.

Gothic Criminology

Gothic criminology is a subset of cultural criminology that uses gothic language and metaphor to bring modern horrors to light by demonstrating fantastic language that is widely consumable in American culture. Gothic criminology was born from Haggerty’s (1989: 16-17) description of a gothic novel and Stanford Lyman’s (1990: 60-61) development of a “gothic sociology.” The creation of gothic sociology emerged from

Robert Park, a sociologist from the historical Chicago School, who is most known for his social ecological approach, five published papers on social conditions in the Congo, a tale of gothic horror associated with the expansion and proliferation of commercially inspired capitalist imperialism. When this is taken in conjunction with Park's writings on the black experience in the South, Lyman (1990) asserts that his approach to the gothic, the weaving of good and evil throughout society, suggests that all facets might stem from one common source. The theoretical foundation for a gothic sociology cannot be solely attributed to Park because is also rooted in the works of Marx and Weber.

Marx is clear in his recognition that money possesses an uncanny level of power, even though it is of no value in and of itself. In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,* he poses the question, "If money is the bond binding me to human life, binding society to me, binding me and nature and man, is not money the bond of all bonds? Can it not dissolve and bind all ties? Is it not, therefore, the universal agent of separation?" (Marx and Engles, 2009). In this, we see that money has the power to make and unmake our social worlds, despite being worth nothing in and of itself. The creation of value where there is none under capitalism is directly tied to Weber's occult creature: the corporation. Rather than forgoing treasures of this earth for heavenly treasures, the corporation allowed for protestants to have a forever renewable profit without ever having to contend with their own salvation. The invention of the corporation in the pursuit of never-ending profits, still allowing for eternal salvation, created a blasphemous soulless, and immortal monstrosity intended to usurp religious mandates on greed. This soulless and irreverent creation of protestant capitalism acts as a vampire, roaming the world in search of new sources of its "elan vital" or abject labor

(Lyman,506; 1991). Gothic sociology was born to address the dark underbelly of Protestant Ethic, much as horror has existed to express anxieties related to the dark side of modernity. The contribution of Marx and Weber to a gothic sociology is rooted in the foundations of modern society, where the true source of monstrosity is the immortal and soulless pursuit of wealth and power. Unlike true crime or cultural criminology, gothic sociology and gothic criminology are built from spaces that were not directly linked to crime but were concerned with larger social formations and their ability to horrify.

Park contributed to the development of gothic sociology in a way that was more empirical. According to Lyman, “he took his point of departure from the Gothic metaphor and focused critical attention on the macabre and malevolent aspects of monarchical capitalist imperialism” (Lyman, 506; 1991). In his work on the Congo, an ideational critique on capitalist imperialism, Park used language and rhetoric that was popular in Gothic occultism and its demonic war against Christians. By employing fantastical imagery as a call to action, he highlighted the dark activities of real people engaging in vampiric behavior under the guise of religion (Lyman, 1991). In his four essays, one ghost written and authored between 1904 and 1907, Park hoped to awaken public consciousness to exploits of the King of Belgium in the Congo Free State Park. The language used in these essays was ripe with gothic imagery and narrative as Park explained, “A new figure looms large on the horizon of Europe! A figure strange, fantastic and ominous--the king who is capitalist, le roi d'affaires; the man who unites in himself the political and social prestige of a reigning monarch with the vast material power of a multimillionaire” (Park, 624;1906). Following the narrative prose of a gothic

novel, Park presents the King as a vampire sucking the life blood from the Congo, attempting remove the façade of a Christian King and explicate the role of propaganda in the crimes against Congolese people.

American sociology rejected the works of Park because of his use of journalistic styling and focus on philosophical analysis of evil in lieu of scientific methodology. The roots of gothic criminology as distinct from gothic sociology finds its roots in the work of Ross (1907) where he describes a new monster, the criminaloid, that has wrought great suffering onto others through greed that is unconcerned with the survivability of others. The work of Ross was the first within gothic criminology that focused explicitly on criminological concepts when using gothic imagery. The criminaloid that Ross referred to was the robber barons at the turn of the century and the soullessness of their practices regarding wages, safety, and child labor. However, due to stylistic differences and disciplinary norms, both the work of Park and Ross were shirked in favor of more traditional analytical styles. The discipline of sociology, and the later emergence of criminology, has since been haunted by notions of “evil,” its delineations, and its treatments. Evil, in the context of criminology has now come to represent a “crisis in cultural representation” (Young, 1996; 117) that creates anxiety and results in attempts to restore a sense of order. Gothic criminology and gothic fiction, more broadly, are both largely concerned with evil, its representations, and its manifestations. However, the employment of the concept of evil varies greatly between the two fields.

Gothic criminology departs from gothic fiction in that gothic fiction draws readers into imagined horrors in a realistically designed world. Gothic criminology aligns itself more closely with the work of Park by using occultist fantasies and gothic language to

draw readers' attention to real world horrors. Its use of language and preternatural imagery can serve to understand the social construction of crime and illuminate how the "real" and "reel" worlds are intertwined (Picart and Greek, 2003). With a deepened understanding of gothic criminology, it is important to note that this theory seeks to return to discussions of evil as a social construct. We see the emergence of evil through popular cinema, the true crime genre, and narratives repeated within the criminal justice system at large. As evil stalks every facet of American life, we see that it is always linked to crime, even if only indirectly. Katz (1990) explains, "Our original sense of deviance is through a nonreflective, sensual awareness of evil in the forms of dread, defilement, transgression, vengeance, sacrilege, sacrifice, and the like." In the ongoing project of subject making via biopolitical power, discipline, neoliberal ideologies, culture, and public policy, the creation and reinforcement cultural orthotaxy related to deviance extends beyond institutions that are designed to control it. Thus, the exercise in boundary creation, disruption, and reformation that occurs in media productions around monstrosity highlights the cultural fragility of our sense of evil.

Gothic criminology understands media as, "a projection of anxiety that strives to reinforce cultural boundaries" while also having the ability to "disrupt these very same boundaries and to expose their cultural fragility" (Sothcott, 2006: 436). Using the foundational basis of what constitutes gothic, such as elements of mystery and fear, settings that contribute to fear and unease, supernatural or paranormal activity, omens and curses, nightmares, deceptive villains, emotional distress, anti-hero's, romance, female suffering (Snodgrass, 2014), and physical nonnormativity (Anolik, 2014), we can highlight the ways in which modern horror disrupts, distorts, and breaks down social

formations. According to Cohen (1996), the monsters that we make via media narratives represent a cultural body that serves as a “harbinger of category crisis” (Picart and Greek, 2007, p. 13). Cohen explains that monstrosity guards “the borders of the possible” and its “difference[s] made flesh, come to dwell among us.” The model presented to us by Cohen reminds readers that the theological language embedded in the Gothic imagination of secular entertainment is alive and well. However, the true power of gothic criminology in the current moment is not in its ability to mirror and borrow this kind of language. Rather, gothic criminology in the age of neoliberalism can be used to understand symbolism that is embedded in the vocabulary of crime media that extends into true horror.

Gothic criminology seeks to understand and outline that, rather than a reflection of reality, film and contemporary media offer a complementary account of academic understandings and aesthetic accounts of crime and criminality. Much like cultural criminology, it focuses on “real” world horrors and uses real language to express these issues to the public and academics. However, gothic criminology’s focus on the evils of modern society do not have to be rooted in “real world” horrors when we consider the role that religion has historically played in understandings of pain and social solidarity. Marx famously stated, “Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people” (Marx, 1843). Possession horror films, with overt focus on spiritual suffering and spiritual solutions, offers us a glimpse into real world pain in the face of mystical and inescapable evil.

“Primordial evil” is explored through issues of serial killing media and vampiric themes. This plays off Katz’s (1990) assertion that “our original sense of deviance is through a nonreflective, sensual awareness of evil in the forms of dread, defilement, transgression, vengeance, sacrilege, sacrifice, and the like.” These narrative patterns are present in crime media and is understood through a gothic esthetic. Gothic criminology helps us understand how the gothic aesthetic is not an obscure eighteenth century oddity but rather a rhetoric that is employed in everyday life. The reemergence of gothic language and imagery back into popular culture, beyond the confines of crime media, has been partially responsible for the emergence of elevated horror as a subgenre distinct from its predecessors. Despite the dated language and imagery, new horror films that employ them are seen as something different than what we had before. The use of the gothic in paranormal media inextricably links it to crime because both areas seek to explain or communicate a social world in which fear is given weighted attention.

Gothic criminology, as a school of thought that makes real world horrors fantastical and employs the imagination of the reader to express the gravity of complex social realities, is unnecessary in our postmodern landscape. The utility of gothic criminology now rests in the inverse. We no longer need gothic language to express real world horrors: rather real-world horrors present themselves to us through a gothic lens. The demonic horrors we collectively face rely on gothic narrative work: isolation, deception, the suffering of women, and liminal social spaces that create a fear or sense of unease. For scholars employing a gothic criminological framework, it is necessary that we take the horrors of the real world- loss of control, the decreasing importance of the individual

in the face of systems and capital, physical suffering, and lack of belief in suffering-into account as we study gothic images in popular culture. We are no longer the creators of the gothic but rather consumers of it. As we look in the face of monstrosity in film and consider how religious institutions are presented in the media we consume, it is necessary that we consider how film offers a complementary account of social malaise and fear. The primordial evil that is presented to us in the modern possession film presents itself as unknowable and uncontrollable. However, in its desire to pervert, defile, and control, it betrays itself thereby creating its own undoing.

Cultural criminology and its subset of gothic criminology prioritizes understandings of crime and criminality through a lens based in media, images, and culture. The use of haunting language (Linnemann, 2014; Gordon, 2011), gothic narrative styles, and the largely unspoken role of the body all highlight ways in which the real and the reel are studied as a one-way relationship. Very little work has been done to address how real-world horrors are embedded in fantastic media and images. Rather, work has focused on making the real more fantastic, be it for general consumption or as a mode for communicating in academic work. This work departs from gothic and cultural criminology in that it is concerned with how horror media and images communicate real fears to audiences in ways that are more subtle and nuanced than outright criminalization and demonization of others via a reliance on the terrible and fantastic.

The power of gothic criminology in the exploration of media and images outside its general purview lies in the use of metonymy of gloom and horror and the vocabulary of the gothic (Harris, 2015). Metonymy is a subtype of metaphor in which one thing comes to represent something else. An example of this is seeing rain, which represents grief in

a funeral scene. The use of these same metaphors across paranormal horror helps build an orthotaxy, in which correct ways of being are clearly understood and displayed. Images and metaphors associated with criminality and evil transcend genre barriers to help create and reinforce social boundaries. Gothic vocabulary is also used across cultural productions related to crime and horror. Examples of gothic vocabulary include, but are not limited to: diabolical, haunted, ominous, terror, provoked, and darkness. The consistent use of gothic elements across both horror and crime centered productions strengthens the bond between the two genres, making gothic criminology fertile ground for exploring the ways in which all media and images speak to boundaries around criminality and harm. I assert that we cannot understand how dangerous others and "real" problems become internalized and feared without understanding how we imagine and consume horror and terror.

Given the profitability of the horror genre, there is a growing market for consumption of the horrific. Traditionally, there has been the belief that horror fans are a peculiar group of people who have abnormal tastes that must be explained (Tudor, 1997). The introduction of psychoanalytic theory to horror has been largely based around Freud's *Unheimlich*, or the uncanny, to help explain feelings of fear, anxiety, and dread (Carr, 2003). Freud explained the Unheimlich as "the name for everything that ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light' (Freud, 1955: 224) and "something which is secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and then returned from it" (ibid.: 245). Explorations of horror employing the Unheimlich have often focused on the return of the repressed and surplus repression (Britton, 1979). When peoples' repressions are related to the abstract other represented by horror movie

monsters, an ideological process occurs where “[subject] project[s] on to the Other of what is repressed within the Self, in order that it can be discredited, disowned and if possible annihilated” (ibid.: 9). Horror, when studied through this lens, is seen as continued support for reifying social order by continuing processes of othering different segments of the population. This dissertation builds on that framework by seeking to understand how horror reifies the social order through narratives around the self and suffering rather than giving attention to those considered “other.”

Other analyses of horror films have suggested that they promote social order and enhance an individual’s self-worth by promoting control over myths (Twitchell, 1985). However, when we accept that horror acts as a “mechanism for the presentation of social ills” (Ingrebresten, 2001:28), questions regarding the psychoanalytic aspect of horror becomes tautological. It does not matter if people see horror films for catharsis, escapism, or expression of their own fears (Schneider, 1999); rather what matters is that the monsters presented are “real” in that they symbolize a world view and help create them (Poole, 2011). By turning my focus to the individual and the institutions in which they are embedded, I show that the demonic encountered through possession-based horror is incredibly real.

This work is built from psychoanalytic work performed by Creed (1990) and Kristeva (1982), which asserts that horror is a way to uncover the workings of unconscious ideologies. However, it departs from this research because it gives no attention to the draw of horror for viewers. Be it underlying psycho-sexual inclinations, repression, or counterphobic work, the reason for consumer motivations matters very little. Rather, this research is concerned with what ideologies are present in consumable horror. Contrary

to the work done previously in gothic criminology, this research considers the horror genre in and of itself, beyond concerns of crime and vampiric capitalism, a site of worthy study. The distinction between the real and the reel matters very little when seeking to understand narratives and normalization of social formations through media and images. Rather, the importance of media and image production in relation to social formations and social norms can be seen in the ways that certain parts of our current neoliberal state operate through narratives that are seemingly divorced from biopolitical forms of governance.

Neoliberal Biopolitics

Neoliberalism is defined by its constant whittling down of the social contract in the form of decreasing adequate healthcare, housing, employment, public services, and education (Giroux, 2005). The reduction of public goods serves to undermine democracy, as citizens are less able to be engaged. Furthermore, neoliberalism's overt focus on anti-terrorism has depoliticized politics even more as American government mimics the very type of terrorism it claims to want to eradicate (Giroux, 2005). The role of the individual in the face of decreasing social safety nets and increased fear of those deemed "other" is increasingly convoluted. People are becoming increasingly more identical to archetypes of market actors, such as the successful entrepreneur, the sovereign consumer, and the hard-working taxpayer (McGuiga, 2014), acting to shape the meaning of everyday life while giving no attention to our sense of self beyond these characterizations. In recent years, as the face of domestic terrorism changes in the United States, the role of the individual has further decreased. No longer are mass shooters seen as lone wolves acting outside the confines of normality, but rather as part

of a collective seeking to right the wrongs of groups of “others.” The case of Kyle Rittenhouse firmly displays how, as the face of the “other” looks more like our own, the narratives around monstrosity and dangerousness changes.

As we stand in a firmly divided country across political party lines, we see that the role of the individual is largely erased, and we come to understand ourselves in terms of “us” and “them.” Our enemy is no longer foreign but rather our neighbors. When our lives are discussed outside of our personhood, the role of the individual is fully negated. We are taught to fear for ourselves but to give no attention to how individuals create the collective we fear.

Moral absolutism is foundational for anti-terrorist rhetoric to thrive, and it also exhausts itself as a national discourse. It removed politics further from the realm of the state by seeking to extinguish “corrupt habits of mind that are still lingering around somewhere” (qtd. in Giroux, 2005). Through constant appeals of moral absolutism and emergency responses, time becomes coded with a culture of fear which positions politics in religious terms, thereby hiding its ideologies and relationships of power. To connect these ideas back to neoliberalism, politics under this ideology become a source to shame those who seek to make power accountable and silence those who express legitimate modes of dissent (Giroux, 2004).

Neoliberalism wages constant war on democracy, public goods, and any value that is not yet commodified. According to Giroux (2005), items, people, and places are either for sale or plundered; public lands are abused by logging companies and corporate ranchers, politicians willing give airtime to powerful broadcasting corporations without any funds going into public trusts, private corporations such as Halliburton and

Boeing reach new levels of war profiteering without bidding, the government passes legislation that allows for corporations to more easily pollute and destroy, public services are left in ruins to lower taxes on multinational corporations, schools begin to take the forms of malls or jails, teachers are forced to generate revenue for their schools by accepting market value, education has become focused on standardized testing, citizenship has begun a function of consumerism and politics have been dominated by a history where, “corporations have been increasingly freed from social control through deregulation, privatization, and other neoliberal measures.” (Tabb, 2003; 153). With corporate domination extended past the economic sphere into government and policy creation, there is increasingly less opposition to the shifting of benefits to the ultra-wealthy and the misplacing of tax burdens onto the middle class and working poor. As neoliberalism and its logics continue their steady march through our political and social lives, the individual becomes lost in the economic focus present across society. Rather than caring about an individual’s education, we care about their ability to produce quantifiable data; for example, public lands and even private properties are given no consideration beyond their ability to be exploited for faceless profit, and public services intended to serve individuals become whittled down to returns on investment and profitability. When individuals are present in neoliberal discourse, they are treated in positivist ways (Brohman, 1995) that assume individuals are atomistic and devoid of personal relationships outside of market exchanges that occur within one single reality comprised of independent people (Mackenzie, 2011).

Under neoliberalism, regulatory controls over the population via biopolitical power become part of the fabric of social reality as individuals are increasingly treated as

purely economic actors. Biopower exerts itself into everyday life as a “hegemonic bloc [that] organized the reproduction of life in ways that allow political crises to be cast as conditions of specific bodies and their competence at maintaining…conditions of social belonging” (Berlant, 2007; 765). As a tool of neoliberalism, biopolitical power has emerged as a defining aspect of postmodern life. In fact, all aspects of our social lives have come to be defined by biopolitical forces. This is evident even in our domestic lives and families (Donzelot, 1997) where concerns around women have shifted from labor to concerns surrounding capital. Normalized forms of surveillance (Coleman, 2004) and social control are built into the fabric of everyday life as neoliberal biopolitics infects all cultural spaces. This intrusion of biopolitics into the personal and domestic spheres is highlighted in the conjuring universe as viewers are introduced to families in turmoil with surveillance and control presented as tools with which they can arm themselves. The normalization of biopolitical neoliberal solutions, such as surveillance and path dependency, in response to neoliberal degradation points to a type of boundary creation (Coleman, 2004) as actors seek to categorize and understand the evil (Monboit, 2016) while the boundaries of the ideal are increasingly viewed as fraying (Berlant, 2011). According to Foucault (1977), for centuries, one of the privileges of the sovereign was the ability to let live or make die. The sovereign could decide to expose life to violence, as in cases of war, or to directly end the life of a citizen as punishment for a crime. In this way power over death was a defense of the sovereign. The right to control life was only done in reference to the right to end it. However, in modern society, the power of the sovereign does not solely rest in the ability to end life, but to grow, produce, and protect. Power of the sovereign now exerts a positive power over life and in rare cases

the state still uses life ending force. Now, the power of the state rests in its ability to foster life or disallow it under neoliberal modes of governance.

For Foucault, death at the hands of the state is so rarely used that it has pervaded the public consciousness in the form of anxiety, which makes death the newest and most salient evil. Death has become the most private aspect of life, and the right to die in one's own terms has become part of the life-regulating functions of the state. Paranormal media and images, ranging from reality television to film, offers competing narratives to the salience of bio-political forms of governance. The state, rather than fostering or disallowing life, is absent from many narratives. Rather, the onus of responsibility for one's own life is placed on the shoulders of individuals, which is commonplace in neoliberalism. Narratives of personal responsibility in the face of systematic issues (Sweet, 2018) come to be both the solution and the problem. However, paranormal films, especially those concerned with possession and the loss of control over the subject, stand as examples of the ways in which biopolitical life regulation and management have become intertwined with neoliberal ideas of the self. The self is at the forefront of our imaginations but completely erased from sites of control and power in victims of paranormal activity and possession, an observation that becomes evident when they seek help from failing and eroded social institutions. In essence, the most central point in a person's life, one which we regulate and control through languages of development and economic viability, becomes the most foundational concern but is given little to no attention outside of its ability to contribute to collective marketability. The attention to a person's marketability is often tied to labor and discipline of the body in service to capital. Within criminology, cultural and gothic,

and within gothic works, nonnormative bodies have often been used to signify monstrosity. From the criminaloid to Dracula- human differences have been used to mark something other- something is present to be controlled and feared. However, the emergence of biopolitical power into horror has begun to change the way we culturally interact with nonnormative bodies. Physical nonnormativity is now used to delineate precarity, vulnerability, and the need for remaking. The unquestioned and ever-present nature of biopower in service of neoliberal logics is communicated easily through gothic metonym and language within true horror.

Foucault argues that the transition to biopower occurred once the locus of control was given to the state rather than religion. He also states that biopolitical notions of power have become so deeply intwined with modern life that they dominate modern depictions of religion and terror. The new importance of religion in American political life, coupled with demonology and demonic language, highlights the invisible and inescapability of our new evil. In expressing biopolitical control via the demonic as a fantastic horror, possession-based horror can connect larger social forces to monstrosity, moving dangerousness away from the body.

The neoliberal subject, when no longer in control of their own person, requires salvation. In society, this salvation presents itself in economic ways of being and understandings of the person as a project for development. In possession-based horror, salvation is required from demonic forces. The salvation from the perversion of the natural order in the form of a primordial evil, so salient in gothic and cultural criminology, comes from an exorcist. However, in postmodern capitalist society, the source of salvation, self-development and marketability, is also the source of the perversion. In

this way, possession horror films provide a false hope that the individual can be saved by others or even saved by themselves.

Bio-politics, regulatory controls over a population, discipline, and power enacted over an individual, emerged as poles on a spectrum of state control. The power that death once held over a population was replaced with calculated management of life. Due to the development and reliance on bio-power, the role of norms and the law became more salient. Law, as a tool for the state, cannot help but arm itself. As noted by Cover (1986), law happens in a field of pain and death. To interpret the law and regulate a life to confinement, which may culminate in the death of an individual, is itself an inherently violent act. In this way, we can understand the disciplining of the body by law under bio-politics as a remnant of the sovereign's historical ability to let live or make die disguised as the ability to make live or let die. This research assumes that biopolitical modes of governance are so deeply embedded and normalized in modern society that even when it is absent from overt discourse, it is present. The role of the church, the state, and other actors that support biopolitical modes of governance is embedded in our modern horror. By categorizing the form that biopolitical and religious regulation take through horror, we can gain a deeper understanding of how horror as a genre has responded to and informs viewers about neoliberalism and the role of personhood. The role of the demonic as it relates to individuals, both those who suffer and those who save, reminds viewers that the absence of unadulterated physical pain does not mean that suffering does not occur. Rather, the demonic highlights that invisible forms of social control, like biopolitical governance, exist on a spectrum of control. Traditionally, cultural criminology has been overtly focused on projects of

discipline as related to the body, be that the body of the other or the cultural body. The emergence of a neoliberal gothic criminology through true horror explores the less obvious, often invisible, and inescapability of biopower in relation to subject making.

Gothic criminology and its relation to biopolitical power is fertile ground for understanding how neoliberal ways of being have become situated in horror and possession centered productions. In fact, gothic ways of communicating social issues are not new. The domestication of the word gothic from the 1830s to the 1850s culminated in the exploration of contemporary issues of the time through a new, urban gothic lens (Adelman, 2017). My work is built in a similar school of thought that seeks to understand contemporary issues related to biopolitical control and neoliberal logics as expressed through mediated images of the demonic.

Chapter Summary

Gothic criminology, as a subset of cultural criminology, offers us the best possible lens to understand how biopolitical forms of governance in neoliberal society are communicated to the public through horror. Rather than focusing on motivations for horror viewers, this research seeks to explicate what messages are being reified through our consumption of horror films. The role of the physical body as a source of unsharable pain that renders our realities fundamentally different (Scary, 1985) is given specific attention because possession-based horror films provide an opportunity to both voyeuristically engage those fears and bear witness to neoliberal suffering, thereby centering the individual. When our personhood comes to be understood only through pain and the struggle to remain fully ourselves, the truly insidious nature of neoliberal logics becomes more fully apparent.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS: ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTENT ANALYSIS

Through an extensive sampling[1] of horror films across the last two decades, this research settles upon an ethnographic content analysis of the conjuring universe to explore how demonic horror reflects cultural anxieties related to neoliberal social conditions. My final sample includes *The Conjuring* (2013), *Annabelle* (2014), *The Conjuring 2* (2016), *Annabelle Creation* (2017), *The Nun* (2018), and *The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It* (2021). I selected the conjuring universe because it is a site of neoliberal performance that both reaffirms and renegotiates boundaries around harm and monstrosity through the development of a neoliberal gothic horror.

Methodological Context

My dissertation is concerned with culture and subjectivity in neoliberal society (Gill, 2008). This research explores a specific site of contemporary media culture through a lens of possession as related to neoliberal subjectivity and its markers such as the bending of fact and fiction, the degradation of social institutions, and the increasing importance of the individual as a site for possession and control. Current research on culture and subjectivity is imbalanced. There is a well-established intellectual foundation for exploring cultural forms and representations, especially in areas of visuality and textual analysis. These forms range from semiotics and deconstruction to multimodal or discursive analysis. These methods provide us with a rich language and conceptual toolbox to understand contemporary media and images.

[1] My sample consisted of 445 of the highest grossing horror films released between 2000-2018. I screened 111 films after exclusions noted within the chapter.

However, except for a few groundbreaking studies (Bhabha, 1994; Blackman & Walkerdine, 1996; Walkerdine, 1997; Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001) and a small number of studies in post-colonialism (Bhabha, 1994; Bhaskaran, 2004), the issue of subjectivity in contemporary consumer media culture and the images that constitute this culture is largely unexplored. There is a dearth of knowledge related to how culture impacts representations of selfhood or identities specifically in political economic terms. To address the issue of neoliberal subjectivity through media, images, and culture it is necessary that we decenter issues of identity from simply internal, intra-psychic work (affect) to one that is part of a larger social, cultural, political, and economic project. In exploring how affective work is connected to larger social forces, we can begin to understand how cultural representations of personhood in neoliberalism are tied to large economic logics.

Until recently, questions regarding subjectivity in its relationship to power were central to critical scholarship. Marxist-influenced thinkers such as Golding and Murdoch (1977) turned to the media to explore its role in perpetuating ideologies that reinforce social formations of domination. Feminist researchers such as Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1993) asked questions related to femininity and subjectivity under disciplinary power. In more recent years, there has been a shift away from research agenda's concerning media, images, and subjectivity.

A shift from culture to materiality during the 2000s has heralded a new type of critical research agenda (Gill, 2008). This shift in research agendas and areas of emphasis are due in large to difficulties in naming the process through which cultural productions and subjectivities are interrelated. Certainly, issues with naming the social

psychological effects of cultural influence, such as viewing relationships as simple one to one process, exist. However, there is no cause to abandon the study of culture altogether. Culture, including film, is a collection of material practices that have real effects. Representations and their relationship to subjectivity are far too important for scholars to ignore or reduce to individual effects (Gill, 2008). Rather, culture must be understood as situated within a larger socio-political context that carries its own logics and produces its own unique forms of personhood.

This research is concerned with culture as a site of boundary work where the terrors of neoliberalism are both constituted and consumed. It assumes that issues of subjectivity and culture are, at once, foundational to the innerworkings of the cinematic universe and troubled through its content. Rather than seeking to explicate exactly how cultural productions and subjectivities are interrelated, this work seeks to understand how subjectivity is understood through one of the most compelling horror universes to date.

Data Collection

To conduct my research, I sampled all horror movies released since 2000, which consists of 445 films (Appendix B) though I viewed 111 of those sampled. Specific attention was given to the top twenty-five grossing horror films for each year, with consideration given to horror that was well received on streaming services. Horror films that were not part of the possession subgenre were excluded. This research defines the possession subgenre as one in which a character is controlled, or fighting against control efforts, by a human or inhuman spirit OR in which other characters or the audience *believe* a character is possessed or likely to become possessed. Films that

were paranormal in nature, but not overt in the spirit's desire to or ability to possess a living person, were excluded. Furthermore, I excluded films that included instances of "torture porn," which are scenes depicting grotesque torture and body mutilation, and possession films that were closely aligned with other subgenres, such as slasher films or body horror.

In the end, I chose to focus upon a singular horror film universe, an interconnected world where several franchises exist together. As a postmodern production, the emergence of the film universe as a satisfactory ending represents a fragmentation of cinema where the universe stands to morally decenter traditional, obligatory happy endings. Recurring heroes across several films come to represent arbiters of truth and act as tools towards moral equilibrium (Shapiro, 1995). In exploring one universe rather than all possession-based horror films, I can understand how the world-building work of the film helps to decenter both traditional understandings of good cinema and continually responds to neoliberal social formations. Furthermore, by situating my research within the confines of one fantasy world, I can fully explore several sites with shared signifiers (Ritter, 2007) and thereby strengthen my analysis.

My final sample consists solely of films in the conjuring universe created by James Wan. Films in this universe are *The Curse of La Llorona* (2019), *Annabelle Comes Home* (2019), *The Nun* (2018), *Annabelle Creation* (2017), *The Conjuring* (2013), and *The Conjuring 2* (2014), and *The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It* (2021). *The Curse of La Lloarna* (2019) and *Annabelle Comes Home* (2019) were excluded from the final sample because they did not deal directly with specific instances of demonic possession. Rather, the evil within these films sought to terrorize and take,

not possess. The conjuring cinematic universe has garnered a variety of critic and audience responses with some claiming these movies to be among of the best horror films of all time. However, *The Conjuring 2* (2014) and other films such as *The Nun* (2018), are viewed as lackluster pieces of cinema that rely on old, contrived notions of horror. However, each one of them had high grossing profits from box offices or were some of the most highly watched and recommended films in the possession subgenre on streaming services. This contradiction is revealing in analytical terms, pointing us toward other kinds of reasons for the cultural attraction to what might, by critical standards, be considered unremarkable. Furthermore, the newness of the universe's creation and its long running span of going on nearly a decade is well suited to understand how notions around the self as a site of neoliberal control in the face of failing social institutions has come to represent one of the most horrifying sites in neoliberal society.

Analytic Procedure

My research employs an ethnographic content analysis approach which is "used to document and understand the communication of meaning, as well as verify theoretical relationships" (Altheide, 1987:86). Borrowing from cultural criminology, this ethnographic content analysis employs the "criminological verstehen" (Ferrell & Hamm, 1998) which draws from Weber's (1978:4-5) formulation of verstehen as an interpretative understanding and form of sympathetic participation. In criminological verstehen, a researcher's subjective experiences and understandings of crime's meanings, symbolism, and emotional aspects foster a great deal attentiveness for the form that crime and its correlates present itself through. Criminological verstehen allows

for a researcher's own experiences to emerge as a window through which we can understand collective experiences and subculture. While this method does involve professional risk, it is not undertaken lightly. The approach was chosen specifically for its shown ability to allow research to move deeper inside the cultural aspects of crime in relation to horror and remove the notion that research somehow exists above and apart from the object of the study. Given that this research moves even further away from mediated centers of crime consumption, such as agents of the state and overtly crime centered themes in horror, to a more nuanced and controversial position by assuming that *all* forms of horror and the horrific are correlates of crime and crime control, the ability of criminological verstehen to account for subjective understandings and emotive experience is crucial.

My research began with an exploratory and preliminary analysis of the contemporary horror film genre which involved screening 111 films, though only five of those screened were included in my final analysis. My initial round of sampling included over 400 films and was informed by the theoretical underpinnings of my work with later screenings which were used to help me delineate specific categories based on narrative description. By utilizing a content analysis approach coupled with ethnographic reflexivity and research design, I was able to build a purposive and theoretical sample with only a few pre-structured categories such as subtypes of horror. This led to parameters that singled out the conjuring universe as an exploratory case study, and my initial round of data collection was purely descriptive in nature. I began my research by doing a close read or screening of each film, sometimes multiple times, and providing a written, narrative summary of each. These summaries were between fifteen

and thirty single-spaced pages, and they encompassed details about the scenes, characters, motifs involved, and quotes. Writing the film scene-by-scene allowed me to track the character development, along with spatial similarities, commonly used metonymy, and aspects of world building. Playing close attention to spatial similarities, or the staging grounds of each story, across the films allowed for me to connect them within the universe beyond the story arc and characters, so that I could locate the spaces in which neoliberal anxieties play out for consumers more intently. Commonly used gothic metonym, a subtype of metaphor where in one thing (such as a home in disrepair) stands for something else (unhappy home or danger) present across every film, also helped to establish a shared meaning across each installment within the universe. Beyond the spatial similarities and shared metonym, I also considered other aspects of world building such as character types, tone, major preoccupations, and the nature of morality among the characters. These aspects of world building that emerged across each of the films were also included in my later coding analysis. However, my research departs from traditional content analysis, with an overt focus on statistical data and rare narrative description, to favor the emergent coding and narrative insistence of ethnography. This phase of my research was used to offer opportunities for reflexivity and narrative data collection.

My next round of research was pattern driven, and I coded using emergent themes. The purpose behind using emergent coding is to allow for data that reflects “meaningful narratives” (Sandercock and Attili, 2010; 26) thereby building off the reflexive process of earlier data collection. During this round of data collection, I identified numerous commonalities between the films such as the invocation of truth and

real life, the role of disbelief, the invocation of primordial evil, consistent physical and emotional isolation, frequent use of gothic symbols, an overt focus on social institutions as corrupt or decaying, displays and affirmations of gender norms, the use of physical pain and nonnormativity, a reliance on sleep and dream states, paranoia, and physical containment. Once these themes were identified based on their presence in films across the universe, I began collecting examples of each from various films. As I collected examples related to each of these core features, subcategories began to emerge. These subcategories included but were in no way limited to examples such as the role of bodily fluids as a sign of both physical suffering, control, and gothic metonym and an alignment with true crime through settings, language, and enlightenment principles. In all of this, I used existing research in gothic and cultural criminology as well as neoliberalism to track the analytical importance, identify meanings, and name cultural significance of themes as evidenced in the cultural attraction to the conjuring universe.

Once I had reached saturation related to my emergent categories and subcategories, I sorted them based on themes in the literature. The predominate and overarching themes that emerged from this focused upon the relationship between the universe and true crime, the role of institutions, and the role of personal subjectivity. The relationship between the conjuring films and true crime is one that reverses traditional gothic criminology's desire to make real world horrors fantastical by aligning paranormal metaphysical horror with real life occurrences. By aligning demonic possession with crime and its correlates, the universe links gothic metonym to crime in a more salient, albeit inverse way. Through its alignment with truth, the cinematic universe positions

social institutions at the forefront of cultural anxieties and highlights the ways that omnipresent forces serve to erode them with increasing focus on personal responsibility – the precarity of the self - in the face of uncontrollable, world-remaking entities. Once my themes emerged fully through preliminary coding, I returned to my descriptive work to connect examples across multiple films. As examples from multiple films were found, I collapsed many of my subcategories together because the themes across them were interrelated. For example, in my earlier rounds of coding, I made a distinction between the dream state (inactive bodies) with sleeping bodies in motion, instances of sleep walking, to represent depictions of the body and the self differently. My initial distinction between the two categories around bodies assumed that an active sleeping body was acting as a person who was dispossessed of their agency, while sleeping (inactive) bodies were more aligned with a lack of trust in their own senses and the gothic tradition of paranoia. However, when considering these subcategories as part of a larger body concerned with the role of personhood, my initial distinction was no longer relevant because, across the films, dispossession and paranoia were all part of the loss of self and self-determination. Once my subcategories had been collapsed, I was able to fully connect the examples from each to the literature. The fully categorized data corresponding literature and overarching themes are available in Appendix C.

Chapter Summary

This research contributes to a small but powerful body of work that situates subjectivity in contemporary consumer media and the images that form it. My work divorces the intra-psychic work of identity and personhood and instead situates the individual as part of a larger social and economic project that exists within neoliberalism.

My work builds off Gil (2008) by showing that cultural productions around subjectivity are viewed within the confines of larger socio-political contexts with primacy given to the representation of the individual rather than their creation.

My ethnographic content analysis is built from a sample of all horror movies released in the United States since 2000 with all films not based on possession horror excluded. Possession based horror is defined as one in which a character is controlled or fighting against control efforts of a human or inhuman spirit, OR in which other characters or the audience believes a character is possessed or likely to become possessed. Films that included depictions of grotesque torture and body mutilation were also excluded due to the overlap with the subgenre of torture porn. After exclusions were made, the final sample for this project consists of the conjuring universe with the exclusion of *The Curse of La Lloarna* and *Annabelle Comes Home*.

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the data collection and analytical tools I have used to understand how subjectivity and the individual is represented through possession-based horror films. The participant observer methodology that is inherent in ethnography makes it an ideal method for understanding cultural coded messages in film. By paying close attention to the various ways in which meaning is reflected (visual, aural, symbolic with reflexive movement between data collection, coding, and analysis), this research aims to be systematic without rigidity, which allows for incredibly rich and in-depth data to be observed which is not possible without the involvement and reflexivity of the researcher throughout the process. In the next chapter, I provide an overview of the films in the conjuring universe and situate them within the horror genre and neoliberal society more broadly.

CHAPTER 4

THE UNIVERSE: NEW MONSTROSITY

The conjuring franchise is often held out as being an exhumation of classic horror tropes- old creaky houses, shadows that move silently along a wall, a creepy doll, a music box, isolation, and whispers in the night, even as young and emerging filmmakers breathe new life into the genre by including pointed social commentary (Coyle, 2018). However, this short-sighted view on the franchise ignores the way in which the revival of classic horror tropes is being used to culturally engage new fears linked to neoliberal logics, biopolitical control, the degradation of social institutions, and the troubled position of the individual within a society defiled by market logics. As noted by Fahy (2010), horror tropes are often a mechanism associated with a culture that is inundated with fear. The comfort of the familiar, such as the classic ghost in the house trope, marks a move toward more existential forms of harm and away from historically conventional forms of violent monsters (serial killers, terrorists, vampires, etc.), which is more widely consumed now than ever before. Furthermore, it is the narrative in its recurrent cycles that draws so many horror fans back to the box office time and again. The conjuring universe is one that displays changing understandings of danger in a post-9/11 America. Before 9/11, terror was perceived as violent criminal acts but has since shifted to an existential threat (Wetmore, 2012). As Americans continue to toil under existential horror, it stands to reason that our cinematic devils will also be existential rather than violent and criminal.

My exploration of the conjuring universe is done to theorize how our familiar horror tropes have been given new life through the emergence of a neoliberal gothic

criminology. The anxiety audience members felt around the introduction of evil, the need to explore its origins, the power of the symbolic nature of the movies in relation to orthotaxy and social institutions, and its presentation of an emerging true horror all highlight that gothic metonym is as useful now as ever before. As gothic criminology used this language to convey social ills, we can now utilize this framework to understand what new cultural fears are on display. Frank Furedi (2007) explains that our heightened sense of vulnerability has “encouraged an attitude of fatalism, pessimism” that is not proportional to “actual possibilities and repercussions” (13). When viewed in chronological order, films in the conjuring universe reinforce the need for an over-heightened sense of fear and dread because even when evil appears to be defeated, it always resurfaces. In this way, the conjuring universe is perhaps one of the most complex and rich film universes to date. The films that comprise the universe can all work as stand-alone films. However, when taken as a collective, their world building and boundary shifting work is evident. The films that were included in my analysis are briefly summarized to contextualize the findings of my analysis.

The Nun

The Nun (2018), the fifth installment in the conjuring universe franchise, directed by Corin Hardy, is the highest grossing film in the universe to date, earning $365 million in gross profits. Despite critic’s general distaste for the film compared to others in the series, the power of the film to draw audiences to the box office is undeniable. The film relies heavily on horror movie clichés including a foggy cemetery, apparitions flitting in mirrors, and crypts that turn into cells. Visually, the film is the most aligned with

traditional gothic methods, and the use of shadow in the film cocoons viewers in a silky darkness that border's total abstraction (Coyle, 2018).

I include this film in my analysis because of its overtly gothic themes and because it is an exemplar of key elements of neoliberalism, such as its bioplitical concerns with control, the focus on the individual, and fear. The Church is an ever-present force throughout the film as the main characters attempt to understand the suffering that took place inside the walls of a convent.

The Nun is an origin story of Valak, also known as The Defiler, a demon that presents itself as a grotesque nun. Valak first appeared in *The Conjuring 2* and terrified movie goers despite her largely passive role. Set in 1952 Romania, *The Nun* calls to mind classic gothic imagery, which is a well-suited stage for an exploration of the origins of an evil that weaves itself throughout the cinematic universe. Much of the film relies on darkness to convey a sense of the unknown and the unknowable. In the film, viewers are introduced to Father Burke, an exorcist with the Vatican, Sister Iren, a novitiate that investigates with him, Frenchie, a local villager who assists the investigatory pair, several nuns, and a shrouded abbess. Father Burke and Irene are sent to a rural convent hidden in the Romanian wilderness to investigate the suicide of a nun. During their investigation, the pair and Frenchie comes to learn of an inescapable and demonic evil that remakes the space they inhabit. At the conclusion of the film, viewers understand that Frenchie has become possessed by Valak as he drives away from the convent, releasing the previously contained evil on the world.

This installment in the conjuring universe allows for us to begin building an understanding of gothic neoliberalism in its blatant use of gothic imagery and narrative

coupled alongside commentary around power, suffering, and the individual. The connections drawn between gothic devices and social commentary weave throughout the universe as they begin to take on more modern, less overt forms. It is necessary that we explicate how neoliberal themes present themselves through traditional gothic forms to understand how the same issues present with similar but more modern devices in other installments.

Annabelle Creation

Annabelle Creation (2017) is the fourth installment in the conjuring universe and is directed by David F. Sandberg. Like other films in the universe, *Annabelle Creation* performed incredibly well at the box office and grossed $35 million nationally in its first week. The film is a prequel to a prequel that performs well as a stand-alone film. Much like the rest of the series, *Annabelle Creation* relies heavily on the use of isolation and gothic tools that weave goodness and evil throughout the storytelling. Like *The Nun*, almost every primary character is a woman.

The constant reiteration of gothic narratives across the cinematic universe serves to reinforce the themes that are present within them. Movie goers continue to respond to the same narrative and theatrical tools because the anxieties represented through the film are constant and share a common source. In *The Nun*, we were introduced to Valak, a summoned ancient evil that seeks only to escape from its confines. The entity impacts the basic reality Sister Irene, Father Burke, and Frenchie share, which results in it deceiving them and possessing their bodies. This film highlights how neoliberal possession begins to move the focus away from our bodies as a defining aspect of self and rather focuses on the psychic workings on the individual. While there is no clear

boundary between the self and the body, possession as a tool for boundary maintenance and renegotiation foreground the disentanglement of the two. We do not know why Valak was summoned, but we do know that it exists for evil alone. Similarly, in *Annabelle Creation*, we are introduced to another evil that is brought into the lives of innocent people and remakes the world they inhabit.

In *Annabelle Creation*, viewers are first introduced to the Mullins family. The patriarch of the family, Samuel, is a doll maker. Soon after the film begins, the Mullins' daughter, Annabelle, is killed in a freak accident. Years later, a group of orphaned girls accompanied by their guardian, Sister Charlotte, travel to the Mullins' farmhouse after the orphanage closed. Two of the girls, Linda and Janice, are best friends. Janice is disabled from her experience with polio and is largely isolated from the other girls. Once the orphans arrive at the Mullins home, viewers learn how the death of Annabelle led to the entrance of a demonic evil, who takes on the name of Samuel's deceased daughter, into the home. At the conclusion of the film, Janice is possessed and cured of her disability, escaping the home before she could be captured. Later, we see Janice in a new orphanage, completely healed of her disability, and is taking on the name Annabelle while being adopted by a young family.

The evil that spans the conjuring universe reminds viewers that evil is possible at any time and is an inescapable force. Regardless of the virtue of a person or their piousness, their relationship to power structures, their level of vulnerability, or their social location, evil exists and seeks to exploit their bodies, which are divorced from themselves, for its own gain. The struggle that ensues leaves personhood and identity

precariously balanced on the precipice of eradication, but it is a concept worth fighting, and even dying, for.

I include *Annabelle Creation* in my analysis because it reinforces gothic elements within the franchise including a castle-like setting, omens, supernatural events, high emotions, gothic vocabulary, and the metonym of horror. It also furthers the analysis of the self by adding more explicit focuses on the similar other as a source of possible power and protection. The familiar gothic elements make the terror the viewer consumes more palatable and familiar while also reinforcing new visions and understandings of evil

Annabelle

Annabelle (2014) is the second film in the conjuring universe and is directed by John Robert Leonetti. Packed full of classic horror elements that range from creepy kids and possessed dolls to jump scares from the shadows, *Annabelle* adds several layers of complexity to the theorization of a neoliberal gothic criminology. Distinct from other films in the universe, *Annabelle* explores tropes around maternal neuroses and how motherhood impacts women's' relationships with the social world. In *Annabelle Creation,* we the family unit and the home exist as a site of anxiety related to the individual through the death of Annabelle Mullins and the presence of orphaned girls. *Annabelle* adds depth to this analysis as it builds off the *The Nun* and *Annabelle Creation* in its focus on women and womanhood.

Annabelle shares a commonality with the other films in the universe because it departs from modern horrors over reliance on the development of the final girl while calling back in gothic depictions of femininity. However, it troubles the relation of women

to men often depicted in gothic works as it does not present men as predators. Like other films in the universe, the primordial evil that plagues the film is characterized as a woman. In the film, we meet Mia and John who are expecting their first baby. One night after their neighbors, The Higgins, are murdered by their daughter, Annabelle, the murderess and her boyfriend break into Mia and John's home and Mia is assaulted with a knife, compromising her pregnancy. Before she is killed by the police, Annabelle Higgins is seen clutching the Annabelle doll that John got Mia as a gift for the nursery. As Mia struggles under the weight of isolation on bed rest, paranormal activity begins to ramp up in their home. After her daughter is born, their young family moves to an apartment to try and calm Mia's fears. However, the paranormal activity escalates. By the conclusion of the film, Mia has lost a friend to suicide after she sacrificed herself for Mia and her daughter, Leah. The cursed doll created by Samuel Mullins leaves Mia's home to later be purchased at an antique store by a nurse for her daughter.

Critics highlight that the film borrows heavily from Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) with a sprinkling of Charles Manson inspired cults. Throughout the film, aspects of popular modern gothic works, and horror evolve as the young family seeks to rid themselves of evil. Using familiar story arcs and ideas, consumers are already comfortable with allows viewers to navigate the ambiguity of neoliberalism in a familiar environment. However, the film carries the same tension building quality as the original *Conjuring*, and the atmosphere of the film is a star. The highly atmospheric nature of he film helps viewers be more comfortable with the ambiguity embedded throughout. In fact, the atmosphere in and of itself comments on the state of neoliberalism in modern

society in that even in traditional shadow, work is plagued by a sense of familiar unknowability.

I include this film in my analysis, not despite criticism and low viewer ratings, but rather because of them. As the second film in one of the most profitable cinematic universes to date, and the most complex and notable horror universe, a poorly done, borrowed, boring, and cheap film could have ended the universe entirely. However, this simply did not happen. The narrative of maternal neurosis that runs throughout the film seems to have fallen flat to audience members. We see very little of this kind of narrative work in later films in the universe, possibly highlighting that our cultural concerns with womanhood are starting to become slightly divorced from the idea of motherhood as the role of women has moved away from labor to concerns regarding capital. *Annabelle* serves as a litmus test for the emergence of the neoliberal gothic throughout the universe. As a mirror to reflect cultural anxieties, *Annabelle* shows that some cultural anxieties, such as maternal neurosis, simply do not register with wider audiences. The atmospheric nature of the film and the familiarity of the symbols make the story easy to consume and engage with. Successful horror films, since the begging of the genre, have offered commentary on cultural anxieties. The “boring” wooden doll that fell rather flat in relation to motherhood has spun off her own sub-universe, allowing for fans to be frightened by her overused tropes and unsurprising evil time and again.

Annabelle touches on neoliberal and biopolitical themes of insatiability related to market growth, the decline of the family, the role of the family as a form of property, and the role of pain in relation to salvation. It also begins to highlight how evil changes forms and that the destruction of a particular form associated with evil does not destroy the

entity itself. Furthermore, *Annabelle* is an excellent example of how gothic elements-female suffering, continuing elements of fear, and the paranormal work to break down, distort, and reify the importance of social formations. Critics of this film and the universe at large are often exacerbated by the reliance on old horror tropes. However, old horror tropes feel less stale in this film than we might assume based on reviews. While expected, the squeaky door, the hands that appear from nowhere, and the old rocking chair remind viewers that the past, even the cinematic past, is present with us as it impacts our present experiences.

The Conjuring

The Conjuring (2013), directed by James Wan, is the first installation in the *Conjuring* universe. Earning over $321 million dollars domestically, *The Conjuring* is perhaps the most critically acclaimed film from the universe. In an era dominated by superhero blockbusters, *The Conjuring* managed to do what seemed impossible by starting one of the most popular movie franchises of the twenty-first century.

The success of *The Conjuring* marks a larger cinematic shift away from torture porn films, characterized by prolonged cycles of violence and torture, to films that are characterized by terror more than horror. These films became incredibly popular in post 9/11 cinema where terror of the body from dangerous others was at the top of cultural mind. While there were possession films that emerged in the years between Saw (2004) and the birth of the cinematic universe, *The Conjuring* was the most notable among them, drawing in film goers and critics alike.

The distinctive shift in the horror market from torture porn and body horror to metaphysical and possession-based stories is part of larger sociopolitical and economic

shifts that required new horrors to allow viewers to experience catharsis around neoliberal logics and the insidious ways they influence our lives. The distinct shift in horror from images focused on bodily suffering to images that explore suffering in both the physical and psychic self also marks the turning away from several newer developments in the genre. In the conjuring universe, starting with *The Conjuring* as a standalone film, viewers see a rejection of sympathetic transgressors and the reemergence of primordial evil. Additionally, we see an unwillingness within the universe to engage in elevated horror. As discussed previously, elevated horror relies on images and messages of the horrific to help communicate social ills to larger and larger audiences. However, *The Conjuring* highlights that movie goers do not necessarily seek social commentary from film, rather they engage in boundary making and reification of the social order indirectly. *The Conjuring* was the first film since 9/11 that truly allowed viewers to explore cultures of fear that are crafted in economic terms through a religious lens. This simplistic presentation of social ills that are impossibly large spun off an entire universe that continues to allow viewers the opportunity to consider the role of power and the role of the self. In this way, the universe presents a new type of horror in the neoliberal moment. It rejects traditional monstrosity via dangerous others and many of the modern developments within the genre; not only this, but it refuses to provide direct social commentary like elevated horror, while also returning to classic metonym and tropes to communicate a new kind of monster that allows for viewers to engage with cultural anxieties around boundary-making.

In *The Conjuring*, we meet the Perron family as they move into an expansive and isolated country home. Immediately after they move in, paranormal activity begins in the

home which frequently targets the mother and one daughter, Cindy. After the activity in the home becomes unbearable, Carolyn begs Ed and Lorraine Warren, the highly contested and famous paranormal investigative couple, for help. Before the Warrens can convince The Church that the family needs an exorcism, Carolyn is possessed by the witch Bathsheba, a woman who sold her soul to the devil after murdering in child in the home a century before. In the end, Carolyn and the Perron family are freed of the evil through Carolyn's love of her children.

The Conjuring is largely atmospheric and reminiscent of old Hollywood horror with tension omnipresent throughout the duration. Not every scene is an adrenaline producing set of scares but rather presents as a puzzle to be solved. Departing from other popular horror films in our Post 9/11 world, *The Conjuring* allows for hope and resolution. The evil within the film is less sympathetic than other movie evils but still maintains its unknowable and uncontrollable quality. As we are introduced to Ed and Lorraine Warren, we see that hope and salvation are often tied to knowledge and personal responsibility. In this way, neoliberal logics and assumptions are embedded within the universe from its inception.

I include *The Conjuring* in my analysis, not only because it is the birth of the universe, but because it is of great cinematic importance. Not only does the film mark a decline in the torture porn era of horror cinema, but it also begins shifting the use of the final girl and notions of femininity in horror while not making direct pointed social commentary. *The Conjuring* marks the decline in horror, as defined solely by the body, and integrates the role of terror and aesthetic to present a completely new form of fear to audiences which allows for the interrogation of the role of the self in relation to power

and irrational evil. The art of the film and the universe can be found in their ability to present new fears and ways of understanding them through tropes that are not only familiar but “tired” by critics’ standards, thereby creating the neoliberal gothic for consumers.

The Conjuring 2

The Conjuring 2 (2016) is the third installment in the conjuring universe. The film continues to follow Ed and Lorraine Warren through their lifelong careers of saving innocent families from unspeakable evils. Less than a year after investigating the well-known and highly controversial Amityville House, the Warrens make their way to England to assist in a case of one of the most televised and discussed paranormal cases of the century, the Enfield Haunting.

The film centers on activity plaguing the Hodgson family. We are introduced to the family through the children but quickly come to learn that the family is experiencing economic precarity as they are led by a single mother, Peggy. Being that Peggy’s children have not seen their father in some time, they create a homemade spirit board to ask when he will return home. Unbeknownst to them, the utilization of the spirit board opens a door to the demonic, thereby allowing evil in their home. Desperate to stop the ever-increasing paranormal activity, the family appears on television to seek help. The interview draws the attention of the Vatican who ask Ed and Lorraine Warren to investigate on their behalf. Through various twists, turns, and tricks, the evil entity Valak deceives members of the home and the investigative team alike. By the end of the film, we see that Ed and Lorraine were able to save the family and defeat the evil that plagues them by relying on their love for one another rather than religious intervention.

The film introduces Ed and Lorraine in more depth, deepening their importance in the universe. The film highlights the couple and their family as loving individuals who have dedicated their lives to fighting supernatural evil. In this way, *The Conjuring 2* leans further into classic gothic motifs and representations of gender than its predecessors. Furthermore, *The Conjuring 2* is a much darker film that uses the role of light and shadow to help create a sense of impending dread for viewers, thereby recalling classic gothic elements of both terror and horror. The role of the demonic force, Valak, in the film relies on deception rather than overt attempts at possession such as those seen in the original *Conjuring*.

The film was met with more criticism than its predecessors. Despite the universe's longevity, critics had already begun discussing the overuse of classic tropes, jump scares, and unnerving scenes. However, the film was widely successful in the box office, raking in over $320,000,000 domestically. Notably different than the other films in the universe, *The Conjuring 2* gives a fair amount of attention to the disbelief of others and even offers the audience a brief chance at disbelief themselves. It also calls in more Christian iconography and language than the other films, which clearly communicates that the evil is real and can only be overcome through divine intervention.

I include this film in my analysis because it gives a great deal of screen time to both dispossession of the body, although not full possession, and the role of manipulation. Like *The Conjuring*, this film presents itself as being representative of a true story, thereby aligning the universe and its production of the neoliberal gothic with true crime.

The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It

The Conjuring 3: The Devil Made Me Do It (2021) (*The Devil Made Me Do It*) is the eighth movie released in the conjuring universe and the third installment of *The Conjuring* substory. Released in June of 2021, it was the first of the films to be available on a streaming service during its theatrical release. Largely due to COVID-19 and the timing of this research, it is too soon to determine how successful this film will be in terms of ROI. Less than a month after the film's release, it has been met with widely different reviews from critics as some assert that it is the best conjuring installment, while others assert that it is a "cry for help from the production team" (Roberts, 2021).

Despite being the seam that runs through the center of the universe, Ed and Lorraine Warren have received little detailed attention in any of the previous films. Acting as heroes to the possessed or the targets of supernatural evil, the Warrens have often been overshadowed by the defining evil in other films. However, *The Devil Made Me Do It* focuses almost exclusively on the paranormal busting duo that has come to inhabit fans imaginations. Adding more dimensions to the couple will surely serve to help prolong the success of the franchise, but in humanizing our heroes, we are allowed to see that they are not perfect as well.

The story behind this film is loosely centered around the murder trial of Arne Cheyenne in 1981. This real-life case was the first instance in the American judicial system where a defendant attempted to plead not guilty by reason of demonic possession. While this alone would be an incredibly compelling story in the history of the United States justice system, it is given scant attention in the film. Rather, the film

focuses on Ed and Lorraine's investigation around the unusual case of demonic possession that seemed to resolve on its own.

For fans of the universe, and as highlighted in the film, demons do not simply leave on their own accord but must be removed through human and divine intervention. The investigation conducted by the Warrens not only aides Arne's case but helps end a cold case in another town. Though the events that unfolded throughout the storyline were beneficial, the work performed on the case diverged wildly from their work in previous story arcs. Until *The Devil Made Me Do It* introduced the power of living individuals into a realm characterized by paranormal entities; in other words, viewers were left to see people as true agents of good, while spirits caused chaos and disruption. However, this landmark case for the Warrens and their fans highlights that evil is not always "out there" in the world of the paranormal but can rather lie in the hearts and intentions of living people.

Furthermore, The Devil Made Me Do It is characterized by the classic aesthetic choices of the other films and delivers on a slow dissent into darkness that overlays crime and evil in the most blatant way possible. I included it in my analysis because it lays bare how evil, and crime relate to one another in the universe: a possessed body is one that can commit evil acts and begs the question of responsibility. While hope is a slow burning theme that runs across the entire franchise, we often see that, despite hope and small victories, true evil can never be defeated. However, *The Devil Made Me Do It* reminds fans that instances of evil do not have to span decades and continents, but rather can be defeated entirely when it emanates from a living person rather than mystical, primordial evil.

Chapter Summary

In exploring the conjuring universe, we can understand broad shifts in horror while also building our understanding of the neoliberal gothic criminology. Naming and identifying what constitutes neoliberal gothic criminology suggests that everyday life under neoliberalism could be considered gothic (Johansen, 2016) in that the extremes that are presented by the gothic are no longer the exception to the normal, but rather the rules we live by. Rather than assuming neoliberal gothic works lose the horror of paranormal activity and ominous settings, viewing the conjuring universe allows us to conceptualize how the neoliberal gothic is built.

Films' meanings change over time as do our perceptions of the films (Wetmore, 2012). By shifting our perspective from individual films to the universe more broadly, we can move beyond the reactionary nature of research on films and begin to understand how horror patterns evolve and build on their predecessors. The conjuring films exist as an exercise in false hope in the face of overwhelming and unpredictable evil (Cullins, 2017). The creation of a universe concerned with possession and primordial evil allows for viewers to experience the notion of a happy or complete ending at the conclusion of the film. However, the universe reminds us that even as one situation draws to a close, it begets another. In the following three chapters, I outline the gothic elements that were borrowed, reimagined, or reworked to form a neoliberal gothic criminology that is concerned with true crime and its correlates of evil in the form of true horror, institutional decay, and the role of the self in neoliberalism

CHAPTER 5

A LABORATORY OF TRUE HORROR

The conjuring universe exists as a site positioned between the worlds of horror, true crime, and gothic criminology. This intersection allows for us to understand how standards within the horror genre are remade through gothic lenses to communicate neoliberal ideologies and anxieties. The reinforcement and renegotiation of social structures embedded within the universe highlight the permeability of boundaries around our understandings of crime and harm, modern social institutions, the body and the self, and our current understandings of the horror genre.

Cultural criminology, whose roots extend to cultural studies, reorients postmodern perspectives by assuming content and stylistic differences are substantive. Within this framework, the “carnival of crime” (Presdee, 2003) considers how consumption of different story arcs that involve state control, societal institutions, and media involvement allow researchers to understand how crime has come to dominate our media and image landscape. However, markers of monstrosity and morality, when given attention in cultural criminology, extend well past the delineations of crime media we generally use. The cultural orthotaxy, those standard narratives that define and reinforce correct and deviant behaviors (O’Donnell,2020), has been created and supported through various subjects that focus on harm and violence, which have often not been construed within the categories of crime and punishment, across entertainment media, including horror.

The conjuring Universe provides fertile ground for exploring how cultural orthotaxy extends to deviant behaviors and beliefs beyond the confines of traditional

criminological inquiry. The universe and its primary plot device, spiritual demonic possession, allows for viewers to consume narratives around pain, punishment, confinement, and institutionalization in palatable ways because it is defined as fitting within the horror genre. Working as the “mechanism for the presentation of social ills” (Ingrebresten, 2001:28), horror distances viewers from the world of crime through its generic framework, even when the conjuring universe gives considerable attention to underlying concepts related to crime, criminality, and criminogenic environments. By aligning the story arcs and the characters with “real life” cases and evil, the films within the universe intertwine themselves with our understandings of harm further extending a “cult of commiseration” (Seltzer, 2008; 13), which is often attributed to other true crime media.

True Crime

True crime has emerged as one of the most popular media genres in American culture. One of the primary functions of true crime is that it creates a model for referred pain and referred belief, which highlights the grey region between fact and fiction. The existence and instance of true crime suggests that we must add the word “true” to crime thereby bending “fiction towards facts” (Seltzer, 2008; 26). The conjuring Universe situates itself as another type of “true story” that offers an opportunity for self-reflection, which not only exposes the reality of our social world, but also emphasizes our anxieties about the conditions of a neoliberal society more significantly.

The idea of “true” stories is introduced and reiterated across the universe when, near the beginning of *The Conjuring*, viewers see the following roll across the screen:

> Since the 1960s, Ed & Lorraine Warren have been known as the world's most renowned paranormal investigators. Lorraine is a gifted clairvoyant, while Ed is the only non-ordained Demonologist recognized by the Catholic church. Out of the thousands of cases throughout their controversial careers, there is one case so malevolent, they've kept it locked away until now. Based on the true story.

Aligning the horrifying tale of the Perron family, whose matriarch, Carolyn, was possessed by a witch, Bathsheba, to the "true" fiction format allows for viewers to extend their beliefs into the subject matter of the film. Furthermore, positioning the Warrens as investigators from the creation of the universe aligns archetypes associated with true crime and policing. From its inception, the conjuring universe was crafted as a space that allows for viewers to bend fact towards fiction while allowing monsters to be fantastical and horrific.

Soon after this text scrolls across the screen, viewers see another line of text stating "1971- Harrisville, Rhode Island." By naming the year and the place associated with the possession of Carolyn Perron, *The Conjuring* further aligns itself with true crime. The emergence of true crime is often associated with Truman Capote's non-fiction novel, *In Cold Blood*, which details the 1959 murders of the Clutter family (Linnemann, 2014). The proximity of the years of the Clutter family murder to the Perron family possession seems to highlight a turning point in American culture. The boundaries between truth and fiction for both the normal and the paranormal world became more permeable with the invention of more accessible mass media and easily consumable images. Furthermore, naming the place associated with the possession aligns with true crime's ability to create a phenomenology of place, or "a lasting

presence that is not physically there" (Bell, 1997; 813). In other words, the conjuring universe allows for viewers to have a similar phenomenological experience that is tied directly to the self rather than a place as a site of transgression and horror.

We see this cultural performance across the Universe on two different occasions The first instance occurs at the conclusion of *The Conjuring 2* when text describes the movie as based off one of the "most documented cases in paranormal history." In *The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It*, we witness this tactic being used again when we see: "The exorcism of eight-year-old David Glatzel was meant to end the months of torment. But for Arne Johnson, it was just beginning. The tragic events that followed made nationwide headlines and led Ed and Lorraine Warren to the most sinister discovery of their career. Based on a true story." These scrolling texts do more than seek to add elements of truth to horror we generally see as fantastical. They serve to foster a cult of commiseration (Seltzer, 2008) where viewers, while helpless to do anything about terror, violence, and trauma, can sympathize with the storyline through voyeuristic consumption and vicarious engagement with their own responses and fears.

This cult of commiseration does not only exist to audience members viewing the films. Rather, it is reinforced within the films themselves, creating a second layer in which consumption of horrific events becomes common place. In *The Conjuring 2,* members of the Hogsdon family appear on a local news channel to seek help after paranormal activity in their home reached unbearable levels. As part of the interview, the newscaster asks the family, "How does it feel to live in a haunted house?" Soon after, they capture paranormal activity through one of the Hogsdon siblings, Janet. The newscast catches the attention of The Church, which ultimately involve Ed and Lorraine

Warren. The appearance of the family on the local news serves to reveal a different reality. True crime serves as a “registration and revelation of reality {that makes} a difference” (Baecker, 1996; 561). In this way, news coverage related to paranormal activity in The conjuring universe does the same thing across numerous films. By highlighting sudden and unforeseen but always imminent accidents (Perrow, 2011), the evil that inhabits the conjuring universe presents itself as a para”normal” accident that helps establish the universe as a source of referred pain and truth.

One of the earliest scenes in *Annabelle*, which models a real-life Manson killing shows the main character, Mia, being awoken as her neighbors are murdered by their daughter next door. Soon after, the daughter and her friends who are members of a cult, The Disciples of the Ram, invade Mia’s home and assault her. The next day, Mia’s television shows a news broadcast regarding the murders. This shocking revelation of familicide and random stranger violence stands in stark contrast to her idyllic suburban home. This theme can be found across the conjuring universe as well and is not specific to one subset film. In *The Devil Made Me Do It*, viewers hear a news report explaining that Arne Cheyenne stabbed a man named Bruno twenty-two times. It was the first murder in the towns 193-year history.

Each news case in the universe serves to link paranormal activity to the carnival of crime (Pressdee, 2003) by allowing viewers to consume media coverage related to crime and all its cultural correlates. These integrated moments related to the cult of commiseration, created by the true crime genre and extended by the conjuring universe, give rise to a space in which viewers can explore the changing face of evil in neoliberal society.

As a subset of cultural criminology, gothic criminology seeks to illuminate ways in which the “real” and “reel” worlds are intertwined (Picart and Greek, 2003) by returning to discussion of evil as a social construct. Narratives of evil do not simply exist on the silver screen; rather, they find themselves embedded in our social institutions, including the criminal justice system. Furthermore, the salience of true crime as a cult of commiseration consisting of normal or para”normal” accidents that influence our understandings of the carnival of crime are foundational to the world building that occurs within the universe.

Primordial Evil

Katz (1990) explains, “Our original sense of deviance is through a nonreflective, sensual awareness of evil in the forms of dread, defilement, transgression, vengeance, sacrilege, sacrifice, and the like.” This relates to the evil that exists within The conjuring universe because it serves as a projection of anxiety that strives to reinforce cultural boundaries” while also having the ability to “disrupt these very same boundaries and to expose their cultural fragility” (Sothcott, 2006: 436). It does so by tapping into the nonreflective awareness of evil while also coding the fantastical as possible. This evil, through its alignment with true crime, comes to represent fantastic horrors that have real world impacts.

In *The Devil Made Me Do It,* Arne’s lawyer tells Ed and Lorraine, “You’ve proven it {possession} to the church. This is a court of law. The standards of evidence are completely different.” The case of Arne Cheyenne and his plea of not guilty by reason of demonic possession recenters discussions of evil as part of the carnival of crime within the universe and beyond. Horror has long been concerned with evil, as the

manifestation of evil has morphed with changing social conditions, but concerns related to evil within criminology, even gothic criminology, have long been shunned from academic discourse. The emergence of gothic stylings as foundational to gothic criminology emerged from Park's work on monarchial capitalist imperialism when he used language popular in gothic occultism to communicate a sense of evil. Though he began discussions on gothic criminology, his previous works were largely shunned for being too journalistic and philosophical in nature. However, concerns with evil persisted and were largely explored through popular culture with gothic criminology echoing the monsters that were created for the masses. The evil within the conjuring universe allows for criminologist to reconsider what fantastical evil can teach us about real world horrors rather than simply echoing gothic stylings. As Alison Young writes in *Imagining Crime*, evil is premised on an absence, something out of place in the social order as in a crisis in the cultural representation of the relational portrayed as a breach or rupture demanding desperate restoration (117).

In the conjuring universe, viewers are introduced to four distinct evils. In *The Conjuring*, Carolyn is possessed by a witch, Bathsheba, who sold her soul to Satan after murdering her son. In *Annabelle Creation*, a demon is attached to a doll created by Samuel Mullins for his daughter before her death. The evil later comes to possess an orphaned child, Janice, who takes on the name Annabelle before being adopted at the conclusion of the film. In the original *Annabelle* film, we see the spirit associated with the doll torment Mia and John when Annabelle Higgins, formerly known as Janice, broke into their home after murdering her adopted family next door. In *The Nun*, Valak the Defiler, a demon that takes the form of a nun, torments nuns in a Romanian Abbey

before possessing a villager, Frenchie. Valak was first featured in *The Conjuring 2* as the evil that plagued the Hogsdon household, targeting the youngest daughter. In *The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It*, the evil that first possessed young David Glatzel and later possesses Arne is controlled by an occultist, Isla, who is seeking to gain power via pact with demonic forces.

These forms of evil stand in stark contrast to commonly explored evils in cultural criminology, such as the rogue cop, serial killers, vampires, and werewolves, and requires us to reorient our attention to other sites of horror in postmodern society. One of the key distinguishing features of all the evils across the universe is that they offer viewers the opportunity to engage with flexible monstrosity. These evils exist for reasons that are new to the genre of horror. They are not portrayed as sympathetic villains, as in the case with other modern horror, or as purely deceptive villains, as in gothic works, nor as overt symbols related to crime and criminality often seen in cultural criminology. Rather, the evil within *The Conjuring* exists in a space where it is all encompassing, inescapable, and unable to be destroyed. In *The Conjuring*, Lorraine explains that the family will not be able to escape Bathsheba when stating, “It doesn’t matter where you go, this dark entity has latched itself to your family and it’s feeding off you.” The evil that plagues the Perrons’ has become fully embedded in their lives so that escape is not possible, consistent with the lack of escape the neoliberal subject exemplifies in isolation, alienation, individualization, and no recourse to social safety nets that are overwhelmed by structural forces.

The demonic in the universe highlights senselessness beyond rational understating that is contrary to most depictions of harm in modern horror media. In *The*

Devil Made Me Do It, Father Kastner, Isla's father, explains that the why of evil does not matter; this anti-explanatory universe is central to contemporary constructions of neoliberalism, which defy structural accounts of violence. Seeking answers to why things occur is "counter to everything that Satan stands for. His sole aim is chaos. His nectar is despair." A lack of concrete motivation, besides pain for its own sake, allows for the evil within the universe to operate simply for itself, taking on different forms, manipulating senses, inhabiting objects and people, and remaking the world in its own image, as it seeps into every aspect of victim's lives, even those beyond their own control. In *The Nun*, viewers learn that everything experienced by Father Burke and Sister Irene, the primary characters within the film, has been a projection by Valak. The characters they interacted with inside the abbey walls, the frantic whispered prayers, and the appeals to a higher power have all been a mockery of their faith.

In a similar regard, Brown (2015) posits that neoliberalism frames everything in economic terms, down to homo economicus itself which is the definitive neoliberal subject, only available as subjects through external and artificial valuations, which erode the base of our liberal democracy. In this way, neoliberalism is ever present and inescapable in postmodern society, with subjects trapped within its foundational institutions just as evil is omnipresent and inescapable in the conjuring universe. Neoliberal logics seek to remake the world in the image of economic capital as evil in the universe seeks to remake people into vessels for control and manipulation. As social life is remade in neoliberal terms, fear becomes the primary way we engage with our world, and the ever-present suffocating fear experienced across the universe helps us contend with the persistent force that seeks to remake us into something else

entirely. In *The Conjuring*, viewers are reminded that “Diabolical forces are formidable. These forces are eternal, and they exist today. The fairy tale is true. The devil exists. God exists. And for us, as people, our very destiny hinges upon which one we elect to follow.” As neoliberal logics come to infect and influence every area of our society, individuals are positioned to feel the gravity of external forces that often exist outside the realm of immediate understanding. As characters in cinematic universe toil under mythological evil and seek salvation from the divine, individuals in postmodern society equally toil under the ever-present, inescapable world-making of neoliberalism.

The inescapability of senseless suffering caused by an entity that can take on any shape or form allows for the evil to inhabit every area of the universe and viewers’ imaginations. For characters within the film, evil is omnipresent, lurking in the shadows and in their safe places; it hides in basements, bedrooms, armoires, play tents, mirrors, sewing machines, dolls, and the bodies of their loved ones. The ability of evil to be ever-present and take on any form allows for flexible monstrosity, an idea previously unexplored in cultural criminology and its subsets. By focusing on the demonic, with its gothic trappings and its familiar haunted house style horror, the conjuring universe provides viewers with a space to explore a new cultural evil by giving it a familiar yet horrifyingly new face – a gothic neoliberal one. In turning our attention to representations of paranormal evil, researchers can begin to understand how neoliberal logics are imposed onto the things we fear most.

The Gothic

The familiar face introducing flexible monstrosity in the conjuring Universe does more than reflect gothic criminology’s attempts to name, remake, and represent the

evils of society. It also distinguishes the universe from other modern horror by relying on gothic elements that are largely considered tired and ineffective, which is another feature of late neoliberalism. As noted previously, critics have dismissed many of the films in the conjuring universe for their overreliance on traditional gothic imagery and devices. These shifts in horror occurred after 9/11which seems to have moved the genre away from traditional stylistic devices. Yet, these same tired devices have experienced a cultural revival that is linked to the nostalgic cultural needs of neoliberal church, family, and state.

Traditionally, gothic criminology used fantastical horrors to express the complexities and terror of social realities. As a communicative style, gothic criminology can be found across all forms of crime media and images of crime. As mentioned before, the journalist styling of gothic criminology became the dominate trait of the subdiscipline after concerns regarding the philosophical nature of evil were rejected from the discipline at large. Language and styles associated with the gothic, such as terror, hauntings, invocations, and darkness, are deeply embedded in the ways consumers engage with crime media and stories. However, the power of gothic criminology in neoliberalism lies in its ability to understand symbolism tied to the metonym of gloom and horror that it embedded in the vocabulary of crime media (Harris, 2015). The devices that scholars used to convey the gravity of social problems now exist in the cultural ether, which are used in a variety of ways but were never fully divorced from our understandings of crime. In this way, gothic language and symbols inextricably bond neoliberal horror and crime through the postmodernist lenses that

seek to delineate new social orders where fear is given new and weighted attention through decaying institutions (Hill, 1998).

Symbols used within gothic criminology to express real world issues are plentiful within the conjuring universe. Relying on familiar gothic metonyms, those elements that stand in for and are cued to some larger feeling, force, or anxiety, allows for viewers to engage with changing social formations in a way that is familiar. Much like the primordial evil's revival in the *Conjuring*, gothic symbolism undergoes a cultural revival that addresses changing social anxieties related to neoliberal logics such as declining institutions, individual responsibilization, the invasion of biopolitical governance into the domestic sphere, surveillance, containment, and control. While there is no shortage of examples of gothic symbols across the universe, several symbols are repeated across numerous films helping to create a gothic experience related to neoliberal conditions of evil that highlights the ways gothic works can be used to disrupt and distort social formations (Cohen, 1996) distinct from other shifts in modern horror. Gothic metonym in the *Conjuring* represents much of the boundary work that occurs within the universe. As a site of neoliberal study, this boundary work moves beyond the traditional work done by both horror and cultural criminology which seeks to understand projections of anxieties. Rather, it touches directly on the boundary work that neoliberal ideologies employ to shape our world.

Under neoliberalism, biopolitical forms of governance have become so fully intertwined with daily life that regulatory controls over the body and individuals remain largely unquestioned. At the foundation of biopower is the ability of the sovereign to foster life or disallow it. Life affirming or extending powers – and its antithesis,

necropolitics - are given primacy, thereby creating a society in which death is seen as the most salient evil. The conjuring universe explores the boundaries of life and death in relationship to the self and neoliberal society through the consistent invocation of bells. Traditionally, bells in gothic works have been used to signify death (Alter, 2012) or the fear of death. Bells are used to evoke sadness and a sense of longing as life ends. However, in the conjuring, bells come to represent a frantic fight against death and a desire to shirk the natural or supernatural progression we all must face. The bell, rather than ringing to make the end of a life, rings to save it and alert others. In other words, the bell becomes a cry for help, one which allows us to make our fear, pain, and terror sharable, if only briefly to others.

This analysis is perhaps most powerfully rendered in *The Nun*, where a scene depicts the horror of being buried alive to shed light on another key neoliberal trope, suffocating paralysis. Father Burke, a priest sent to investigate the suicide of a nun at an isolated convent in rural Romania, is lured into a foggy dilapidated graveyard. As Burke flees a spiritual projection of a boy vomiting snakes, he falls into an open grave. The grave is instantly sealed and a bell above the grave rings frantically. Later, Sister Irene, a novitiate that traveled with Burke to investigate, enters the graveyard and hears the ringing of the bell. Suddenly, the bells above every grave begin to ring, creating a cacophony that prevents Irene from identifying Burkes' grave. As the bell represents a longing to escape of transcending death in neoliberal society, the deafening roar of bells from all other graves further represents the permeability between the boundaries of life and death. Furthermore, the ringing of many bells highlights the way in which neoliberal logics seek to obscure themselves and hide in plain sight. As society is increasingly

defined by one crisis after another and the constant availability to news of tragedy, individuals do not have time to situate themselves in a sociopolitical landscape defined by omnipresent evil. However, the invocation of bells across the universe is consistent in the films themselves and within gothic works as a whole. Bells as a signifier between the boundaries of life and death, or to obscure and distort appear in *The Conjuring, The Conjuring 2, Annabelle Creation, and The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It*.

Much like the continued presence of bells across the universe, the conjuring films offer a plethora of moments when objects are moved by unseen hands. In some instances, small items, such as toy fire trucks, eerily roll into a dimly lit hallway. In other cases, huge wooden pieces of furniture are thrown against doors, trapping occupants of the room inside. In every instance, the fear associated with movement caused by unseen forces is palpable. The movement of daily items, large and small, in the universe represents the invisible hand of the market. In neoliberal society, the invisible hand is “a poetic expression of the most fundamental economic balance relations, the equalization of rates of return” (Ingrao, 1990). The force of the invisible hand reaches into different forms of governance (Williamson, 1994), public services (Le Grand, 2009), and even individuals’ psychology (Bettache and Chui, 2019). When the invisible hand reaches into our domestic and personal spheres, it is often presented via neoliberal concepts. In this way, neoliberalism acts for individuals as the invisible hand does for economics. Neoliberalism is invisible, yet it regulates our assumptive worlds (Bettache and Chui, 2019). The unseen hand that interrupts domestic life through the conjuring universe reflects how the unseen seeks to remake the world in its own image.

As a site of boundary creation, distinction, and reinforcement, the conjuring universe also does an incredible amount of work related to gender which subverts typical horror norms and narratives within gothic works more broadly. This is achieved through the invocation of both traditional gothic metonym, such as snakes, and through the subversion of traditional gothic and horror villains. Snakes have been part of gothic imagery since the genre first emerged and continue to thrive in horror today. One of the first introductions of the snake into popular horror culture is the short story “The Anaconda: An East Indian Tale” (1808) in which the Orientalized snake is used to represent queerness, femininity, and eroticism (Vučina, 2017). In other works, the snake is presented as a complementary enemy to man, representing the least controlled part of the psyche that is incomprehensible or the causelessness of evil (Lucina, 2017). The use of snakes, most notably in *The Nun*, stand to align the evil entities with evil for the sake of itself. While this alone does not introduce anything new to gothic criminology, horror, or gothic works, the coupling of causeless evil with different forms of femininity represents a dramatic shift in horror and gothic works more broadly.

Most interpretations of gothic work have been authored by men and attribute much of the terror of gothic work to a motif of incest through a helpless daughter confronting erotic power (Kahane, 1980). In other gothic formations, women’s sexualities are treated as a foregone conclusion where they are treated as inherently sexual creatures (Wolff, 1979). In modern horror, women have been largely represented through evolutions of the final girl, all of which were designed to represent desirable feminine traits. However, the conjuring universe does not rely on idealized femininity, sexuality, or helplessness in the face of male eroticism; in fact, it is strikingly absent.

While it does contribute to cultural orthotaxy regarding gender norms, it also aligns femininity with primordial evil serving to situate gender within the neoliberal context. Every instance of evil across the universe is associated with a woman, or a feminine vessel associated with the evil, most of whom move ordinarily in ideal and innocent spaces, such as mothers, daughters, nuns, and dolls. The consistent instances that include unholy women across the universe act to counter traditional and newer gothic motifs, subvert horror norms, and present evil in a way that is counter to most cultural consumption but remains strikingly consistent with nostalgic neoliberal orders. The subversion or traditional monstrosity in the face of primordial evil and its alignment with true crime situates the conjuring universe as a site that clearly engages with the boundaries and boundary work of neoliberalism.

True or Real

The alignment of the conjuring universe with true crime highlights the ways in which postmodern society is positioned between fact and fiction. The boundaries between fantasy and reality are obscured for audience members, as well as characters within the film, as primordial evil returns to the silver screen. The evolution of gothic metonym across the films clearly highlights changing boundaries around fear and shifting cultural anxieties. As a text, the universe is well suited to expand definitions of gothic criminology and explore how neoliberal logics are changing the face of horror more broadly. Beyond that, the content of the universe, its characters, and its story arcs also add incredibe depth and dimension to our understandings of how the gothic, horror, and true crime have come to inhabit the same social space.

The conjuring universe further aligns itself with cultural criminology, and its subset of true crime, through a constant nostalgic invocation of enlightenment principles. The horror genre has only come to bear cultural fruit through rational enlightenment because it is used as a site of exploration and catharsis related to the dark side of industrialization and changing social forms in modernity. Enlightenment and its subsequent creation of monstrosity (Donovan, 2011) are what gave rise to the genre. Gothic modes have existed as a direct counter to enlightenment principals (Anolik, 2014) by creating unknowable and irrational worlds. By aligning itself with true crime, the conjuring universe troubles the historical relationship between the gothic and enlightenment principles because it does not reinforce the delineation between known and unknown. Rather, it positions the supernatural world as part of the natural world so that the appearance of the paranormal does not create a persistent and unsettling uncanny. Rather, the supernatural is a site for exploration, categorization, and control.

Neoliberalism is deeply rooted in positivist ways of thinking and interacting with the social world (Brohman, 1995) in that it assumes that individuals are atomistic and devoid of personal relationships beyond simple market exchanges. It also assumes that there is a single reality of independent people (Mackenzie, 2011) where an objective truth exists, devoid of personal experiences or expressions. Positivist ideas as underpinnings of neoliberal logics are largely invisible yet widely accepted in postmodern society. Throughout the conjuring universe, viewers are consistently reminded of the importance of truth in the face of para”normal” accidents. Thus, the ever-present possibility of danger does nothing unless facts support the horror.

In the conjuring Universe, Ed and Lorraine Warren are the famed and highly contested paranormal investigators on which these films are based; not only are they highly visible in most films within the universe, but they also shepherd us through each film and guide the boundary work. In *The Conjuring*, Carolyn Perron beseeches Ed and Lorraine to help her family after she hears them speaking at a local college. During their introduction, a listener asks what they call themselves and Ed responds that they have been called a lot of things, such as "demonologists, ghost hunters, paranormal researchers…" Before Ed finishes, Lorraine interjects "kooks" and ends this scene saying, "but we prefer simply to be known as Ed & Lorraine Warren." From the outset of the universe, we see Ed and Lorraine positioned as arbiters of the truth when others meet victims with total disbelief.

After Carolyn finds Ed and Lorraine in the parking lot post lecture, they agree to help her family despite some misgivings from Ed. In doing so, they have to employ paranormal equipment in the home because "exorcisms cannot be performed unless there is proof." In *Annabelle*, a priest mentions to Mia and John that he knows a couple who may be able to help after we see them interviewing roommates in the opening scene. In *The Conjuring 2*, The Church employs Ed and Lorraine to travel to England and investigate the haunting of the Hogsdon family. The church does not want to be involved in a case that may be a hoax, so Ed and Lorraine are able to serve as fact-finding mediaries. Finally, in *The Devil Made Me Do It*, they assist the police with a murder investigation and launch their own paranormal investigation to support Arne's claims of possession.

Across every film, Ed and Lorraine serve as reinforcements to positivist ideas that there is a single truth regardless of personal experience. In *The Conjuring 2*, while the team gathers evidence, they capture footage of Janet destroying the kitchen which leads them to believe that she was faking the paranormal activity. After they leave, Janet tells them that she faked the activity to make the team leave so the demon would not kill her family. On the train, Lorraine experiences a psychic vision after hearing the recorded voice of a deceased man, Bill, who is trapped by the demon in the home. She screams after she realizes what has happened and insists that they return to the home. While she arrived at the truth by fantastical means, the truth was still ascertained. As investigators, the Warrens are treated as skeptical saviors that are only willing to intervene if the objective truth warrants their involvement.

The juxtaposition of a universe created to communicate social anxieties regarding new economic and social orders through fantastical horrors with its insistence on truth, fact finding, and belief highlights the tensions that individuals come to feel living under neoliberal conditions. As individual experiences are made invisible, fear becomes the primary way by which we interact with the world, but we are constantly reminded that objective truth is of primary importance. The pain of others and the pain of our own is but a shadow to the overwhelming forces and neoliberal logics of marketability.

In *The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It* (2021), Arne Cheyenne's lawyer tells Ed and Lorraine Warrentowards the beginning of their investigation that "that kid {Arne} will either live or die depending on what you two find." as the duo begins to investigate his possession. The Warrens, as investigative agents for both the church and criminal

defense, highlight how the conjuring works to fully invert traditional gothic understandings of enlightenment in favor of a rational and knowable reality often associated with crime and crime control while also demonstrating how the individual is the last line of defense. The interweaving of the supernatural world with the natural world as a site for exploration of harm positions the universe between cultural criminology and paranormal horror.

Chapter Summary

The conjuring universe positions itself between horror, true crime, and gothic criminology. The space that it inhabits aligns paranormal horror with real world social anxieties created under neoliberalism through consistent insistence on truth and phenomenological experiences. While gothic criminology used gothic metonym as a stylistic device to communicate social conditions as fantastical, the conjuring universe creates a fantastical world that is reflective of changing social conditions. However, the world that is created is shaped by the same conditions it seeks to reflect. Therefore, the alignment of paranormal horror with true crime represents the emergence of a true horror genre that acts in similar ways to true crime.

The revelations of true horror within the conjuring universe serve to create a new para”normal” accident that reinforces cultural fears around the ever-present possibility of danger and harm. In doing so, it offers viewers a chance to experience catharsis related to primordial evil in postmodern society. Primordial evil has long been a site of contention within criminological discourses, yet we find it having a cultural revival as the conditions of neoliberalism present a suffocating constriction on personal expression in favor of market logics. The inescapability of these logics, represented through traditional

gothic metonym allows for viewers to process overwhelming social forces in a way that is familiar. However, these familiar metonyms have experienced shifts in what they represent under the same conditions.

The conjuring universe, with its traditional gothic stylings expressed through a lens of true horror, represents the creation of a neoliberal gothic genre. The neoliberal gothic is concerned with the formation, maintenance, and subversion of social boundaries that represent what is possible. It reifies and renegotiates our understanding of evil and monstrosity in a way that makes it palatable to a mass audience. Like gothic criminology, the neoliberal gothic seeks to bring conceptions of primordial evil to the forefront of our cultural imaginations. However, this evil is no longer robber barons, rogue cops, or imperial capitalism. Rather, the evil that individuals toil under is neoliberalism itself.

CHAPTER 6

RUINATION

Having established that the conjuring universe presents a new genre, the neoliberal gothic, through its alignment with true crime and insistence on gothic metonym, we can begin to explore how the films within the universe communicate specific forms of neoliberal anxieties through a model of true horror. The bending of fiction towards fact allows for the experiences within the universe to be taken as true representations of the social world. The introduction of primordial evil as a harbinger of crisis for characters within the film also introduces a category of crisis within the universe where the boundaries of institutions are permeable, subject to powers both corrupt and capable of redemption, and thus are ever-changing in response to supernatural forces.

As a site of expression for neoliberal anxieties, the conjuring universe situates the role of social institutions as one of its primary concerns. The triad of the Church, the state, and the family all come to inhabit viewer imaginations as key sites for the performance of the demonic. While each institution interacts with the demonic in different ways, we see that each one is shaped by its relationship to primordial evil. As neoliberalism continues to erode our liberal democracy (Brown, 2015) and evolves into a “war against the population” (Dardot and Laval, 2019; xx), the role of institutions in modern society is diminished in favor of economic capital. In this way, neoliberal logics operate as a possessing entity that infects the cultural and political body as it continues its steady march of erosion. As institutions continue to give way to economic logic, the social safety net is diminished creating a deep sense of insecurity and precarity. The

precarity that is created under neoliberal conditions comes to bear fruit in the fantastical world created by the conjuring universe as viewers are exposed to ineffective and decaying institutions that are, at once, the only possible source of salvation, yet wildly ineffective in the face of omnipresent evil.

The Church as State

Horror in post 9/11 America has often been defined by the increase in nihilism and the removal of hope from traditional horror formats (Wetmore, 2012). However, the conjuring universe reintroduces hope for salvation through Ed and Lorraine Warren, because they act as positivist intermediaries to The Church. As an institution, The Church is positioned to exert control over demonic forces that allow individuals freedom from demonic possession or oppression. In this way, The Church possesses biopolitical power over characters within the universe since their presence is often touted as the key to continued life.

The ability of the church to foster life through exorcism or disallow it through non-intervention is a foregone conclusion within the films. Invocations of The Church as a life-giving institution is foundational to each film within the universe. In *The Conjuring*, Ed Warren explains to Carolyn that The Church must have definitive proof of demonic activity to involve themselves in deliverance efforts. Often, priests and nuns are central characters in supporting the move through a larger corrupt church toward salvation. In *Annabelle*, Mia and John seek help from their priest. In *The Conjuring 2*, Ed and Lorraine gather evidence on behalf of The Church. In *Annabelle Creation*, a member of The Church, Sister Charlotte, attempts to protect orphaned girls from the evil in the Mullins' home. In *The Devil Made Me Do It*, priests interact with both David and Arne

during their possessions, while Ed and Lorraine engage with Father Kastner as they investigate. *The Nun* centers on two institutional actors, Father Burke and Sister Irene, as they attempt to investigate and control evil on behalf of The Church. As portrayed in these examples, the needed involvement of a religious institution is seen as a foregone conclusion from the inception of the universe. In a similar means, neoliberalism creates path dependent outcomes in that certain types of institutionalizations recognize and reflect forms of regulation (Brenner, 2005). Other spiritual guides take shape in actors whose faith moves them toward sacrifice. Within the conjuring universe, we see this kind of path dependency played out for characters as they seek salvation.

The salience of The Church representing path dependency in neoliberal society is only furthered by the reemergence of religion into political prominence in the United States. Giroux (2005) highlights how American public and religious life have become more intertwined as the government supports a range of social services for religious institutions and conservative evangelical movements, undercutting the distinction between church and state. The path dependency on The Church within the universe, despite its waning ability to offer salvation, reminds viewers of the erosion of social institutions. As social safety net programs have transformed into instances of workfare and prisionfare we find that many individuals must still engage with these kinds of coercive programs to function. In the conjuring universe, we see characters turn to religious iconography and ideals even when The Church is unavailable.

In *Annabelle Creation*, Mr. Mullins enters his home after learning Linda, Janice's best friend, and Janice, who was later possessed by the demon calling itself Annabelle, entered his deceased daughter's old bedroom. In the bedroom, they found a closet that

contained the Annabelle doll , the vessel used by the demon to gain entrance into the Mullins home, with walls covered in pages from the Bible. The doll sits at his dining room table with a poorly written note reading “found you” placed beside it. The demon takes the form of Janice before slinking back to the shadows where it grows to ceiling height with glowing yellow eyes. Understanding that the previously contained evil has been set free in his home, Mr. Mullins holds up a crucifix to the entity. As he stands trembling, his fingers are broken backwards by an unseen force causing the cross to fall to the floor before Samuel dies. This scene highlights how path dependence on religious control and ways of interacting with omnipresent evil are not only ineffective, but deadly. Under neoliberalism, biopolitical power and path dependency are foregone conclusions in postmodern life. Despite failures and ineffectiveness, our social institutions are presented as the only option for facing possessing evil.

Despite the insistence that The Church is the source of salvation, every film highlights that The Church operates with callousness and a total disregard for the lives of people affected by the demonic as a plot device. In *The Nun*, we see a member of the convent commit suicide as a form of sacrifice to protect the church from the demon, Valak. Nonetheless, the Church rigidly cannot and will not offer her salvation. Similarly, in *Annabelle Creation*, we see that Sister Charlotte is unable to save Janice from being possessed despite her virtuous role as emissary of The Church. We see this theme occur in *Annabelle* as well, when the family priest is unable to help Mia and John as he asks them to be patient while finding someone who can help. In addition to these examples, *The Conjuring 2* demonstrates this motif as well when the Hogsdon family is not able to receive the help they deserve because the investigative process of The

Church takes too long. Finally, in *The Devil Made Me Do It*, the prison chaplain states "God gives everyone the right to defend themselves" when giving Arne a vial of holy water as he enters solitary confinement. Much like neoliberalism continues to exist despite its failures (Brenner, 2005), The Church continues to assert itself as a source of power and control that is needed for a return to normalcy, but it does not ever offer any help to those who are suffering. In this way, The Church reflects Weber's occult creature- the corporation. Rather than seeking salvation or heavenly treasures, The Church simply exists as an institution of its own logic for its own gain which is evident when its most committed subjects must operate outside of it in helpless efforts against evil.

Under neoliberalism, biopower exerts itself into everyday life as a "hegemonic block [which] organized the reproduction of life in ways that allow political crises to be cast as conditions of specific bodies and their competence at maintaining…conditions of social belonging." (Berlant, 2007; 765). Within the conjuring universe, we see that The Church allows for paranormal crises to be cast as problems for specific people. In *The Conjuring*, Mr. Perron explains to Ed that his family aren't church going people. This idea also becomes clear in *The Conjuring 2* when the family is experiencing economic precarity, family instability, and instances of bullying which lead two daughters to play with a Ouija board, thereby allowing the evil into their homes. In *Annabelle Creation*, Mr. and Mrs. Mullins conducted a séance to contact their deceased daughter. Again, this theme is included in *The Devil Made Me Do It* when Arne invites the evil into his body to try and save David. Over the course of this film, we discover that the occultist, who is ultimately killed by the evil she wrought, seeks power and control. Kastner, the priest

who fathered the occultist, hid her and her evil away from the church in an isolated mill house. When Ed and Lorraine discover the incarnate evil, Isla kills her father. Before his murder Kastner sobs, “I failed as a priest. I failed as a father. Please God don’t let me fail at…” as his throat is slit. Similarly, in *The Nun*, Father Burke is plagued by his inadequacy after a failed exorcism led to the death of a young boy, Daniel, and Sister Irene is just a novitiate who has not yet taken her vows. Finally, in *Annabelle*, the priest explains to Mia that “demons can’t just take souls, Mia. A soul needs to be offered to the demon before he can take it.” The unwillingness of the church to intervene with life affirming power seems to rest on the believe that people who experience demonic possession have personal responsibility in their suffering. This is where neoliberalism and the horror genre link since narratives of personal responsibility in the face of systematic forces are pervasive in neoliberal society as well (Sweet, 2018). The increased focus on individual responsibilization in the face of declining social safety nets is touted and challenged across the film. Viewers understand that the reported failings of the individuals who suffer pale in comparison to the pain they feel, yet the narrative of personal responsibility hinders any assistance from The Church. In this way, the conjuring universe also centers the individual and atomized forces as the locus of fraught, failed, and sometimes valorized last-ditch efforts against the evil that institutions have let in.

As the *Conjuring universe* makes clear, the regulatory controls of the biopolitical state over the population are increasingly understood through religious lenses. When considering the spectrum of biopolitical controls as tools of neoliberalism ranging from coercive public programs to the death penalty, we see that surveillance as a tool of

positive life control emerges in a variety of different ways. These normative aspects of social control are built into the very fabric of political practice and social formations (Coleman, 2004). Security and order, which are key criminological forces, are given primacy in neoliberalism as space is remade into predictable and known entities through mass culture. Within the *Conjuring universe*, viewers witness numerous instances of surveillance on behalf of The Church as victims of possession seek help. At the beginning of *The Conjuring*, viewers see a clip of an exorcism being performed as the Warrens lecture at a local college. The victim in the video is Frenchie, the villager later introduced in *The Nun*. The prerecorded exorcism was part of documentation created to send to The Church in relation to the possession Frenchie experienced. Later, after Carolyn convinced the Warrens to help her family, they enter her home with another investigator and a police officer. After introducing themselves, the group sets up a variety of paranormal detection devices in order to fulfill the required documentation needed by The Church. In a time of crisis, the family opens their home to strangers and allows for every aspect of their lives to be recorded as they seek to make a case to The Church for intervention. At the beginning of *Annabelle*, we see roommates being recorded during an interview with the Warrens as they seek intervention for paranormal activity. One of the roommates tells them, “We were terrified.” The fear associated with the demonic paranormal activity is so great that people are willing to go to any lengths to be safe from it. In *The Conjuring 2*, the Warrens and other investigators continue to employ recording devices and other forms of paranormal surveillance. As investigators, the Warren duo is consistently engaged with efforts to document paranormal activity to prove its existence to The Church. Normalizing invasive surveillance methods to prove

some objective form of truth within the confines of the neoliberal gothic is part of the boundary erection (Coleman, 2014) within neoliberalism which seeks to delineate moral boundaries that are underpinned by fear of the other. Surveillance itself is a drive toward documentation that often does not add up to a form of truth but a form of criminalization, profiling, and framing in the convergence of crime control and neoliberal orders.

This work of boundary creation within neoliberal society is often done in service of naming and categorizing social ills (Monbiot, 2016), which is done by academics who seek to understand what neoliberalism is exactly and by biopolitical powers that seek to categorize and control the populous. Examples of the symptoms of neoliberalism abound but it has become so embedded in our social fabric that it, like The Church in the universe, is a foregone conclusion. As inequality is recast as virtue and anonymity is, at once, a natural symptom and cause of power. However, the ideologies of neoliberalism aren't seen as ideology any longer. Rather, with the natural order of things, these ideological forms operate as a strange convergence of divine and biological law (Darwin's theory of evolution) (Monbiot, 2016). Within the *Conjuring universe*, we see the Warrens always trying to name the demonic entity that plagues the families they help. In *The Conjuring 2*, as her husband hangs out a window poised to fall to his death, Lorraine screams at the demon, "Your name gives me dominion over you, demon, and I do know your name!You are Valak: the defiler, the profane, the marquee of snakes!" As Lorraine condemns Valak back to hell, the entity disappears, and Lorraine saves her husband just before he falls onto a tree set to impale him. The desire to know and name a force (here associated with evil) to control its impacts upon our

daily lives is a form of neoliberal logic in and of itself. Outside of academic attempts to name what neoliberalism is, we see that neoliberalism is also concerned with the categorization and subsequent control of those considered outside the realm of orthotaxy.

Cultural criminology, and criminology more broadly, is deeply concerned with boundaries that categorize otherness as a site for social control. Distinctions and labels created within the criminal justice system and culture at large create shifting boundaries around our understanding of dangerousness and monstrosity. In neoliberal society, where poverty is considered a moral failing and social control of the poor is intertwined in the criminal justice system, messages regarding the moral order associated with crime and criminality, as well as its metonyms of violence, are readily available. When instances of public coercive aide fail to align individuals with the normative moral order, the criminal justice system intervenes. When society is unable to control crime, we simply contain it. We enclose it in a variety of ways ranging from public housing to prisons, to increasingly expanding forms of electronic and home monitoring (Wacquant, 2010). Similarly, the evil within the conjuring universe is unable to be destroyed, only contained, with the home and other “sacred” spaces its dwelling. In *The Devil Made Me Do It*, Kastner shows Ed and Lorraine to the basement of the mill house where he lives. This dark basement is full of occult items he collected while studying the group disciples of the ram. Upon seeing these items, Lorraine says that he should burn them, but he explains that he is keeping “guns off the street” by holding onto them and out of the hands of others. Using traditional gothic settings such as these to communicate containment as a new response to mythical evil serves to reinforce notions that we must

not only be able to name our social ills, but we must also be able to contain them. This idea remains present throughout the words of main characters, most prominent when Ed Warren reminds viewers, “The threat of evil is ever present… We can contain it as long as we stay vigilant, but it can never truly be destroyed.”

In *The Conjuring*, we are introduced to Ed and Lorraine Warrens’ home in Monroe, Connecticut. Within their home, they have a museum of haunted artifacts that were collected from their completed exorcisms. Ed explains to a reporter, “Everything you see in here is either haunted, cursed, or has been used in some kind of ritualistic practice.” When he is questioned about fearing the objects in the room, Ed explains that they have a priest come by one time a month to bless them. When he is asked why they simply do not destroy the cursed items, he states, “That would only destroy the vessel. Sometimes it’s better to keep the genie in a bottle.” This representation of confinement relates to conditions in neoliberal society since the ability of individuals to find respite from dangers is a large part of our twenty-four-hour news cycle. The idea that we are powerless in the face of structures or individuals that would seek to do us harm means that containing the evil becomes the best way to protect individuals. As scholars know, criminal activity is virtually never caused by an evil person but rather a reflection of inequitable market and social conditions. The involvement of The Church in the universe to contain evil is a correlate of the ability of the state to control those who commit crime, often culturally coded as “other,” “deviant,” or “monstrous.” The Church does not act to help those who suffer just as law enacted as a biopolitical tool does not exist to prevent harm. Rather, both The Church and law are tools used for the containment of those who transgress orthotaxy assumptions. For example, Arne was

imprisoned after he murdered Bruno while experiencing demonic possession in *The Devil Made Me Do It*. His confinement and the confinement of the cursed items, including the Annabelle doll, in the Warrens' home reminds viewers that our response to harm and the return to normal ordered existence takes primacy over harm reduction and prevention or structural explanation. Rather, we are simply caught at the vortex of these forces.

Within the confines of the conjuring universe, we see The Church as an example of traditional biopower where religious institutions have the power to foster life or end it. However, The Church does not represent a totalizing institution that exists to control the entire corpus through religious logics. Rather, the state, which offers confinement or reinforcement and is less present than the Church, also exists to demonstrate to viewers the power of institutions that are responsible for positive power over life. In this way the conjuring universe reminds viewers that powers of control and containment do not lie at one site but are dispersed across our social institutions.

This notion can be seen throughout the cinematic Universe and is first brought about in *The Conjuring* when the Warrens bring a police officer, Brad Hamilton, with them to investigate the Perron home. Similarly, it appears again in *Annabelle Creation* when the police arrive at the Mullins' isolated farmhouse after the evil associated with the doll, Annabelle, possesses Janice, who attacks her friends and Sister Charlotte. When the police open the door to the closet where Janice had been trapped, they find that it only contains the doll. The police do not find Janice, who is later adopted by the Higgins under the name Annabelle. Many years later, in *Annabelle*, Mia is awoken by a sound from next door where Annabelle Higgins murders her parents. Annabelle later

enters Mia's home and assaults her before dying as she clutches the doll left at the farmhouse, which was a present to Mia from her husband, John, as she decorated a nursery. The police respond to Mia's assault by killing a man who is with Annabelle Higgins. Later, a police detective comes to Mia's apartment to tell her that the Higgins' daughter was responsible for the murder and that she had been involved with a cult. He explains, "It is believed that they had interest in the occult, that they did this to prove their devotion. Violence for violence's sake." This theme remains present in *The Conjuring 2* when police respond to a call from the Hogsdon home and are terrified by the paranormal activity. However, in this film there is little to no protection from the state as one police officer suggests they call a priest. Finally, in *The Devil Made Me Do It*, the Warrens serve as investigators in ways that the police cannot. When seeking to get information from a detective, Lorraine helps a police chief find a body after he told her he was "only interested in leads that are grounded in reality." In this moment, the state is prosecuting Arne for the murder of Bruno while Ed and Lorraine are looking to prove it was a para"normal" accident. In this way, Ed and Lorraine operate both as extensions of a neoliberal juridical order: investigators obsessively pursuing alternative standards of evidence and justice, while simultaneously working within and with the neoliberal state as a policing project.

While the power of The Church is generally centered across the universe as being adjacent to state power, there are small glimpses of the state as a protective force against bodily harm even though it is largely ineffective as well. The police officer in *The Conjuring* and other films represents the idea of security and the power of the state to intervene, even in para"normal" situations. However, like The Church, the state is

unable to respond with any type of life-affirming power. Rather, they exist solely to categorize, confine, and control. Both The Church and the state serve as reactionary social forces against the undestroyable demonic evil within the universe, but the Church maintains center stage. As the primordial evil runs amok across the films unchecked and uncontrolled by the Church or the state, we see that its primary site of destruction is that of the family and the home.

The Family and The Home

Horror films allow viewers space to contend with the dark side of modernity and emerging cultural fears. Like gothic criminology, horror relies on its ability to confront issues in fantastical and horrific ways. As culture rapidly expands and changes under neoliberalism, the horror genre has responded to social conditions through the introduction of the final girl, the emergence of sympathetic villains and anti-heroes, increased nihilism, elevated horror, and an over reliance on body-based horror through torture porn in post 9/11 American culture. However, building from the 1970s, one theme has remained stable and ever present in mass media horror: the assault on the family (Williams, 2014).

Within the conjuring universe, the family is treated as the primary site of disruption from demonic forces and the home of the site of demonic invasion. In fact, *The Nun* is the only film in the universe that is not explicitly focused on the family and the home. The primacy given to the family unit across the universe builds on a cultural orthotaxy that insists there is a correct way of being within the social order. Across the films, the Warrens are held out as an idyllic family, while the families that they try to help are, in their own ways, dysfunctional. In *The Conjuring*, the Perrons' home is often

viewed as incomplete and unstable when the father, Walter, is traveling for work. Dysfunctional dynamics are seen in *Annabell*e as well when John is largely absent from the home, leaving Mia and their newborn daughter Leah to bear the weight of demonic activity alone. The minor story arc of the Higgins' murder highlights the introduction of evil into the family home as life-ending and violent, an example of child-raising gone wrong. Similarly, in *Annabelle Creation*, the Mullins' family is left in ruin after the death of their young daughter, and the orphaned girls are placed in harm's way as they are without the protective force of the family. In *The Devil Made Me Do It* the family is struggling to contend with the absence of their adult daughter Debbie, who has recently started cohabitating with Arne. This theme becomes present again in *The Conjuring 2*, the family is headed by a single matriarch and experiences economic precarity. The family situation is distressing enough to the children that they make a homemade spirit board to ask when their father will come home. When compared to the Warrens, a true nuclear family with traditional gender roles and loving relationships, the families who suffer from demonic activity seem to be responsible for their suffering due to their misalignment with idealized family structures. In other words, the disrupted nature of their home lives is a pathologized way to invite evil in without making any attempts to do so.

Under neoliberalism, the fantasies associated with the family, a site of our most durable social relationships, "are fraying" (Berlant; 2011;3). In the 1940s, when neoliberalism first introduced its economic principles into society, there were clear boundaries between spheres of operation. At first, these boundaries set the home and family as a different space built on values of operative and relational need to support

kindship systems from the outside world. Despite being a universe created around demonic forces and metaphysical threat, the *Conjuring* films are still concerned with threats from outside the home that would seek harm and ruination to nostalgic constructions of the family.

One of the earliest scenes in *Annabelle* shows John and Mia returning from church when Mia tells John that they have to start locking their door because “it’s a different world now.” Later that same night, after the murder of the Higgins’ family next door, Mia is assaulted by two unknown individuals in her home. Over the course of the rest of the film, much of the paranormal activity suggests a living intruder in the home. When Mia confronts John about her experiences, he paternalistically dismisses her with “You’ve got to remember that we moved here to get away from what happened. We packed up our clothes; we packed up our furniture; we packed up the good memories. But the fears and the anxieties, we promised to leave those behind.”

In *The Conjuring*, Carolyn investigates sounds she assumes are her children playing but finds that they are all sleeping. Suddenly, she hears a crash from downstairs and all their family pictures have fallen off the wall. In the distance, she hears clapping and the sounds of furniture being moved. Up until this point, the paranormal activity in the home has not been incredibly pronounced and the sounds coming from the darkness of her home seem as though they could be caused by an intruder. In another scene, her husband, who is often not as present due to his job and financial responsibility, explores other sounds that seem to suggest they emanate from a living intruder in the home. However, as the paranormal activity increases day by day, it is the Warrens who reveal that a demonic entity lives among and attached to them. This

theme takes a turn in *The Devil Made Me Do It* though, as the murder of Bruno, despite Arne's possession, reminds viewers that pain and suffering can be brought on by anyone at any time, even in our own homes where we are never safe.

The weaving of external threats throughout a universe concerned with demonic possession highlights the ways in which family decay in American society is tied to narratives around dangerous others. While this distinction is largely concentrated within the conjuring universe, it is less present in other horror films which are largely concerned with dangerous others *or* paranormal entities, but not both. The marrying of the two dangers is one defining aspect of the neoliberal gothic that makes it distinct from other horror films. However, its insistence on family dangers is clearly in line with both the horror genre more broadly and current sociopolitical conditions in which family degradation is framed in economic terms (Cooper, 2017).

The reemergence of neoliberalism in the 1980s provided no distinction between the private and public sphere. The time setting of the conjuring universe as a site of "true" horror is situated between the first introduction of neoliberalism, as a logic divorced from domesticity, and the full infiltration of neoliberal logics in the home during the 1980s. In the current moment in which *The Conjuring* was produced, the domestic sphere is part of the larger public project of neoliberalism where market values and family values are the same (Galioto, 2016). The tension felt between overly romantic views of family life in the past and the current moment is evident in the films. The normative structures of the family are taken for granted, much like the necessary involvement of the church. The infiltration of the possessing evil into the family unit is held out as its own form of horror that consumes much of the screen time in the films.

Thus, the fact that much of the film takes place in the claustrophobic, dark, domestic spaces of “home” lends a neoliberal logic to the austerity of invasion and attack.

The family as an institutional fantasy has only succeeded through gendered and generational exercises of power where some members flourished, and others were deeply exploited. Under traditional models, the sexual division of labor, categorized by a male bread winner and an unrecognized female domestic laborer, provided the requirements for social reproduction to be achieved on a micro daily scale. This social formation came to define one of the hallmarks of democratic socialism in the twentieth century, as the demand for a family wage was dependent on this model of exploitation (Garrett and Voela, 2016). However, under neoliberalism, this concept of the family has begun to crumble as logics have shifted from concerns around labor to concerns around capital. The presentation of gender in the conjuring universe, and the return to “normalcy” after demonic disruption and possession, is indicative of the way neoliberal power exerts itself in our most intimate spheres. Under neoliberalism, mothers are transformed into agents of the state as social institutions, such as education and the courts, as they regulate the idea of family desirability (Donzelot, 1997). In the conjuring universe, a possessed mother represents a breakdown of biopolitical control in the domestic sphere, most horrifically visualized as Bathsheba, a witch who killed her own children, who is the presence linked to the possession.

Over the universe, Lorraine Warren is held out as a model wife within the confines of traditional gender roles that the films seem to ache for. She is a gifted clairvoyant, dedicated wife, caring mother, and altruistic in relation to her psychic gifts and time, yet she is viewed as incredibly fragile by her husband, Ed. In *The Conjuring*,

viewers are introduced to Lorraine after a horrible investigation that left her physically and psychically scarred. After this occurrence, Ed insists that she will not be working on any more cases, yet she agrees to help Carolyn Perron. Similarly, in *The Devil Made Me Do It*, Lorraine is constantly worried about Ed's health after he suffered a heart attack during the exorcism of David. We see Lorraine's caring nature come through in *The Conjuring 2* as well when we see a vision of Lorraine watching her child while reading her Bible before Valak, the primal demon from *The Nun* where the universe's origin is grounded, causes her to desecrate the book as she cares for her child. Lorraine also interacts with the families she helps in a caring and nurturing way, often helping with household chores as Ed provides fatherly-like guidance and entertainment to children. The influence of the Warrens as positivist investigators and mediaries to The Church, coupled with their consistent gendered performances, highlights the ways in which biopower influences the home. As the duo assist families in ridding themselves of evil, they are also bringing them back into the fold of orthotax understandings of the family through faith, affirming a neoliberal and conservative reliance upon conventional family configurations.

These family norms can be seen in the dramatic exorcism scene of Carolyn Perron in *The Conjuring* when we see her wrestled into a chair and then strapped down to be covered with a sheet. Ed throws holy water on Carolyn, and her screams cause the basement walls to shake. The screams of a possessed mother causing the walls of the home to shake reinforces to viewers the important role that mothering plays to the traditional American family. As an incredibly intense exorcism begins to end, Ed shouts, "Bathsheba, by the power of God, I condemn you to hell" as Lorraine grabs Carolyn's

head and urges her to remember the day she would never forget: when her family picture was taken on the beach. From this exorcism, we see that neither divine intervention nor The Church was able to save the Perron family; rather a mother's love was able to overcome evil that could not be controlled.

The crisis of the welfare state, brought on by neoliberal logics, has positioned the family as an institution of biopolitical power rather than a private institution. The family is now "a protector of private property, of bourgeois ethic of accumulation of the state" (Donzelot, 1997; 5). It is a "queen and prisoner" (7) of the neoliberal world as it is denounced for its egocentrism and exploitation while also being fully essential to the exercise of state power. As an institution concerned with private property, the family stands fully captive to neoliberal logics, and the conjuring universe gives emphasis to this literal form in the use of possession.

In The *Conjuring 2*, we begin to see the home and the family not only as a social institution but as a form of property itself. From the outset of the paranormal activity, the demon Valak controls the spirit of Bill Wilkins, a 72-year-old man that passed away in the family's home. Over the course of the film Bill's voice is heard through Janet's body screaming, "My House!" He also growls through Janet, stating, "You don't belong here. This is my home. Get out now!" In neoliberal society, there is an explicit focus on property rights and how property rights can be used to restructure power within and outside of institutional frameworks (McIntosh, & Hatcher, 2010). Increasingly, property is no longer tied to physical parcels but is ever expanding to include a variety of other things ranging from our genetic material to bandwidths. As property continues to shape our courts and our power structures, its presence in relation to demonic possession

does more than simply conjure images of classic haunted houses. Rather, it situates the concept of ownership in ways related to the family as a declining social and moral institution deeply tied to individual failures and personal responsibility that are also gendered and patriarchal.

When considering the role of ownership and the family within the confines of neoliberal society, possession represents yet another form of ownership. As our ideas of what can be owned in society shift, we have seen an emergence of possession horror based on the idea that we can be fully dispossessed of our own selves in relation to primordial evil. In *The Conjuring*, Lorraine explains that "Demonic spirits don't possess things; they possess people. It wanted to get inside of you." As the primordial evils within the universe target their intended victims and wreak havoc on families and homes, the ultimate threat is that there will be a total loss of self. With the minor exception of Frenchie's possession at the end of *The Nun*, and the subsequent recording of his exorcism shown during *The Conjuring*, we see the evil is primarily concerned with possessing women unless it is controlled by a human actor, such as in *The Devil Made Me Do It* when Isla targets Arnie and David. This focus on women as victims of possession speaks to the disruption in the American family as unrecognized domestic labor has given way to the logics of capital.

As neoliberal logics continue to tear at the fraying ends of idealized family life, we see that our most intimate spaces are not safe from logics and forces that seek to destroy. Rather, the best hope for our families is a reordering engagement with the forces of neoliberalism, one that is both symptomatic and affirmative of its ordered understandings of the social world and containment. These ideas can be seen in the

conjuring universe, which reminds viewers of the total decay of the American family as neoliberal logics infect the home and destroy the role of motherhood. Its insistence on traditional gender roles and the desire to return women back to the home speaks to a cultural romanticism of a past when the domestic sphere was separate from neoliberal logics, and whose valorization operates at the expense of women.

Summary

The emergence of a true horror genre to express neoliberal anxieties through the continued use of gothic metonym highlights the complex ways in which gothic criminology, horror, and neoliberalism intersect as a site of study. Neoliberal gothic productions shirk traditional gothic understandings of enlightenment by focusing on truth and objectivity. Furthermore, they disregard emergent horror trends, such as the introduction of sympathetic transgressors, the primacy of the final girl, the removal of hope, and societal moves to “elevated horror,” which intentionally provide commentary on issues of race, gender, and class. Rather, the neoliberal gothic employs familiar metonym in new ways to signify changing anxieties. In the conjuring universe, we see how gothic stylings coupled with an insistence on truth and “real” situations provides space to contend with larger sociopolitical and socioeconomic forces under neoliberalism.

In this chapter, I have outlined the ways in which the conjuring universe provides viewers with the opportunity to engage with anxieties around institutional decay under neoliberalism. Over several films, we see that the power of The Church and the state is both ineffective and inescapable. However, neoliberal logics regarding power and institutions are deeply embedded in these films as well. In this way, the conjuring

universe serves to reinforce boundaries around institutions created in neoliberalism, such as the assumption that biopolitical power can save individuals, the idea that institutional pathways are necessary, the primacy given to surveillance in containment and control efforts, and the belief that the family is the primary social unit with which we should all be concerned.

The assumed and taken for granted nature of institutions within the universe coupled with the blatant lack of effectiveness of the institutions highlights the way in which neoliberal gothic work serves to reify and challenge boundaries of possibility. Furthermore, the *Conjuring* reliance on gothic motifs to signal the difference in internal geographies and external geographies as sites of harm marks another distinction in the emergence of neoliberal gothic criminology. Much like horror, neoliberal gothic criminology responds to and is created by the social conditions in which it is produced while using popular and available stylistic devices. In this way, neoliberal gothic criminology is easy to consume, representative of the social world it inhabits, and an exercise in boundary making and reconstruction that, like the films, leaves much unsettled.

CHAPTER 7

POSSESSION AND DISPOSSESION

The neoliberal gothic established by the conjuring universe is a site plagued by neoliberal ideologies told through horrifying and fantastical lenses. The presentation of true horror encourages viewers to take the contents of the universe at face value rather than assuming the evil and all its correlates are works of dark fantasy. The power of neoliberalism as an ideology is, due to its convergences of capitalism with the self, now understood as the natural order of things, like biological law, leaving little room to intervene in a world whose horrors often reify its logics. Within the universe are several neoliberal ideologies, such as the merging of faith-based positivism[2], path dependance on decaying institutions, the predominance of forms of surveillance, and the importance of the nuclear family, which operate as underexamined natural orders. This taken-for-granted nature of neoliberal logics stands in stark contrast to the cultural anxieties within the universe as displayed through the repetitious, fantastic disintegration of our social world. At first glance, these anxieties seem to be limited to the family and its associated cis-het patriarchal gender roles as the films are packed with romantic nostalgia and institutional decay related to the biopolitical power of forces that seek to do us harm. The romantic nostalgia that seeps into the film, in both its aesthetic style and its story arcs, quite literally conjures in its yearning, a time when omnipresent evil did not define our lives. Through its horrific romance and spotlight on disintegration, the conjuring universe allows for viewers to participate in a popular, sociological analysis of the underside of neoliberal logics that are taken as social fact.

[2] The view that there is a single reality that is independent from people or their experiences.

As a site of boundary creation and renegotiation, the universe places failing social institutions, such as the state and the family, at the forefront of viewers' minds. While neoliberal logics wreak havoc across public and private spheres leaving individuals reduced to economic terms and embodiments of biopolitical power, the demons in the conjuring universe impact all spaces and individuals which are seemingly part of the atmosphere of the home, family, and personhood. Caught in between mystical and omnipresent evil and ineffective decaying institutions, individuals are left in a place of stasis. This is most apparent in constructs of the liberal and individualized subjects, such as the characters that emerge from these films. Ever present and always in danger, the individuals in the conjuring universe are given no options for self-salvation, as demonic forces seek to control their bodies and take ownership of their souls.

Pretty Dolls and Pained Bodies

Horror, especially in post 9/11 cinema, is preoccupied with the body. In the wake of a plethora of torture porn (Edelstein, 2006), which are neo-grindhouse films with prolonged series of extreme violence, horror viewers saw the emergence of a new brand of horror defined by sympathetic transgressors and elevated horror. However, the focus on the body remained a defining aspect of the genre. Even in elevated horror films, such as *It Follows*, the body and the inescapability of death take center stage as an entity passed through sexual intercourse stalks its newest victim, Jay, to kill her. The focus on the body coupled with growth of overt nihilism within horror leaves viewers with films where it is understood that most of the characters will die. Films ranging from *The Blair Witch Project* to *Halloween Kills* all depend upon narratives in which death is the

inevitable outcome for most, if not all, of the characters in the film. The overt focus on the body and its haunting relationship with spirals of death within the horror genre has left little room for considerations on how our concepts of the self interact with larger social forces outside of life-ending violence. While there are examples of a pathological self, such as the classics *Psycho* and *Nightmare on Elm Street*, very little attention has been given to the individual beyond distinct forms of mental pathologies or the mortal vulnerability and tearing apart of the physical body. However, adject bodies play a large role in the conjuring universe, highlighting a shift in the ways we understand the self and the body. In this chapter, I examine how this overt focus on the body and bodily suffering is deeply tied to global capitalism and the use of human bodies as means of labor extraction and exploitation.

Global capitalism has often been described as a form of inscription on the body through the role of labor and production as well as the expansion of consumptive practices (Freeman, 2011). One need only think of the great deal of work done on the effects of global capitalism on the bodies of the exploited, such as migrant agricultural laborers (Harrison, 2008) and international domestic workers (Liu, 2015). A body that labors is shaped and disciplined by neoliberalism in subtle and overt ways. McNally (2011) asserts that in the capitalist market era, we live in an “age of monsters and of the body-panics they excite” (1). From vampiric capitalism to banks on the verge of collapse which threaten to swallow citizens and their modes of survival alive, grotesque capitalism has become essential to the fabric of everyday life. Body snatching, ritual murder, organ theft, and all forms of body horror point to the monstrosity of the market as it threatens “the integrity of human personhood” (McNally, 2011; 3). The conjuring

universe, and its popularity, touches on similar themes related to the body and its consumption. As the forces of global capital and neoliberalism continue to wreak havoc on the human body, the primordial evil within the universe seeks to break the body's will and use it for its own gain: a total loss of self.

One of the more horrifying ways in which this theme materializes in the conjuring universe is through the horror convention of the child's doll. In *Annabelle*, text appears on the screen explaining, "Since the beginning of civilization, dolls have been beloved by children, cherished by collectors and used in religious rites as conduits for good and evil." This disclosure is immediately followed by a close shot of the Annabelle doll, unblinking and smiling into the distance. Dolls in both gothic fiction and popular culture have long been used, in gender-normative ways, to represent the boundaries between girlhood and womanhood, beauty, innocence, and fragility (Frever, 2009). The presentation of a doll as an empty vessel for manipulation highlights that a body, with a lack of self-determination, is merely a tool, especially a feminized one whose evil is more insidious due to its markers of innocence. As a tool for the demonic, the Annabelle doll is used to terrorize individuals that the entity seeks to possess, – and the flat blankness of the doll as a lifeless toy captures the vulnerabilities of the neoliberal self. This doll remains flat and lifeless as a fetishized item of consumption.

However, the figure of the doll is not limited to one film in the Universe's franchise. In *Annabelle Creation*, as the Mullins return from church, they experience a flat tire. As Mrs. Mullins attempts to flag down a passing car, her husband, Samuel, loses a bolt as his daughter, Annabelle, runs into the road to retrieve it. While fetching the lost bolt, she is struck, dramatically and out of nowhere, by a passing motorist. A

baby doll with a crushed head lays in a dusty road, reminding viewers of the fragility of the body and its link to the self. The hopelessness of the scene, knowing the empty doll represents the death of a young girl, instills viewers with a sense of how important the body and the relationship to the self is in terms of life. The relationship between the body and the self, viewed through the lens of porcelain dolls, is reinforced elsewhere in the film. Years after Annabelle Mullin's death, a group of orphans arrive at the derelict Mullins' farmhouse. Here, Linda and Janice get their own bedroom which is cluttered by broken and unfinished dolls. Later, Linda, an orphaned girl who lives in the Mullins decaying farmhouse, explores the farmhouse and notices a door that opens to a crawl space under the stairs. Once she is under the stairs, the door shuts, and she hears a sound behind her. Turning around, she sees the Annabelle doll smiling from the shadows before it is yanked back by an unseen force. In another scene, after another orphan named Janice finds the Annabelle doll hidden in a closet lined with Bible pages, a figure shrouded by a sheet approaches her from behind. While the sheet is slowly pulled from the figure as it walks, the sheet drops to the floor and reveals nothing underneath the sheet. The absence of a physical form under the sheet, juxtaposed with the moments where Janice finds the doll and Linda sees it moves under the stairs, reminds viewers that the power of the evil does not lie solely in the object it is associated with; rather the object is simply a tool for the entity while the self is a vessel.

Annabelle, the doll, highlights for viewers the power of a body as a tool for manipulation, devoid of any meaning on its own. As a conduit for the primordial demonic evil in the series, the doll would seem to be the perfect vessel. However, consumers of the universe know that a demon cannot possess an object, only a person. Therefore, a

perfect empty vessel is not an inhabitable space capable of reproducing the evil but only a tool for communication. The unfinished and broken dolls remind viewers of the fragility of our bodies, the emptiness of a body devoid of the self, and its ties to consumption. Unusable and mangled, the imperfect dolls are cast aside in the home, left to ruin and decay. This message is much more salient with the introduction of Janice, who is suffering from limited mobility due to polio. Beyond the eerie unsettling nature of the dolls, their half-finished nature, discarded and scattered about an unkempt room in an isolated and derelict farmhouse, calls viewers' attention to the disconnectedness of our bodies and those around us. Rejected and forgotten, the bodies of the dolls remind viewers that we are only useful when we are a finished, normative project within the cast of capital and neoliberalism. Later, Janice comes to remind viewers that if not disposed of, bodies that are imperfect are made to suffer further until they can be made useful.

As mentioned, the role of the body within modern capitalist society has often been tied to its normativity and functions. Within criminology exists a sordid history in which the discipline relied heavily on eugenics to create the idea of a born criminal (Rafter, 1997). Projected middle class fears inspired by mass urbanization, immigration, the burden of the rural poor, and growing bodies of literature on degeneracy and eugenics added to cultural understandings of criminality marked by physical difference. In American culture, this kind of physical marker of deviance and criminality was often conveyed to the public through gothic storytelling within the media and cultural images (Higgins, & Swartz, 2017), beginning in the years following the Emancipation Proclamation and continuing today. Powered by eugenics thinking, physical difference

as a sign of monstrosity and criminality has been used to justify all manners of social horror, from ethnic cleansing to forced labor (Wetzell, 2000; Becker and Wetzell, 2006), with lasting impacts on our judicial system today, such as support for stop and frisk policies and racial profiling (Simon, 2020).

In neoliberalism we see that nonnormative bodies create a sense of horror that "permeates the boundary between the self and the other" (Stryker, 2014; 19), which serves to reaffirm boundaries that are threatened in its own way. Within gothic literature, physical nonnormativity, cast as aberration, has often been used to mark character as "Other" (Anolik, 2014). Across criminology and gothic literature, we find that enlightened definitions of a healthy human body, often presented in gendered and raced terms, contribute to orthotax understandings of correct ways of being. In neoliberalism, where bodies are tools for labor extraction and capital production, nonnormativity is still regarded as a significant site for exploration. As Kristeva (1982) notes, "There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated" (1). Within the neoliberal gothic confines of The conjuring universe, we see physical nonnormativity that exists beyond the traditional concerns of monstrosity related to physical othering. Rather, physical nonnormativity within the universe serves to reinforce the vulnerability inherent in existing in a body that is not useful for capitalist labor extraction, such as the lame child, the murderous mother, the pregnant female, and other roles. The monster is not the nonnormative body, but rather the evil that detects that vulnerability and seeks to break that body for its own gain.

This line of thinking is apparent throughout the cinematic the *Conjuring's* universe. In *Annabelle Creation*, Janice must use crutches and leg braces because she has complications from polio. Her physical limitations make her the target of demonic possession and work to reinforce the idea of "broken" bodies allowing vulnerability. Similarly, in *Annabelle*, Mia is pregnant with her first child. Her pregnancy is used to make her more vulnerable to the evil and introduce maternal neurosis, which is frequently invoked through her husband's dismissal of her concerns related to the paranormal activity she is experiencing. Finally, in *The Conjuring 2*, Billy has a stutter that leaves him isolated at school. As the paranormal activity begins to plague the family, he is one of the first members to experience the demonic entity. Physical nonnormativity within the conjuring universe is not limited to concepts of monstrosity, even though the evil does appear in monstrous forms; rather the presence of physical disability and nonnormative bodies highlights that those individuals are at greater risk of demonic manipulation, terror, and possession, in part because they are isolated from a larger societal capitalist normative order.

Annabelle, the doll, reminds viewers of a body that can be fully manipulated and devoid of any type of pain response to external stimuli while the insistence on nonnormativity across the films highlights the permeability of boundaries around orthotax understandings of the body related to value extraction and exploitation. The body of characters that the evil impact in The conjuring universe is often plagued by signs of abuse or left with physical scars from the paranormal events that take place. We see that nonnormative bodies are often the ones most targeted by the evil aligning the presence of physical nonnormativity with precarity and vulnerability. While not

monstrous individuals, the victims of paranormal body horror represent an abject that is punished for its inability to align with physical normativity.

In addition to the examples already mentioned, more instances of this analysis arise within the films. Soon after arriving at the Mullins' home in *Annabelle Creation*, Samuel shows Janice a chairlift he made for her. However, this chairlift is later used against Janice in a demonic attack that leaves her in a wheelchair with doctors unsure she will ever walk again. After the accident, Janice is wheeled into a derelict barn by a demonic force. Once she is trapped inside, she is helpless as the demon takes the form of Annabelle Higgins and attacks her once again. This attack leads to her possession. Likewise, in *Annabelle*, Mia's pregnancy and her later status as a mother make her more vulnerable to the demonic as it uses her status against her, leading her to believe that her new baby, Leah, is the target of the possession. Before Mia gives birth, Annabelle Higgins breaks into her home after murdering her parents whispering, "I like your doll," as she clutches the Annabelle doll from the shadows. This serves to draw viewers' attention back to the physical form associated with evil. As Mia struggles to make sense of the situation, a man emerges from the shadows and stabs her in the stomach. While she survives the attack, Mia's pregnancy is considered at risk and she is placed on bed rest, leaving her isolated and struggling from the violence of that night.

In *The Conjuring 2*, Billy repeats a nursery rhyme to try and help him get rid of his stutter. The catchy and simple rhyme is:

"There was a crooked man, and he walked a crooked mile

He found a crooked sixpence upon a crooked stile

He bought a crooked cat, which caught a crooked mouse

And they all lived together in a little crooked house”

After the demonic activity in the Hogsdon home began to escalate, Peggy takes her children to a neighbor’s house. That night, Billy gets up after he hears the dog’s bell ring to let the dog out. When he opens the door, the dog transforms into the distorted and broken crooked man who chases Billy while singing the rhyme. Janet, the intended victim of Valak’s possession, enters the hall and speaks with the voice of the crooked man as the fireplace begins to shake. In this scene, we see the evil entity exploiting Billy’s physical nonnormativity to terrorize the rest of his family. Furthermore, the presence of the crooked man as a type of monster signals the abnormality of the situation that the family finds themselves in. The family, through their economic hardship and single parent status, are already in a “crooked” situation. The misaligned form of the man in the nursery rhyme highlights him as a monstrous force that seeks to further degrade the stability of the home by exploiting physical nonnormativity among a family member.

Over the time of the horror genre, different subgenres expressed certain traits that were particular to their storylines. Elevated horror, the highly contested new form of horror that burst onto the scene in the mid-2000s, is characterized by a discontinuance of horror that is rooted in bodily pain in films such as *The Witch,* the story of panic and despair in New England after a young boy vanishes, and *The Wind*, a feminist take on the life of women in the American plains and prairie madness. The role of bodily pain and suffering in horror adds to the cult of commiseration related to the genre, in that the pain of the characters is understood and believed from the outset. Physical

nonnormativity within the conjuring universe reflects the shift to elevated horror in which the body is not the sole source of terror and pain, but rather a correlate of it while not providing direct social commentary. Much like the use of dolls and crooked men in the conjuring universe, elevated horror does not rely on the body as a source of horror, but rather treats it as a symbolic and aesthetic tool. However, the horror of the *Conjuring* franchise is not devoid of bodily pain and harm. Rather, the universe inhabits a space where bodily pain and suffering is both a source of terror and a symbolic tool. As a symbol, the body in the *Conjuring* films can be understood through gendered lenses, lenses related to labor extraction and dispossession, and as a sign of the normative family. However, symbolism related to the body can also be understood as reflective of power and control. In almost every film within the universe, we see a continued reliance on blood and bile to signify the transfer of power from the individual to the demonic or vise versa. Though these images appear within the films, their relevance to other theories is also notable. This can be found in symbols of blood being has long been used within gothic criminology to signify perversions of power and biopolitical control over the population as capitalist and monarchs seek to expand their stranglehold across the globe.

The presence of physical pain as a response to vulnerability and the breaking of the body as evil seeks to consume it, coupled with the role of bodily functions as a symbol for power and control, position the films in the conjuring universe between elevated horror and its predecessor in post 9/11 consumer culture with its predilection for extreme gore and violence. The body and all its functions are necessary conquests of the primordial evil as it seeks to infect the lives of everyone in the home, but it is not

the sole aim of the demonic. Rather, the death of the body and the suffering that leads to it, are unfortunate byproducts in evils' attempts to infiltrate every aspect of its host. The discipling, or torture, of the human form stands as something meant to break a person's will. In *The Conjuring*, the Warrens explain to the Perron family that there are various levels of demonic activity. First, people experience demonic infestation, "the whispering, the footsteps, the feeling of another presence," followed by oppression, "where the victim, and its usually the one who is the most psychologically vulnerable, is targeted specifically by an external force. It breaks the victim down and crushes their will." Once these two stages are complete, the final result is possession. In this way, the film in the conjuring universe helps us explore the full spectrum of biopolitical control when demons use the body as a tool to break the will of an individual.

The demons' overt focus on nonnormative bodies, coupled with the presence of the doll as a conduit for evil, remind viewers that biopolitical governance exists on a spectrum where discipline of the body is seen as a more visceral form of control that is enacted when regulatory control fails. In neoliberal society, discipline is an assumed biproduct of market regulations that are internalized through individual projects of self-improvement and increasing marketability. However, a body devoid of any internalized logic is merely a tool, a symbol of life that is devoid of meaning. Its abjection is rooted in its inability to contribute to global capitalist labor extraction and development. Nonnormative bodies that carry some internalized logics, but are unable to fully participate in the market, are subjected to control and violence that seeks to make the body more normative or punish it for its difference. The human body, and the cultural body that it represents, reminds viewers of the role of discipline in relation to neoliberal

agenda and power. On the other end of the spectrum, biopolitical forces that seek to exert power over life, through a control of the self and the breaking of personal will, are also available for viewer consumption within the conjuring universe.

The Self

Under the ever-increasing weight of neoliberalism, we find that all individuals are imprinted with economic logics which, in turn, predisposes human life to precarity and dis-possession. The weight of global capital moves beyond the body and effects all aspects of our personhood. *The Managed Heart* (Hochschild, 2012) expands on Mill's (1951) work by examining the "personality market" beyond the ways in which emotion, demeanor, and personality work in the white-collar marketplace to consider the labor that is required to produce affect. Under neoliberalism, the prominence of affective labor defined by "a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, [and] passion" (Hardt, 1999) occupies an "ever expanding dimension of labor and life" (Freeman, 2011). With this being said, the role of affect and personal conceptions of the self have largely been absent from modern horror discourse until now. The conjuring universe reminds us that, just as vampires, werewolves, and zombies have ambled across the silver screen offering us pale after images of the monsters of capitalist markets, the demonic has equally infected our cultural imagination. Our physical monsters, with all their gothic trappings and ideological weight, call to mind the disciplining power of the state and neoliberal ideologies embedded within. However, the demonic as a possessing, unconquerable, and invisible evil reminds viewers that the absence of physical punishment does not mean that we are free from control. As a biopolitical force, the demonic reminds us that control over the self does not require the overt use of our

bodies. Tropes of historical horror, such as the serial killer, organ thief, and body snatcher, still engage viewers in market monstrosity as discipline of the body remains an ever-present force in society. However, our new evil is far more sinister as it seeks to control more than our labor. The primordial, world reshaping, and soul-inhabiting power of demonic evil reminds us that far more than our bodies are influenced by social forces. Rather, our very souls are subject to control and manipulation.

This control that evil exerts within the conjuring universe is evident across all the films. One powerful example of this occurs in *Annabelle*. After the paranormal activity in their apartment reaches frightening heights, John and Mia reach out to their priest for help. When he arrives and learns that most of the activity has been associated with the doll Annabelle Higgins held as she died, the priest explains, "Demons can sometimes use objects as conduits to achieve their desired goal: our souls." Mia worries that the evil is trying to take her daughters soul, but the priest explains that Leah is not the intended victims since souls cannot be taken; rather, they must be offered. As a safety measure, the priest takes the doll until he can find someone to help the young couple. As he is driving away, a demonic voice comes over the radio taunting, "May God have mercy on your soul," as the doll's eyes glow red in the backseat. Once he arrives at the church, he is thrown back from the doors and lays bleeding next to the conduit doll. Later, as Mia frantically searches for her crying baby hidden by the demonic force, she screams, "What do you want from me?" At this moment of chaos and panic-driven thoughts, a red crayon rolls from under Leah's crib. Mia looks up and sees "her soul" scribbled across the ceiling. As Mia frantically searches Leah, she begins to plead, "Please! There has to be another way!" When she looks over, "Your soul" is written on a

window that slowly opens. Mia intends to commit suicide, thereby sacrificing her soul for her daughter but is saved by John as her friend Evelyn grabs the Annabelle doll before plunging to her death. In the distance, sirens sound. Similarly, in *The Nun*, a nun hangs herself from her window to escape the control of Valak, the possessing evil that resides within the bowels of the convent. We also see suicide implied in *The Conjuring*, when the apparition of a woman, formerly possessed by Bathsheba, appears to characters in the film. The sacrificing of the body to save the soul of an individual highlights that bodily pain is not the true source of horror within the cinematic universe. Rather, the total loss of the self comes to be the greatest fear.

In *Annabelle*, the taking of a soul is the primary objective of the demonic. However, in *Annabelle Creation*, the same entity seeks to possess, and successful does, the body and soul of Janice, who takes on the name Annabelle. Many years later, well into her adulthood, Annabelle Higgins murders her family, and with her death, she transfers the evil that has inhabited her body back to the doll. This theme can be seen in *The Devil Made Me Do It* as well, when Isla, the occultist, makes a deal with the demonic for power in exchange for three sacrificed souls. Unlike the evil in *Annabelle*, the demonic does not require a willfulness from the soul it takes, either via possession or murder. Rather, their souls were sacrificed by another for their personal gain. This concept is not limited to the cinematic universe, though. In neoliberalism, we see that the self as a personal development project is not always done willfully, but rather results from structural forces beyond our control that inhabit the core of our personhood.

To better understand the loss of self in neoliberalism, we must explore the concept of alienation. Alienation, simply stated, is the “concept that describes the

estrangement of individuals from one another, or from a specific situation or process" (Marshall, ed., 1994; 9). In neoliberalism, alienation is inevitable as the economic sphere is replicated through all other spaces (Wrenn, 2014), including alienation – an unrecognizability – of one's very own self. Our personal identity, or self-reflective conscious self, is formed in relation to social identities. These social identities are assigned by our surroundings and relational social identity, which is formed when a personal identity interacts with our surroundings. The pervasiveness of neoliberal logics into our social spheres has drastically reshaped the process of personal identity work, as our social identities and relation identities are continually made and remade in the image of neoliberal logics. Through the self-reflective process of personal identity formation, individuals come to embody neoliberal principals as alienated persons. In this way, the physical body of the individual, and arguably the body of the nation, is not the only source of neoliberal control. Rather, neoliberal ideology becomes part of the fabric of personhood as individuals are alienated from themselves and others.

The conception of alienation is not new to film. Films that highlight the strain of alienation exist beyond the confines of horror and include, but are not limited to, *Taxi Driver* (Clapp, 2005), *The Piano Teacher* (Wyatt, 2005), and *The Matrix* (Dahms, 2005). The inclusion of alienation in films across genres are different in many ways, with most depictions of alienation in horror being rooted in physical isolation. Dahms (2005) explores two primary depictions of alienation as related to *The Matrix*, touching on one trajectory where the experience of alienation is a downside of the "modern condition" (110). In this discussion, Dahms (2005) traces the ways in which *The Matrix* highlights the four primary levels of alienation: alienation from nature, alienation from oneself,

alienation from species-being, and alienation from other human beings (Mészáros ,2006). These levels of alienation can be seen as themes in other films outside of *The Matrix,* though this one gives the most extensive understanding of them. However, films within the conjuring universe explore alienation from the self in ways that have rarely been given thoughtful attention in other horror films, even those related to possession by giving weighted attention to how the process leading to possession serves to decenter the self.

In instances of possession, not demonic oppression meant to break the spirit of the victim, we see that the possessed becomes unrecognizable and totally alienated from those around them. For Carolyn Perron, her possession was intended to have her murder her children. For Janice, her possession results in engagement with a Manson-like cult and the murder of her family. For Mia, this occurs in the death of her only friend. For Arne, his possession resulted in the death of his boss and a stint in jail. For David, his demonic possession led to the possession of Arne after he stabbed his father and Ed Warren suffered a heart attack. For the Hodgson family, their already tenuous family situation began to disintegrate further as the family lived in separate homes to try and protect themselves. The failure of institutions to protect the possessed meant that the only source of salvation for them was in their relations to one another which were almost effectively destroyed. This idea appears in neoliberalism, when the tendency to individualize suffering and salvation and the responsibilization of the self in the face of overwhelming possessing evil, or neoliberal logics, is not a solution but rather a symptom of the possession that is recreated on the silver screen.

This idea is furthered even more when we examine a scene between Arne and David from *The Devil Made Me Do It.* After Arne saves David from demonic possession, David visits Arne in prison and explains, “I remember what it felt like. You’re always cold, and you’re never alone. That’s why you can’t sleep. Because it’s never quiet in your head. Sometimes, you think something, then you’re not sure if it was really you. But now you’re seeing it. It’s here with you. And it’s telling you to do things.” The inability of David or Arne to distinguish their own thoughts from that of the possessing demon highlights the ways in which a victim of possession is alienated from themselves. Their thoughts are not their own, and the actions they commit while possessed are not what they would do. However, they are powerless to stop these thoughts and actions. Much like neoliberal logics become internalized as part of personal identity formation, the demon as a possessor reminds viewers that we are not always in control of ourselves, our thoughts, or our bodies. As demons seek to whittle their targets’ resolve, they manipulate the environment and individuals’ senses to blur the boundaries between reality and fiction so that one’s own senses cannot be trusted. This concept is not all too different in the case of neoliberal logic either; as an individual is submitted to surroundings in a neoliberal setting, their identities, thoughts, and actions change as a result.

Despite critics’ general disregard for later installments in the universe, the films’ popularity and box office success demonstrate some kind of attraction into the evergreen American trait of paranoia that does not give way to sensationalism or overacting. The paranoia that viewers are introduced to in these inaugural films are also present in both traditional and modern gothic tales. Gothic criminology has relied heavily

on paranoia and a sense of unease as communicative devices when making real world horrors into fantastical situations, and it clearly has staying power across mediums and time periods. In interrogating what constitutes neoliberal gothic boundaries related to possession, we see that paranoia is at every turn. Whether our characters are distrusting of others, their senses, systems of power that are intended to protect them, or their very selves, their subconscious mistrust is made palpable on screen.

Across the universe, we see that targets of primordial evil are unable to trust their own senses and perceptions as the entities manipulate their environment and minds. In projecting the struggles individuals feel in the wake of disorienting evil, the universe deepens a cult of commiseration in which individuals' understandings of the world and themselves no longer align with the conditions in which they find themselves. Like *The Matrix*, the evil within the conjuring universe is ever present and in control of what an individual experiences. However, unlike *The Matrix*, the evil within the universe does not simply seek to control what an individual experiences in themselves and the environment they live in; rather, it seeks to remake the world through inhabiting an individual instead of simply controlling them. This idea appears with clarity when David is interviewed by Ed and Lorraine Warren about the day he was possessed. He tells them, "I didn't know what happened. It all felt like a dream, and no one believed me when I told them." As a victim of demonic possession, young David was alienated from others when he could not share his story, only to be further alienated when he lost all control of his body to the evil tool hold.

The role of dreams in the conjuring universe serves to trouble the boundaries between "real" life and the affective nature of self-identity formation as well. Across the

universe, we see that characters are physically manipulated in their sleep, suffer from visions in their dreams, and serve as a temporary host for the evil entity without giving way to full possession. However, when they wake, they find themselves thrust back into the grips of possessing evil. The inescapability of the demon, and its ability to constantly respond to individuals attempts to thwart it highlights how neoliberal logics have come to impact every aspect of our identity, so that even when we are aware of its impacts, we are unable to wake up and resist it.

This can be seen in *The Nun*, where the dream state and the act of being suddenly awoken from it are utilized time and again. In one scene, Frenchie, who is later possessed at the end of the film, jerks awake after a dream of a torrent of blood pouring down the abbey steps. Later, Sister Irene is awoken, suddenly and without cause, to be silently stalked by Valak through the abbey. As Irene explores the abbey, she encounters the shadow of Valak displayed across a large cross. This dark and foreboding scene is shrouded in dream-like silence so that it is hard to know if Irene is truly awake or not. Later, after being trapped in the convent overnight and locked in her bedroom, Irene is again awoken from a vision where a statue of the Virgin Mary points to a torrent of blood that thunders down a set of stairs, just as Frenchie had seen previously. As Irene gathers herself, she sees a nun kneeling at her bed feet to pray before a rosary breaks and the nun disappears. The consistent use of waking from a dream state across the film highlights the permeable boundaries between the physical world, our bodies, and our affective selves. The reliance on the dream state to separate the body from the self helps viewers understand that the loss of self is not only tied to physical death and discipline, but to a lack of control over one's thoughts and actions.

The horror of sleep and of waking life in the conjuring universe allows viewers to experience the all-encompassing nature of neoliberalism. Even when characters are not possessed fully by the entity, they are unable to escape it. Much like David and Arne could not distinguish their own thoughts from those of the demons, individuals who experiencing paranormal dreams such as Frenchie and Irene, or instances where victims of paranormal activity sleepwalk in *The Conjuring* and *The Conjuring 2*, the boundaries between the self and the entity are permeable and ever in flux. In these ways, full possession by primordial evil seems to be inevitable while those in proximity to it are also disposed of their selves.

Dispossession

Neoliberalism affects both the body of an individual and their inner geographies of self in pervasive and violent ways ranging from the exertion of biopolitical control to an all-encompassing alienation from the self; from the vulnerability of nonnormativity to the paranoia of distrust of one's own senses, sanity, and awakeness, we see the ways in which neoliberalism transcends into the horror genre Yet, a great deal of the research that has been conducted regarding the role of the body and the self has been diunital in its thinking and presentation, because the body and the self are being presented as separate sites of study while still inexorably linked. A body disciplined through labor and an affective self-disciplined in a similar way are treated as two distinct sites of study, forever entwined but understood on their own terms. However, under neoliberalism, the body and the self both suffer through economic logics always in the favor of capital. This relates to the embodiment of neoliberal practices in the lives of people, which is done partially through the directive that all people should become "entrepreneurs of the self"

(Gidden, 1991). where people are defined by their ability to be an autonomous economic actor that is always responsive to the market. In doing so, the individual is no longer constructed in relational terms, but rather fully inhabited by neoliberal logics. This would be the greatest fear of such a social order: to realize the full horror that one does not have control over one's self in a society where this is the primary value and way to survive. Just as Carolyn Perron in *The Conjuring* had no control over the actions of her body when possessed by Bathsheba as the evil swirled both within her and about her, individuals possessed by neoliberal logics are captured in a whirlwind of economic logics that impact every aspect of their lives, which is a biopolitical horror of the self.

This discussion is further continued when we include gender and portrayals of gender in the mix. In the conjuring universe, we see that evil, while impacting everyone in the home and every relationship, targets women and girls explicitly unless the possession is caused by a living woman, such as the case of Arne and David in *The Devil Made Me Do It*. In neoliberalism, the affective labor that serves to alienate people from themselves has come to define our personal and professional spheres as constructed through gendered lenses (Freeman, 2011). The entrepreneurial nature of personal projects (du Gay, 1996) in neoliberal society insists that individuals must calculate themselves to participate in markets of personality. In this formation, women sit at the crux of tensions where neoliberal subjectivity is characterized by a lack of attention to injury but normalizes harm through an increased focus on personal responsibility (Scharff, 2016). In the conjuring universe, viewers see that women and girls are always the desired target of the primordial possessing evil and that evil takes on a feminine form when seeking to possess a victim. As neoliberal subjects, vessels

for the demonic, and the face of primordial evil, women are rendered “culturally intelligible” (McRobbie, 2009), because they are, at once, the embodiment of life affirming biopolitical power, manipulated by great evil, and capable of extreme forms of violence.

Women as victims of possession inhabit a space between life and death. While possessed, their bodies are physically alive while the self is largely inaccessible as evil seeks to control them. The current phase of neoliberalism has been linked to undead ways of being through a reliance on imagery of the zombie (Fine, 2010). This builds off a long trajectory of envisioning capitalism as an underworld production being akin to a vampire state (Frimpong-Ansah, 1991) or the devil itself (Taussig, 1980). These images relate to the idea of “zombieconomics,” which is built off the assumption that economics responds only to its own logics and is entirely parasitic in its relation to people. As part of this parasitic relationship, the individuals that are fed on by the market are degraded and transformed into a shell of their selves (Fine, 2010), remade as mindless and ambling. However, as I have discussed throughout, neoliberalism is not simply a matter of economics but rather a personal and political project that seeks to remake the world and life itself. In this way, neoliberalism and demonic possession have the same goal-to destroy the self, control the body, erode institutions, and remake the fabric of our world. Thus, demonic possession and life in neoliberalism both represent a space between life and death where no place is safe from evil and its influence.

Chapter Summary

Modern horror is reflective of a “split society” (McNalley, 2011) where “the painful and traumatic process through which non-capitalist social bonds are dissolved,

individuals [are] subjected to market forces, and impersonal economic relationships [are] created between the dominated and the dominant" (12). In this, monstrosity has been used to explore what characterizes modern capitalism. However, the emergence and predominance of demonic primordial evil highlights the truly insidious inescapability of neoliberal logics. Vampires and werewolves can be killed; serial killers can be captured; the victims of body snatching can be found. However, the demonic can only be contained. Its power extends from our most hallowed institutions down into our most intimate spaces, wrapping those in the universe in an inescapable gloom and horror of not only the death of our bodies but an abject death of the self.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The demon of neoliberalism now possesses our world. As an omnipresent and inescapable force, there is no place in society left that is beyond the grips of neoliberal violence. American political life, social institutions, cultural productions, our domestic sphere, and the very nature of personhood and subjectivity have all come under the control of unraveling and world remaking economic logics. In a time characterized by fear easily consumed through the twenty-four-hour news cycle (Rosenberg and Feldman, 2008), frequent moral panics (Thompson, 2005), and environmental degradation (Doherty and Clayton, 2011), it is more important than ever that scholars give keen attention to the boundary work that is inherent in cultural productions related to fear.

This research takes to heart the centrality of fear as part of American life under neoliberal social formations. By focusing my attention on the horror genre, I expose how fear related to the possessing aspects of neoliberalism are communicated through one of the most popular horror cinematic universes to date: the conjuring universe. I focus my attention on this universe, because it represents a shift in the horror genre more broadly by signaling a larger change in what scares the cultural imaginary. To understand the shift that has occurred within the horror genre, I employ a cultural criminological lens with weighted attention given to gothic criminology. I presumed from the inception of this project that representations of crime and its correlates extend beyond traditional crime media and images due to a shared language between horror and gothic criminology. Horror has existed to provide an outlet for feelings related to the

dark side of industrialization allowing for monsters to show us what is considered deviant (Donovan, 2011), while gothic criminology has employed similar metonym to make the darker side of the protestant ethic consumable to larger audiences. In this way, horror holds a mirror up to modern society while gothic criminology offers tales of real horror shrouded in mystery. The shared language between horror and gothic criminology inextricably links the two together, even if they represent two sides of the same coin.

Further linking gothic criminology and horror is the overt focus on evil, be it real and presented in fantastic ways, such as with gothic criminology, or fantastic but presented as real, as with horror. As Katz explained, “Our original sense of deviance is through a nonreflective, sensual awareness of evil in the forms of dread, defilement, transgression, vengeance, sacrilege, sacrifice, and the like.” Deviance, and the need to control deviant persons, is inherently linked to crime and crime control. In the past, crime and horror have been more clearly linked by the type of villains that are widely consumed. Villains like serial killers, organ thieves, body snatchers, rogue cops, pedophilic rapists, abusive husbands, drug addicts, and white-collar criminals (Picart and Greek, 2007) all clearly align with crime and crime control. However, since the late 2000s, we have seen a rise in a new form of evil within horror, one that relates less directly to crime but is still tied to social formations in which crime occurs.

Metaphysical and paranormal horror have long been aligned with economic conditions which are foundational to neoliberal logics and social conditions. Within the confines of gothic criminology, Park explains that “a new figure looms large on the horizon of Europe! A figure strange, fantastic, and ominous…” (Park, 624;1906) when

describing a vampire-like monster that sucks the life blood from the Congo. Other scholars have also invoked paranormal monstrosity when discussing the market. These instances of economic terror range from the devil himself (Taussig, 1980), to vampire states (Frimpong-Ansah, 1991) or zombies (Fine, 2010), and specters that haunt (Marx and Engeles, 2002). The use of gothic language to express real world horrors is commonplace in academic writing, even with demons and demonology making numerous appearances (O'Donnell, 2020; McKittrick, 2006; Althaus-Reid, 2004; Wynter, 2003). My research asserts that the link which exists between gothic and haunting language in relation to crime and social conditions can be inverted from a simple narrative style and employed to help us understand real world horrors that are cloaked in this language within consumer media and images. Rather than simply communicating the horrors that exist in gothic language, we can understand evil that is embedded within it.

The proposition that gothic criminology can be used to deconstruct paranormal productions, requires that we consider paranormal images within the cultural confines that produce them. In this way, paranormal media and images represent the emergence of a neoliberal gothic criminology that, while carrying the same language and stylistic markers as its predecessor, offers much more in terms of analytical prowess. My research highlights the early hallmarks of this emerging form of criminology, thereby extrapolating the ways in which crime and paranormal media are connected while also being bound to the conditions of neoliberalism.

Neoliberal Gothic Criminology: A New Monster

Neoliberal gothic criminology exists as a site beyond traditional understandings of criminological concerns and considers the way in which crimes correlates are linked to conditions of neoliberalism and the presentation of those correlates to a mass audience. My ethnographic content analysis of the most popular horror cinematic universe to date helps outline the ways in which paranormal media is linked to crime, how this link influences the nature of messaging within the films, and how neoliberal social conditions are expressed and embedded in the universe through its characters, story arcs, and assumptions.

Possession based horror within the conjuring universe represents the emergence of a true horror genre tied to paranormal activity and demonology. By presenting possession horror as part of a "true story," the universe aligns itself with true crime and the carnival of crime (Presdee, 2003), as it communicates messages about social institutions and control to a mass audience. Themes that run across the universe, such as institutional decay, changing gender norms, biopolitical control, surveillance, and subject making, are all presented as fantastic horrors that distance viewers through its framework, thereby allowing an easier transmission of messaging regarding "social ills" (Ingrebresten, 2001).

True crime, one of the fastest growing media genres, highlights the region between fact and fiction in consumer culture, a theme which presents itself in the universe. By positioning the possessions within the cinematic universe as true stories, the *Conjuring* world similarly bends "fiction to facts" (Seltzer, 2008), presenting viewers with opportunities for self-reflection as it exposes anxieties around the conditions of

neoliberalism. Further aligning itself with true crime, true horror within the cinematic universe taps into a phenomenological experience. However, it is not a phenomenology of place (Bell, 1997) but rather it presents the self as a site of transgression and horror. Finally, the conjuring universe introduces viewers to the concept of a para"normal" accident. Normal accidents within true crime represent a new normal in which danger is "sudden but always imminent, unforeseen, and endlessly previewed shock to system" (Seltzer, 2008; 12). Possession based horror in a cinematic universe centered on real experiences reminds viewers that demonic evil is always possible, lying in wait, and that no amount of preparation or virtuousness can negate its presence.

To further the discussion, true horror as embedded within the conjuring universe troubles distinctions made within and around gothic metonymy despite its constant invocation. Gothic works have often shirked principles of Enlightenment, (Anolik, 2014) while horror (Donovan, 2011) and criminology alike have relied on darker sides of industrialization to thrive. By making the supernatural world part of the natural world, a persistent uncanny is created where the supernatural is a site for control. This is one of the hallmarks of a neoliberal gothic criminology in that its alignment with true crime unsettles both our understandings of crime's correlates and the gothic genre.

The model of true horror that is presented by neoliberal gothic criminology allows for viewers of the films to accept the universe as fact, thereby creating space for the universe to communicate specific forms of neoliberal anxieties through horror. Certainly, horror has always responded to the cultural conditions it was produced in, as seen most recently when body horror and torture porn responded to post 9/11 anxieties (Wetmore, 2012). However, as the body panics associated with terrorism began to fade away,

horror viewers and critics began to see instances of elevated horror that presented pointed social commentary rather than cheap thrills associated with horror films of the past. True horror stands in stark contrast to both body horror and elevated horror while shirking evolutions within the genre, such as overt nihilism (Wetmore,2012), the emergence of sympathetic transgressors (Tamborini, Stiff, & Heidel, 1990), and the evolution of the final girl (Karras, 2002). Rather, true horror borrows from each of these trends to communicate the affective nature of all-encompassing evil within neoliberalism. One of the most prominent features that communicates this idea within the conjuring universe is its overt focus on declining social institutions, most notably the church which represents the state and the family.

The Church within the universe serves as a stand-in for state power and biopolitical control. This synonym is incredibly powerful when we consider the way religion has reemerged into American political life (Giroux, 2005). The necessity of biopolitical intervention is a foregone conclusion in every film as the victims of possession and their potential saviors, Ed and Lorraine Warren, seek to invoke the church for aide. However, across every film, we see that the church is not only ineffective, but rather indifferent or callous to the suffering of families plagued by the demonic. The path dependency on ineffective and crumbling institutions (Brebber, 2005) is incredibly stark when we see that no amount of investigation, surveillance, or evidence gathering is enough to practically involve the church, and individuals are left to defend themselves in the face of world remaking evil. These roles of investigation and surveillance is yet another foregone conclusion within the universe. Much like social control is built into the fabric of our reality (Coleman, 2004), paranormal control and

surveillance is necessary to receive help in the conjuring universe. As an emerging area of criminology, neoliberal gothic criminology is concerned with the ways that social institutions and biopolitical control are invoked across fantastic horrors. Rather than relying on institutions to offer salvation, the cultural productions highlight that the erosion of our social institutions is too far gone for them to be effective. However, left with no other options, we continue to try to evoke them. Possession based horror, when studied through a neoliberal gothic criminological lens, is well positioned to highlight the ways in which the state and surveillance is played out on a larger scale. In addition to this, it is also useful when considering how other institutions, such as the family, have come under assault from metaphysical neoliberal monsters.

Focusing on other institutions, it is important to understand that horror has a long history of assaulting the family (Williams, 2014). However, the conjuring universe offers a glimpse into what happens to the family when the world is remade through demonic intervention. Within the universe, the family is treated as the primary site of upheaval from the demonic and a site that warrants protection from external, dangerous others. Each family that suffers from demonic activity is less than ideal when compared to the idyllic Warrens and their painfully nostalgic gender roles. In this way, a home that does not fall into orthotax understandings of what constitutes a correct family is seen as transgressive enough to invite evil in. The evil often starts small in ways that lead viewers and characters to wonder if an intruder is causing the disturbances, and in some cases, we see that an outsider does cause harm, even if under the influence of demonic possession themselves. The weaving of external threats throughout a universe concerned with demonic possession highlights the ways in which family decay in

American society is tied to narratives around external, dangerous others. While this distinction is largely concentrated within the conjuring universe, it is less present in other horror films, which are largely concerned with dangerous others *or* paranormal entities but not both. This weaving together of external human threats with paranormal threats is another hallmark of neoliberal gothic criminology, further communicating that danger is ever present, and in some cases, the danger is totally inescapable.

The family that is being protected in each film across the conjuring universe reminds viewers of a time before neoliberalism came to dominate our private spheres. Prior to the introduction of neoliberalism into the domestic sphere in the 1980s, the fantasized family institution relied on a sexual division of labor that is simply not possible anymore as women's roles have come to be part of larger capital accumulation projects or sources of biopolitical regulation and control (Donzelot, 1997). The family and familial roles have changed in response to the crisis of the welfare state and have created a space where the family and home are now simply an institution concerned with private property. The conjuring universe offers viewers the chance to engage with these changing family formations in a way that is divorced from recent trends related to the final girl and distinct from other assaults on the family in horror. As a cornerstone of neoliberal gothic criminology, the possession of women and the tenuous state of family life comes full center as a site, not to be protected despite the characters attempts to do so, but one that is already ruined.

Ruination as a primary tenant of neoliberal gothic criminology moves beyond social institutions and explores the ways in which biopolitical control and neoliberal logics have become to possess individuals. Rather than simply contending with the role

of the body, neoliberal gothic criminology addresses subjectivity and subject making as part of the affective self in a way previously unseen within horror and largely absent from academic discourses related to culture (Gil, 2008). Much of horror in the post 9/11 world has relied on horrors of the physical body (Cover, 2015) to communicate, reinforce, and renegotiate boundaries, while the emergence of elevated horror signaled a marrying of social commentary with horror. This can be seen in the possessing evil within the conjuring universe, as it creates a bridge between the body, of both a person and the cultural body, to the affective self and our very notions of personhood beyond pathologies associated with villainy.

The blending of the self and the body within the conjuring universe contends with cultural logics that present the body and the self as separate units. Within the universe, the body is treated as a site of discipline when primordial evil seeks to break the body to influence the will of a person and remake them into vessels for evil. The presentation of the body within the confines of the conjuring universe exists on a spectrum wherein we see bodies devoid of the self, bodies vulnerable to possession, and normative bodies. Each of these given forms is affected by possession in unique ways.

Through constant invocation of dolls, films within the universe position the body devoid of the self as a pure vessel for manipulation, whereas dolls are incomplete. An empty physical form, such as a doll, is not enough for the demonic as it does not reproduce evil, just as a body disciplined by neoliberal capitalism is not enough because it does not carry forward economic logics. Rather, the vessel of the doll and disciplined human bodies serve as vehicles for communication. Furthermore, nonnormative bodies, such as Mia’s pregnant body and Janice’s disabled body, are positioned as sites of

vulnerability, ripe for the infestation of evil. Within neoliberal society, bodies are defined by their normative functions. This presentation of the body links to criminology as well, considering nonnormative bodies have been used by eugenics scientists (Rafter, 1997) to introduce the idea of a born criminal. This notion is furthered within horror and gothic works like criminology, as physical difference is used to mark a person as “other” (Anolik, 2014). Films within the conjuring universe depart from all these understandings of physical nonnormativity and the body to trouble the boundaries between the body and the self in relation to our understandings of value extraction in capitalism and exploitation through gendered lenses.

Within the confines of the conjuring universe, the self as a site linked to the body, reminds viewers that just because our bodies do not suffer discipline does not mean that we are free from control. Just as capitalism disciplines bodies, neoliberalism possesses individuals as personhood and subject making are presented as opportunities for personal development. Through consistent invocation of the soul, be it a wish for mercy or an attempt to control, possession-based horror reminds viewers that far more than our bodies are at stake. Alienation, the estrangement of a person within modern society, is replicated through all spaces (Wrenn, 2014) leaving a person unrecognizable. Possession based horror within the conjuring universe centers alienation from the self to show a person who is slowly dispossessed of their personhood as evil inhabits them, just as neoliberal logics render our world and personal identities unknowable when individuals become vessels for economic logics in service of global capital. The infection of the demonic and the possession of neoliberalism play on the evergreen American trait of paranoia as individuals are unable

to distinguish themselves from the possessing entity. As young David reminds viewers in *The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It*, “I remember what it felt like. You’re always cold, and you’re never alone. That’s why you can’t sleep. Because it’s never quiet in your head. Sometimes, you think something, then you’re not sure if it was really you. But now you’re seeing it. It’s here with you. And it’s telling you to do things.” In other words, one the possession of either form occurs, the loss of self is inevitable.

In conclusion, for possession-based horror to be truly effective, it must move past notions of the body as the primary site for pain and suffering. Similarly, for neoliberal gothic criminology to be an effective analytical tool, scholars must be willing to contend with the ambiguities related to subjectivity and subject making in cultural representations by considering the body and the self as a collective whole, each controlled in their own way. Traditionally, academic works concerned with the discipline of the body under global capitalism (Kristeva, 1982; Wetzell, 2000; Becker and Wetzel, 2006; Harrison, 2008; Freeman, 2011; McNally, 2011, Lui, 2015) and its relation to crime and its correlates (Simon, 2020) have been largely divorced from academic works concerned with the self under the same conditions (Mils, 1951; Gidden, 1991; Marshall, ed., 1994; du Gay, 1996; Hardt, 1999; Dahms, 2005; McRobbie, 2009; Freeman, 2011; Hochschild, 2012; Wren, 2014; Scharff, 2016). However, like discipline and biopower, the body and the self exist as parts of the same whole, inextricably linked and rendered useless without the other. Thus, neoliberal gothic criminology, with its attention to mediated representations and fantastical horror, is the only form of criminology that can contend with how anxieties around the body and the self exist in the same emerging cultural spaces.

Limitations and Future Research

This study contributes to cultural criminology and its subset of gothic criminology by proposing an emerging subcategory of the discipline: neoliberal gothic criminology. Neoliberal gothic criminology as a field of study maintains cultural criminology's focus on mediated images related to crime and its correlates while recognizing that gothic metonymy within the discipline is linked to larger cultural productions and the conditions of neoliberalism at large. My research builds on an interdisciplinary trajectory that considers how crime has become embedded in all cultural productions and how the fear of crime contributes to a culture of fear that defines modern life. Rather than using language associated with horror to communicate criminological issues, neoliberal gothic criminology can be used to unpack how images of monstrosity and evil indirectly tied to crime represent larger cultural anxieties, such as the ruin of social institutions, issues of subjectivity, and the process of subject making in neoliberalism. By presenting fantastic horrors as real, neoliberal gothic criminological productions exist as a site of boundary making and reinforcement that contribute to the carnival of crime, which works to make the subgenre a category of its own.

In future research, I would like to apply neoliberal gothic criminology to other cultural productions related to paranormal evil, be that related to possession or notions of haunting. Films such as *The Amityville Horror*, *The Rite*, *The Haunting in Connecticut*, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, and *Deliver us From Evil* all present themselves as part of a paranormal true horror subgenre that is ripe for exploration. By exploring other paranormal horror films aligned with the true crime subgenre, more core

tenants of neoliberal gothic criminology will be elucidated. This effort would also serve to embed cultural criminology within the history of horror more broadly.

Despite the foundation built for neoliberal gothic criminology, the limits of the area are not well defined. In the future, I would also like to apply neoliberal gothic criminology to instances of elevated horror that do not align themselves with true stories to see if the analytical prowess extends into purely fictional worlds. Similarly, I am interested in how concepts central to neoliberal gothic criminology, namely institutional decay and the role of the individual, present themselves across various forms of horror. Films that have been released since I began writing, and would have been excluded from my sample, such as *Antlers* (2021), *Studio 666 (2022)*, and *Malignant* (2021) all contend with neoliberal issues told through gothic metonym. By exploring the boundaries of neoliberal gothic criminology, I hope that this subdiscipline will be able to actively contribute to other areas of study and support other scholars who have invoked the images of the demonic. Given the confines of the conjuring universe, this research is unable to contribute to discussion around race, nationality, or socioeconomic status in any concrete way. However, neoliberal gothic criminology does not have to be blind to these topics. Rather, all future research within this emerging area should actively seek to contend with these areas as sites of moral discourse. Now that a basic theoretical foundation has been laid, issues of race and class within modern horror as it relates to neoliberal anxieties must take primacy in future works.

This project is one step in a larger research agenda that is concerned with how fear, crime, and neoliberalism are linked across consumer media and images. In a society where time and space constrictions are tighter than ever before (Harvey, 1989), I

anticipate that our cultural anxieties will increase in their rapid proliferation, thereby changing the horror genre completely. Rather than having era's, such as the slasher era of the 1980s, horror films will become a site where all anxieties exist in proximity to one another with large interruptions, such as post-9/11 horror and the emergence of major cinematic universes like the *Conjuring*. Expanding on understandings of neoliberal gothic criminology in terms of horror, while new in its inception, helps equip cultural criminologist to consider how mediated images of fear can contribute to criminological understandings of the world and how criminology is embedded in all forms of horror. When extending this project and study, I would also like to expand my research to sites of cultural messaging that are more experiential in nature, such as the large body of research on dark tourism [3]. Little attention has been given to how dark tourist experiences contribute to how language of spirits and spirituality influence criminological understandings, making it a prime area for further research and understanding.

Concluding Thoughts

In concluding this dissertation, I want to reflect on how I came to my topic of neoliberal possession. When I first began my doctorate program in 2015, I knew a few things with great certainty. I did not want to write about neoliberalism; I did not want to write about gender, and I did not want to write about true crime. With this knowledge, I picked a topic I was certain would keep me from having to contend with those issues: the paranormal. At the conclusion of this dissertation, I am sure readers can appreciate my amazing ability to stick to a research plan.

[3] For a well rounded literature review on dark tourism you can reference Punitha and Rajashekar (https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIRO006007.pdf)

As a young academic, I was particularly interested in law and society but always appreciated a good dramatic gothic flair. When I came across gothic criminology while browsing my institution's library for a paper on necropolitics, I thought that, surely, armed with this tool, I would be able to write a dissertation about what I wanted while avoiding all the things I said I would. While I could not find any recent writings regarding gothic criminology, I was undeterred. Ever the fan of the underdog, I decided that I was going to use gothic criminology to show that it could be incredibly powerful, even if it was no longer en vogue.

After a year of considering possible sites for research, I finally landed on possession-based horror films. This came after an extensive sampling of over 400 horror films with high ROI's and a great deal of guidance from my committee members. I stubbornly refused to consider slasher films, or films rooted in bodily horror, because I had a predetermined affinity for the paranormal. This predetermined affinity, coupled with my desire to work within the confines of gothic criminology, proved to be a fruitful combination.

Once possession-based horror emerged as the central theme of my research, I began working on my coding and analysis. From the outset of this research, I made a mistake that, I believe, is common among young academics: I started from my conclusion. I assumed that viewing possession-based horror through a gothic criminological would lend itself to findings that prioritized institutional decay and the role of the body but not much else. I knew that the basis of our economic democracy was failing (Brown, 2015) and that the body was central to both research agendas and in popular culture, but I had not considered much beyond the confines of what I already

knew. However, as I began to code and consider emergent themes, the role of the body began to fall away. Confused, I turned to my supervisor for guidance who began to push me to consider the subject I dreaded most: neoliberalism. The years that followed were plagued by a consistent struggle in which I would be confronted by a theme that I did not want to engage with. I would write and research only to stop when faced with resistance or redirection, often for months on end. Then, in late August, my mother, Missy, passed away. Suddenly, I was left in a place where I was torn between professional responsibilities, academic obligations, and deep, world remaking loss. After weeks had passed, I took stock of the work I had done. I considered the resistance, my hesitations, and all my preconceived notions about my research. In the face of my loss, I realized that what I had been fighting all along was fear: fear of the unknown, fear of failure, fear of professionalization, and a true fear of the loss of myself in the face of concepts and ideas larger than myself and my predetermined affinities. After this realization, I decided to lean in. I leaned into the directions from my supervisor, advice from colleagues, uncharted areas of study, and the topics I feared most. In doing this, my research topic truly came into being. I was free from the fear of failure and left in a space of true academic curiosity. I had to know where this research would end, and I pursued that end sincerely.

The emergence of neoliberal gothic criminology as my research topic came as much of a surprise to me as it did anyone. When I coupled my affinity for the paranormal with my committee's directions to incorporate all my dreaded topics-gender, neoliberalism, true crime while paying close attention to the body, the self, and fear-I found that I had done what I set out to do, even if I did it in a way I had never

imagined. This research shows that gothic criminology is a site of worthwhile study in our neoliberal moment. Its confines have been defined by a neoliberal focus that is loosely defined by an alignment with true crime, a focus on institutional decay, and an unapologetic dive into the relationship between the body and the self in a time defined by fear and the threat of world remaking possession.

I began this dissertation with the assertion that demons are real, and I conclude with that same assertion. Neoliberal logics are woven into the fabric of our reality so deeply that it is, in some instances, impossible to distinguish those logics from ourselves as it possesses our personhood. However, the conjuring universe reminds viewers that life happens even as the demonic moves among us and within us. Relationships are formed, life ends, people enter our worlds for a time then leave, our homes change, our lives can seem to be fully remade, yet at the end, we persist. Despite the best attempts of primordial and invisible evil to subvert, defile, and control, we resist by consistently seeking to name and know the evil we face so that we may defeat it. Neoliberal gothic criminology provides us with the framework necessary to name what cultural demons we face. It is my hope that we will face them sincerely, without pretense or predetermination in the face of seemingly inescapable neoliberal gloom. Through cultural reflections and mediated languages, may we come to understand and save the idea and possibilities of our self.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Filmography

Alien. Directed by Ridley Scott. 20th Century Fox, 1979.

American Mary. Directed by Jen and Sylvia Soska. IndustryWorks Pictures, XLrator Media, Universal Pictures, 2012.

Annabelle. Directed by John R. Leonetti. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2014.

Annabelle Comes Home. Directed by Gary Dauberman. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2019.

Annabelle Creation. Directed by David F. Sandberg. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2017.

Antlers. Directed by Scott Copper. Searchlight Pictures, 2021

A Quiet Place. Directed by John Krasinksi. Paramount Pictures, 2018.

Deliver US From Evil. Directed by Scott Derrickson. Screen Gems, 2014.

Halloween II. Directed by Rick Rosenthal. Universal Pictures, 1981.

Halloween Kills. Directed by David Gordon Green. Miramax, Blumhouse Productions, Trancas International Pictures, Rough House Productions, 2021.

Happy Death Day. Directed by Christopher Landon. Blumhouse Productions, 2017.

Hereditary. Directed by Ari Aster. A24, 2018.

Incarnate. Directed by Brad Peyton. Bh Tilt, 2016.

It Follows. Directed by David Robert Mitchell. RADiUS- TWC, 2014.

Jennifer's Body. Directed by Karyn Kusama. 20th Century Fox, 2009.

Jurassic World. Directed by Colin Trevorror. Universal Pictures, 2015.

Malignant. Directed by James Wan. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2021.

Nightmare on Elm Street. Directed by Wes Craven. New Line Cinema, 2984.

Ouija: Origin of Evil. Directed by Mike Flanagan. Universal Pictures, 2016.

Psycho. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Paramount Pictures, 1960.

Ready or Not. Directed by Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2019.

Saw. Directed by James Wan. Lions Date Films, 2004.

Scream. Directed by Wes Craven. Dimension Films, 1996.

Studio 666. Directed by B. J. McDonnell. Open Road Films, 2022.

Taxi Driver. Directed by Martin Scorsese. Columbia Pictures, 1976.

The Amityville Horror. Directed by Andrew Douglas. MGM Distribution Co., 20th Century Fox, 2005.

The Blair Witch Project. Directed by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez. Artisan Entertainment, 1999.

The Conjuring. Directed by James Wan. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2013.

The Conjuring 2. Directed by James Wan. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2016.

The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It. Directed by Michael Chaves. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2021.

The Curse of Lloarna. Directed by Michael Chaves. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2019.

The Exorcism of Emily Rose. Directed by Scott Derrickson. Screen Gems, 2005.

The Haunting in Connecticut. Directed by Peter Cornwell. Lionsgate, 2009.

The Hills Have Eyes. Directed by Alexandre Aja. Fox Searlight Pictures, 2006.

The Matrix. Directed by The Wachowskis. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1999.

The Nun. Directed by Corin Hardy. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2018.

The Omen. Directed by Richard Donner. 20th Century Fox, 1976.

The Piano Teach. Directed by Michael Haneke. Mk2 Diffusion, 2001.

The Rite. Directed by Michael Hafstrom. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2011.

The Wind. Directed by Emma Tammi. IFC Midnight, 2018.

The Witch. Directed by Robert Eggers. A24, Universal Pictures, 2015.

Us. Directed by Jordan Peele. Universal Pictures, 2019.

Vacancy. Directed by Nimrod Antal. Sony Pictures Releasing, 2007.

Appendix B: Sample Frame

Excel Data

2000						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2000 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	Scream 3	2/4/2000	Miramax	R	$89,138,076	16,537,676
2	Hollow Man	8/4/2000	Sony Pictures	R	$73,209,340	13,582,437
3	Final Destination	3/17/2000	New Line	R	$53,302,314	9,889,112
4	Pitch Black	2/18/2000	USA Films	R	$39,235,088	7,279,237
5	The Exorcist	12/26/1973	Warner Bros.	R	$37,112,212	6,885,382
6	Book of Shadows: Blair Witch 2	10/27/2000	Artisan	R	$26,421,314	4,901,913
7	Dracula 2000	12/22/2000	Miramax	R	$21,569,567	4,001,774
8	Urban Legends: Final Cut	9/22/2000	Sony Pictures	R	$21,468,807	3,983,081
9	Sleepy Hollow	11/19/1999	Paramount Pictures	R	$8,228,618	1,526,645
10	House on Haunted Hill	10/29/1999	Warner Bros.	R	$356,258	66,096
11	Stigmata	9/10/1999	MGM	R	$26,867	4,984
12	The Sculptress	10/27/2000		R	$9,972	1,850
13	Anatomie	9/8/2000	Sony Pictures	Not Rated	$9,598	1,780
14	Blood, Friends and Money	9/22/2000		Not Rated	$3,631	673

Total Gross of All Movies	$370,091,662	

2001						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2001 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	Hannibal	2/9/2001	MGM	R	$165,092,266	29,168,244
2	The Others	8/10/2001	Miramax	PG-13	$96,522,687	17,053,478
3	Thirteen Ghosts	10/26/2001	Warner Bros.	R	$41,867,960	7,397,166
4	Jeepers Creepers	8/31/2001	MGM	R	$37,904,175	6,696,850
5	Valentine	2/2/2001	Warner Bros.	R	$20,384,136	3,601,437
6	Dracula 2000	12/22/2000	Miramax	R	$11,430,810	2,019,577
7	Bones	10/24/2001	New Line	R	$7,316,658	1,292,695
8	The Forsaken	4/27/2001	Sony Pictures	R	$6,755,271	1,193,510
9	Soul Survivors	9/7/2001	Artisan	PG-13	$3,100,650	547,818
10	The Devil's Backbone	11/21/2001	Sony Pictures Cla…	R	$453,067	80,047
11	Ginger Snaps	5/11/2001		Not Rated	$284,063	50,187
12	Ôdishon	6/15/2001	Vitagraph Films	R	$110,776	19,571
13	Cure	7/6/2001		Not Rated	$94,596	16,713
14	Trouble Every Day	11/30/2001	Lot 47 Films	Not Rated	$9,788	1,729
15	Tell Me Something	9/21/2001		R	$2,567	453
16	Blood, Friends	9/22/2000		Not Rated	$982	173

	and Money					
Total Gross of All Movies					$391,330,452	

2002						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2002 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	The Ring	10/18/2002	Dreamworks SKG	PG-13	$127,230,430	21,898,524
2	Resident Evil	3/15/2002	Sony Pictures	R	$40,119,709	6,905,285
3	Queen of the Damned	2/22/2002	Warner Bros.	R	$30,307,804	5,216,489
4	Halloween: Resurrection	7/12/2002	Miramax/Dimension	R	$30,259,652	5,208,201
5	Ghost Ship	10/25/2002	Warner Bros.	R	$29,879,445	5,142,761
6	FearDotCom	8/30/2002	Warner Bros.	R	$13,208,023	2,273,325
7	Jason X	4/26/2002	New Line	R	$13,121,555	2,258,443
8	Wes Craven Presents: They	11/27/2002	Miramax/Dimension	PG-13	$12,693,621	2,184,788
9	Below	10/11/2002	Miramax/Dimension	R	$589,424	101,449
10	The Devil's Backbone	11/21/2001	Sony Pictures Cla…	R	$302,182	52,010
11	Trouble Every Day	11/30/2001	Lot 47 Films	Not Rated	$76,206	13,116
Total Gross of All Movies					$297,788,051	

2003						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2003 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	Freddy vs. Jason	8/15/2003	New Line	R	$82,622,655	13,701,932
2	The Texas Chainsaw Massacre	10/17/2003	New Line	R	$80,469,745	13,344,899
3	Gothika	11/21/2003	Warner Bros.	R	$58,224,334	9,655,776
4	Final Destination 2	1/31/2003	New Line	R	$46,896,664	7,777,224
5	28 Days Later…	6/27/2003	Fox Searchlight	R	$45,064,915	7,473,451
6	Jeepers Creepers II	8/29/2003	MGM	R	$35,623,801	5,907,761
7	Darkness Falls	1/24/2003	Sony Pictures	PG-13	$32,539,681	5,396,298
8	Cabin Fever	9/12/2003	Lionsgate	R	$21,158,188	3,508,820
9	Wrong Turn	5/30/2003	20th Century Fox	R	$15,417,771	2,556,844
10	House of 1,000 Corpses	4/11/2003	Lionsgate	R	$12,634,962	2,095,350
11	House of the Dead	10/10/2003	Artisan	R	$10,199,354	1,691,435
12	Willard	3/14/2003	New Line	PG-13	$6,882,696	1,141,408
14	Ghost Ship	10/25/2002	Warner Bros.	R	$234,046	38,813
16	Les Yeux sans visage	12/31/1962		Not Rated	$52,709	8,741
Total Gross of All Movies					$450,032,336	

2004						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2004 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	The Grudge	10/22/2004	Sony Pictures	PG-13	$110,359,362	17,771,233
2	AVP: Alien Vs. Predator	8/13/2004	20th Century Fox	PG-13	$80,281,096	12,927,712
3	Dawn of the Dead	3/19/2004	Universal	R	$58,990,765	9,499,318
4	Saw	10/29/2004	Lionsgate	R	$55,153,403	8,881,385
5	Resident Evil: Apocalypse	9/10/2004	Sony Pictures	R	$50,740,078	8,170,704
6	Exorcist: The Beginning	8/20/2004	Warner Bros.	R	$41,814,863	6,733,472
7	Anacondas: The Hunt for the…	8/27/2004	Sony Pictures	PG-13	$31,526,393	5,076,713
8	Seed of Chucky	11/12/2004	Focus/Rogue Pictures	R	$17,016,190	2,740,127
9	Darkness	12/25/2004	Miramax/Dimension	PG-13	$16,626,820	2,677,426
11	Gojira	5/7/2004	Rialto Pictures	Not Rated	$412,520	66,428
12	Ju-On: The Grudge	7/23/2004	Vitagraph Films	R	$325,661	52,441
13	The Texas Chainsaw Massacre	10/17/2003	New Line	R	$101,910	16,410
14	Riding the Bullet	10/15/2004	Innovation Film G…	R	$101,107	16,281
15	Malevolence	9/10/2004	Painted Zebra Rel…	R	$81,250	13,083
16	A Tale of Two Sisters	12/3/2004	Tartan Films	R	$35,710	5,750

17	Fabled	12/10/2004	Indican Pictures	R	$18,224	2,934
18	The Manson Family	10/22/2004	Dinsdale Releasing	Not Rated	$11,657	1,877
19	Evil Remains	10/22/2004	Screen Media Films	R	$8,396	1,352
20	The Hillside Strangler	9/24/2004	Tartan Films	R	$306	49
Total Gross of All Movies					$464,969, 445	

2005						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2005 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	Saw II	10/28/2005	Lionsgate	R	$87,014,325	13,574,777
2	The Ring Two	3/18/2005	Dreamworks SKG	PG-13	$75,941,727	11,847,383
3	The Exorcism of Emily Rose	9/9/2005	Sony Pictures	PG-13	$75,072,454	11,711,771
4	The Amityville Horror	4/15/2005	Filmways Pictures	R	$65,233,369	10,176,812
5	The Skeleton Key	8/12/2005	Universal	PG-13	$47,907,715	7,473,902
6	Boogeyman	2/4/2005	Sony Pictures	PG-13	$46,752,382	7,293,663
7	House of Wax	5/6/2005	Warner Bros.	R	$32,064,800	5,002,308
8	The Fog	10/14/2005	Sony Pictures	PG-13	$29,511,112	4,603,917
9	Doom	10/21/2005	Universal	R	$28,212,337	4,401,300
10	George A. Romero's Land of …	6/24/2005	Universal	R	$20,700,082	3,229,341
11	Cursed	2/25/2005	Miramax/Dimension	PG-13	$19,294,901	3,010,124
12	The Devil's Rejects	7/22/2005	Lionsgate	R	$17,044,981	2,659,123
13	The Cave	8/26/2005	Sony Pictures	PG-13	$15,007,991	2,341,340
14	Wolf Creek	12/25/2005	Weinstein Co.	R	$12,156,570	1,896,500
15	Darkness	12/25/2004	Miramax/Dimension	PG-13	$5,536,622	863,747
16	Alone in the Dark	1/28/2005	Lionsgate	R	$5,178,569	807,889
17	High Tension	6/10/2005	Lionsgate	R	$3,681,066	574,269

18	Venom	9/16/2005	Miramax/Dimension	R	$881,745	137,557
19	Dominion : Prequel to the Ex…	5/20/2005	Warner Bros.	R	$251,495	39,234
20	Hellbent	9/16/2005	Regent Releasing	R	$179,747	28,041
21	Three... Extremes	10/28/2005	Lionsgate	R	$77,532	12,095
22	Kairo	11/9/2005	Magnolia Pictures	R	$49,046	7,651
23	Malevolence	9/10/2004	Painted Zebra Rel…	R	$44,771	6,984
24	Undead	7/1/2005	Lionsgate	R	$41,196	6,426
25	A Tale of Two Sisters	12/3/2004	Tartan Films	R	$36,352	5,671
26	Fabled	12/10/2004	Indican Pictures	R	$13,201	2,059
27	Chaos	8/10/2005	Dinsdale Releasing	R	$10,289	1,605
28	Marebito	12/9/2005	Tartan Films	Not Rated	$6,232	972
29	The Roost	10/21/2005	Vitagraph Films	Not Rated	$5,642	880
30	The Dark Hours	10/13/2005	Freestyle Releasing	R	$423	65
Total Gross of All Movies					$587,908,674	

2006						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2006 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	Saw III	10/27/2006	Lionsgate	R	$80,238,724	12,250,186
2	The Omen	6/6/2006	20th Century Fox	R	$54,607,383	8,337,005
3	Final Destination 3	2/10/2006	New Line	R	$54,098,051	8,259,244
4	When a Stranger Calls	2/3/2006	Sony Pictures	PG-13	$47,860,214	7,306,902
5	Hostel	1/6/2006	Lionsgate	R	$47,326,473	7,225,415
6	Silent Hill	4/21/2006	Sony Pictures	R	$46,982,632	7,172,920
7	The Hills Have Eyes	3/10/2006	Fox Searchlight	R	$41,778,863	6,378,452
8	The Texas Chainsaw Massacre…	10/6/2006	New Line	R	$39,517,763	6,033,246
9	The Grudge 2	10/13/2006	Sony Pictures	PG-13	$39,143,839	5,976,158
10	Stay Alive	3/24/2006	Walt Disney	PG-13	$23,086,480	3,524,653
11	Pulse	8/11/2006	Weinstein/Dimension	R	$20,264,436	3,093,807
12	An American Haunting	5/5/2006	Freestyle Releasing	PG-13	$16,298,046	2,488,251
13	See No Evil	5/19/2006	Lionsgate	R	$15,032,800	2,295,083
14	Black Christmas	12/5/2006	MGM	R	$10,917,918	1,666,857
15	Slither	3/31/2006	Universal	R	$7,802,450	1,191,213
16	Wolf Creek	12/25/2005	Weinstein Co.	R	$4,029,778	615,233
17	After Dark	11/17/2006	Freestyle Releasing	Not Rated	$2,310,680	352,775

	HorrorFest 2006:…					
18	Hard Candy	4/14/2006	Lionsgate	R	$1,024,640	156,433
19	El Laberinto del Fauno	12/29/2006	Picturehouse	R	$568,641	86,815
20	Tamara	2/3/2006	City Lights Pictures	R	$206,871	31,583
21	Feast	9/22/2006	Weinstein/Dimension	R	$56,131	8,569
22	Sílení	8/9/2006	Zeitgeist	Not Rated	$45,798	6,992
23	The Strange Case of Dr. Jek…	9/29/2006	Rocky Mountain Pi…	R	$24,216	3,697
24	Cruel World	10/28/2006	Indican Pictures	R	$17,986	2,745
25	Saw II	10/28/2005	Lionsgate	R	$10,768	1,643
26	Hellbent	9/16/2005	Regent Releasing	R	$8,039	1,227
27	Marebito	12/9/2005	Tartan Films	Not Rated	$7,661	1,169
28	Dead Man's Shoes	5/12/2006	Magnolia Pictures	Not Rated	$6,408	978
29	Hair High	8/4/2006	Plymptoons	Not Rated	$5,342	815
30	Calvaire	8/11/2006	Palm Pictures	Not Rated	$2,623	400
31	Abominable	4/14/2006	Freestyle Releasing	R	$1,810	276

2007						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2007 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	I am Legend	12/14/2007	Warner Bros.	PG-13	$206,129,574	29,960,694
2	1408	6/22/2007	MGM	R	$71,985,628	10,463,027
3	Saw IV	10/26/2007	Lionsgate	R	$63,300,095	9,200,595
4	Halloween	8/31/2007	MGM	R	$58,269,151	8,469,353
5	30 Days of Night	10/19/2007	Sony Pictures	R	$39,568,996	5,751,307
6	El Laberinto del Fauno	12/29/2006	Picturehouse	R	$37,065,974	5,387,496
7	The Messengers	2/2/2007	Sony Pictures	PG-13	$35,374,833	5,141,690
8	28 Weeks Later	5/11/2007	20th Century Fox	R	$28,638,916	4,162,633
9	The Mist	11/21/2007	MGM	R	$25,335,717	3,682,517
10	The Reaping	4/5/2007	Warner Bros.	R	$25,126,214	3,652,065
11	Grindhouse	4/6/2007	Weinstein/Dimension	R	$25,031,037	3,638,232
12	The Hills Have Eyes II	3/23/2007	20th Century Fox	R	$20,804,166	3,023,861
13	Hostel: Part II	6/8/2007	Lionsgate	R	$17,544,812	2,550,118
14	Dead Silence	3/16/2007	Universal	R	$16,574,590	2,409,097
15	P2	11/9/2007	Summit Entertainment	R	$6,348,315	922,720
16	Black Christmas	12/5/2006	MGM	R	$5,317,820	772,938
17	Blood and Chocolate	1/26/2007	MGM	PG-13	$3,526,588	512,585

18	Captivity	7/13/2007	Lionsgate	R	$2,686,800	390,523
19	The Abandoned	2/23/2007	Lionsgate/After Dark	R	$1,255,524	182,488
20	Skinwalkers	8/10/2007	Lionsgate/After Dark	PG-13	$1,018,965	148,105
21	El orfanato	12/28/2007	Picturehouse	R	$917,756	133,394
22	After Dark HorrorFest 2007:…	11/9/2007	Freestyle Releasing	Not Rated	$874,635	127,127
23	Fido	6/15/2007	Lionsgate	R	$298,110	43,329
24	Hatchet	9/7/2007	Anchor Bay Entert…	R	$175,281	25,476
25	Rise: Blood Hunter	6/1/2007	Samuel Goldwyn Films	R	$114,306	16,614
26	Black Sheep	6/22/2007	IFC Films	Not Rated	$82,987	12,062
27	Behind the Mask: The Rise o…	3/16/2007	Anchor Bay Entert…	R	$69,136	10,048
28	The Last Winter	9/19/2007	IFC Films	Not Rated	$32,921	4,785
29	Wind Chill	4/27/2007	Sony Pictures	R	$31,388	4,562
30	The Tripper	4/20/2007	Freestyle Releasing	R	$23,200	3,372
31	Sílení	8/9/2006	Zeitgeist	Not Rated	$2,526	367
Total Gross of All Movies					$693,525,961	

2008						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2008 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	Saw V	10/24/2008	Lionsgate	R	$56,746,769	7,903,450
2	I am Legend	12/14/2007	Warner Bros.	PG-13	$50,263,436	7,000,479
3	Prom Night	4/11/2008	Sony Pictures	PG-13	$43,869,350	6,109,937
4	Quarantine	10/10/2008	Sony Pictures	R	$31,691,811	4,413,901
5	Mirrors	8/15/2008	20th Century Fox	R	$30,691,439	4,274,574
6	One Missed Call	1/4/2008	Warner Bros.	PG-13	$26,890,041	3,745,131
7	Shutter	3/21/2008	20th Century Fox	PG-13	$25,928,550	3,611,219
8	The Ruins	4/4/2008	Paramount Pictures	R	$17,432,844	2,427,973
9	El orfanato	12/28/2007	Picturehouse	R	$6,241,391	869,274
10	Låt den rätte komma in	10/24/2008	Magnolia Pictures	R	$1,483,912	206,672
11	Diary of the Dead	2/15/2008	Weinstein Co.	R	$952,620	132,676
12	House	11/7/2008	Roadside Attractions	R	$575,048	80,090
13	The Mist	11/21/2007	MGM	R	$258,038	35,938
14	The Signal	2/22/2008	Magnolia Pictures	R	$251,150	34,979
15	My Name is Bruce	10/31/2008	Image Entertainment	R	$173,066	24,103
16	Peur(s) du noir	10/3/2008	IFC Films	Not Rated	$77,876	10,846
17	La terza madre	6/6/2008	Mitropoulos Films	Not Rated	$54,947	7,652
18	Cthulhu	8/22/2008	Regent Releasing	R	$15,513	2,160
19	Splinter	10/31/2008	Magnolia Pictures	R	$14,154	1,971
20	Rogue	4/25/2008	Weinstein Co.	R	$10,452	1,455

21	Frontière(s)	5/9/2008	After Dark	NC-17	$9,913	1,380
22	Eden Lake	10/31/2008	Third Rail	R	$7,321	1,019
23	American Zombie	3/28/2008	Cinema Libre	Not Rated	$3,126	435
24	Shrooms	2/1/2008	Magnolia Pictures	Not Rated	$2,863	398
25	Edgar Allan Poe's House of …	5/9/2008	Regent Releasing	R	$1,677	233
Total Gross of All Movies					$293,647,307	

2009						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2009 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	Paranormal Activity	9/25/2009	Paramount Pictures	R	$107,854,596	14,380,613
2	The Final Destination	8/28/2009	Warner Bros.	R	$66,477,700	8,863,693
3	Friday the 13th	2/13/2009	Warner Bros.	R	$65,002,019	8,666,936
4	The Haunting in Connecticut	3/27/2009	Lionsgate	PG-13	$55,389,516	7,385,269
5	My Bloody Valentine	1/16/2009	Lionsgate	R	$51,545,952	6,872,793
6	The Unborn	1/9/2009	Universal	PG-13	$42,670,410	5,689,388
7	Drag Me To Hell	5/29/2009	Universal	PG-13	$42,100,625	5,613,416
8	Halloween 2	8/28/2009	Weinstein/Dimension	R	$33,392,973	4,452,396
9	The Last House on the Left	3/13/2009	Universal	R	$32,752,215	4,366,962
10	The Uninvited	1/30/2009	Paramount Pictures	PG-13	$28,596,818	3,812,909
11	Saw VI	10/23/2009	Lionsgate	R	$27,693,292	3,692,439
12	Sorority Row	9/11/2009	Summit Entertainment	R	$11,965,282	1,595,370
13	Pandorum	9/25/2009	Overture Films	R	$10,330,853	1,377,447
14	The Collector	7/31/2009	Freestyle Releasing	R	$7,712,114	1,028,281
15	Låt den rätte komma in	10/24/2008	Magnolia Pictures	R	$638,173	85,089
16	Thirst	7/31/2009	Focus Features	R	$318,574	42,476
17	The House of the Devil	10/30/2009	Magnolia Pictures	R	$101,215	13,495

18	After Dark's Horrorfest III	1/9/2009	After Dark	Not Rated	$66,456	8,860
19	Yaavarum Nalam	3/6/2009	Big Pictures	Not Rated	$36,594	4,879
20	Grace	8/14/2009	Anchor Bay Entert…	R	$8,297	1,106
21	Shadowland	7/24/2009		R	$8,221	1,096
22	I Sell the Dead	8/7/2009	IFC Films	Not Rated	$7,066	942
23	The Death Factory Bloodletting	5/15/2009	Nocturnal Features	Not Rated	$4,638	618
24	Death of a Ghost Hunter	6/12/2009	Nocturnal Features	Not Rated	$4,490	598
25	Shuttle	3/6/2009	Truly Indie	R	$1,925	256
26	The Objective	2/4/2009	IFC Films	Not Rated	$95	12
Total Gross of All Movies					$584,680,109	
Total Tickets Sold						77,957,339

2010						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2010 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	Paranormal Activity 2	10/20/2010	Paramount Pictures	R	$84,660,648	10,730,120
2	A Nightmare on Elm Street	4/30/2010	Warner Bros.	R	$63,075,011	7,994,298
3	The Wolfman	2/12/2010	Universal	R	$62,189,884	7,882,115
4	Resident Evil: Afterlife	9/10/2010	Sony Pictures	R	$60,128,566	7,620,857
5	Saw 3D	10/29/2010	Lionsgate	R	$45,710,178	5,793,431
6	The Last Exorcism	8/27/2010	Lionsgate	PG-13	$41,034,350	5,200,804
7	The Crazies	2/26/2010	Overture Films	R	$39,123,589	4,958,630
8	Devil	9/17/2010	Universal	PG-13	$33,679,655	4,268,651
9	Daybreakers	1/8/2010	Lionsgate	R	$30,101,577	3,815,155
10	Piranha 3D	8/20/2010	Weinstein/Dimension	R	$25,003,155	3,168,967
11	Splice	6/4/2010	Warner Bros.	R	$17,010,170	2,155,915
12	My Soul to Take	10/8/2010	Universal	R	$14,744,435	1,868,750
13	Case 39	10/1/2010	Paramount Vantage	R	$13,261,851	1,680,843
14	Frozen	2/5/2010	Anchor Bay Entert…	R	$246,177	31,201
15	The Exorcist	12/26/1973	Warner Bros.	R	$235,134	29,802
16	Chain Letter	10/1/2010	New Films Cinema	R	$205,842	26,088
17	The Human Centipede	4/30/2010	IFC Films	R	$181,467	22,999
18	Hausu	1/15/2010	Janus Films	Not Rated	$140,750	17,839

19	After.Life	4/9/2010		R	$108,596	13,763
20	George A. Romero's Survival…	5/28/2010	Magnolia Pictures	R	$101,740	12,894
21	I Spit on Your Grave	10/8/2010	Anchor Bay Entert…	R	$93,051	11,793
22	Paranormal Activity	9/25/2009	Paramount Pictures	R	$64,214	8,139
23	Hatchet II	10/1/2010	Vitagraph Films	R	$62,000	7,858
24	Deadfall Trail	5/14/2010	Nocturnal Features	Not Rated	$35,855	4,544
25	Circle	8/27/2010	Indican Pictures	Not Rated	$10,024	1,270
26	Heartless	11/19/2010	IFC Films	Not Rated	$3,697	468
Total Gross of All Movies					$531,211,616	
Total Tickets Sold						67,327,194

2011						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2011 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	Paranormal Activity 3	10/21/2011	Paramount Pictures	R	$104,007,828	13,115,741
2	Insidious	4/1/2011	FilmDistrict	R	$54,009,150	6,810,737
3	Final Destination 5	8/12/2011	Warner Bros.	R	$42,587,643	5,370,447
4	Scream 4	4/15/2011	Weinstein/Dimension	R	$38,180,928	4,814,745
5	The Rite	1/28/2011	Warner Bros.	PG-13	$33,047,633	4,167,419
6	Priest	5/13/2011	Sony Pictures	PG-13	$29,136,626	3,674,227
7	Don't Be Afraid of the Dark	8/26/2011	FilmDistrict	R	$24,046,682	3,032,368
8	Dream House	9/30/2011	Universal	PG-13	$21,302,340	2,686,298
9	Shark Night 3D	9/2/2011	Relativity	PG-13	$18,877,153	2,380,473
10	Fright Night	8/19/2011	Walt Disney	R	$18,298,649	2,307,521
11	The Thing	10/14/2011	Universal	R	$16,999,934	2,143,750
12	Dylan Dog: Dead of Night	4/29/2011	Omin/Freestyle	PG-13	$1,186,538	149,626
13	Red State	9/23/2011	Smodshow Productions	R	$1,065,429	134,354
14	Creature	9/9/2011	The Bubble Factory	R	$331,000	41,740
15	Trolljegeren	6/10/2011	Magnet Pictures	PG	$253,444	31,960
16	The Afflicted	10/28/2011	Nocturnal Features	Not Rated	$212,940	26,852
17	Filth to Ashes,	9/30/2011	Nocturnal Features	Not Rated	$196,147	24,734

	Flesh to Dust					
18	Human Centipede 2: Full Seq…	10/7/2011	IFC Films	Not Rated	$141,877	17,891
19	Paranormal Activity 2	10/20/2010	Paramount Pictures	R	$92,259	11,634
20	Inkubus	10/28/2011	Screen Media Films	R	$81,600	10,290
21	Evidence of a Haunting	8/26/2011	Nocturnal Features	Not Rated	$71,834	9,058
22	Hausu	1/15/2010	Janus Films	Not Rated	$69,650	8,783
23	11/11/11	11/11/2011	Rocket Releasing	R	$38,100	4,804
24	Stake Land	4/22/2011	IFC Films	R	$33,245	4,192
25	Bereavement	3/4/2011		R	$24,400	3,076
26	Black Death	3/11/2011	Magnet Pictures	R	$22,554	2,844
27	The Ward	7/8/2011	Cinedigm	R	$7,760	978
28	Raymond Did It	2/11/2011	Plastic Age Produ…	Not Rated	$3,632	458
Total Gross of All Movies					$404,326,975	

2012						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2012 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	Paranormal Activity 4	10/19/2012	Paramount Pictures	R	$53,900,335	6,771,398
2	The Devil Inside	1/6/2012	Paramount Pictures	R	$53,262,945	6,691,324
3	The Possession	8/31/2012	Lionsgate	PG-13	$49,130,588	6,172,184
5	House at the End of the Street	9/21/2012	Relativity	PG-13	$31,611,916	3,971,346
6	Texas Chainsaw 3D	1/4/2013	Lionsgate	R	$21,744,470	2,731,717
7	Chernobyl Diaries	5/25/2012	Warner Bros.	R	$18,119,640	2,276,336
8	Silent Hill: Revelation 3D	10/26/2012	Open Road	R	$17,530,219	2,202,288
9	Silent House	3/9/2012	Open Road	R	$12,739,737	1,600,469
10	The Collection	11/30/2012	LD Distribution	R	$6,810,754	855,622
11	The Apparition	8/24/2012	Warner Bros.	PG-13	$4,936,819	620,203
13	Lost Woods	3/2/2012	Nocturnal Features	Not Rated	$180,117	22,627
14	DeadTime	4/11/2012	Nocturnal Features	Not Rated	$156,072	19,607
15	Deadly Renovations	6/8/2012	Nocturnal Features	Not Rated	$146,146	18,360
16	Slaughter Creek	9/14/2012	Nocturnal Features	Not Rated	$136,815	17,187
17	V/H/S	10/5/2012	Magnet Pictures	R	$100,345	12,606
18	The Awakening	8/17/2012	Cohen Media Group	R	$95,933	12,051
19	The Road	5/11/2012	Freestyle Releasing	R	$92,476	11,617
20	The Innkeepers	2/3/2012	Magnolia Pictures	R	$78,396	9,848
21	Intruders	3/30/2012	Alchemy	R	$48,366	6,076

22	The Bay	11/2/2012	Roadside Attractions	R	$30,668	3,852
23	Kill List	2/3/2012	IFC Films	Not Rated	$29,063	3,651
24	Death of the Virgin	2/10/2012	Indican Pictures	Not Rated	$24,418	3,067
Total Gross of All Movies					$308,863,451	

2013						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2013 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	The Conjuring	7/19/2013	Warner Bros.	R	$137,400,141	16,900,386
2	Insidious Chapter 2	9/13/2013	FilmDistrict	PG-13	$83,586,447	10,281,235
3	Mama	1/18/2013	Universal	PG-13	$71,628,180	8,810,354
4	Evil Dead	4/5/2013	Sony Pictures	R	$54,239,856	6,671,569
5	Carrie	10/18/2013	Sony Pictures	R	$35,266,619	4,337,837
6	You're Next	8/23/2013	Lionsgate	R	$18,494,006	2,274,785
7	Paranormal Activity: The Marked Ones	1/3/2014	Paramount Pictures	R	$18,343,611	2,256,286
8	The Last Exorcism Part II	3/1/2013	CBS Films	PG-13	$15,179,303	1,867,072
9	Texas Chainsaw 3D	1/4/2013	Lionsgate	R	$12,597,475	1,549,504
10	The Lords of Salem	4/19/2013	Anchor Bay Entert…	R	$1,165,881	143,404
13	The Wicker Man	6/1/1975		Not Rated	$58,341	7,176
15	Aftershock	5/10/2013	Weinstein Co.	R	$40,179	4,942
17	V/H/S 2	7/12/2013	Magnet Pictures	R	$21,833	2,685
18	The ABCs of Death	5/21/2013	Magnolia Pictures	Not Rated	$21,832	2,685
19	Nothing Left to Fear	10/4/2013	Anchor Bay Entert…	R	$7,886	969
Total Gross of All Movies					$448,523,012	

2014						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2014 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	Annabelle	10/3/2014	Warner Bros.	R	$84,273,813	10,315,032
2	Ouija	10/24/2014	Universal	PG-13	$50,856,010	6,224,725
3	Deliver Us from Evil	7/2/2014	Sony Pictures	R	$30,577,122	3,742,609
4	Oculus	4/11/2014	Relativity	R	$27,695,246	3,389,870
5	Devil's Due	1/17/2014	20th Century Fox	R	$15,821,461	1,936,531
7	Paranormal Activity: The Ma…	1/3/2014	Paramount Pictures	R	$14,118,761	1,728,122
8	The Quiet Ones	4/25/2014	Lionsgate	PG-13	$8,509,867	1,041,599
9	The Pyramid	12/5/2014	20th Century Fox	R	$2,695,735	329,955
10	Tusk	9/19/2014	A24	R	$1,821,983	223,008
11	The Remaining	9/5/2014	Sony Pictures	PG-13	$1,169,603	143,158
12	Saw	10/29/2004	Lionsgate	R	$815,324	99,794
13	The Babadook	11/28/2014	IFC Midnight	Not Rated	$742,092	90,831
15	Horns	10/31/2014	RADiUS-TWC	R	$164,480	20,132
17	Afflicted	4/4/2014	CBS Films	R	$121,179	14,832
19	Honeymoon	9/12/2014	Magnolia Pictures	R	$9,318	1,140
20	The Sacrament	6/6/2014	Magnolia Pictures	R	$9,221	1,128
21	13 Sins	4/18/2014	RADiUS-TWC	R	$9,134	1,117
22	Come Back to Me	7/25/2014	Freestyle Releasing	R	$7,744	947
23	The ABC's of Death 2	10/31/2014	Magnet Pictures	Not Rated	$7,171	877

24	Stage Fright	5/9/2014	Magnolia Pictures	R	$7,078	866
25	Almost Human	2/21/2014	IFC Films	Not Rated	$5,710	698
28	V/H/S: Viral	11/21/2014	Magnolia Pictures	R	$2,756	337
Total Gross of All Movies					$254,888,301	

2015						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2015 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	Goosebumps	10/16/2015	Sony Pictures	PG	$79,132,868	9,387,054
2	Insidious Chapter 3	6/5/2015	Focus Features	PG-13	$52,218,558	6,194,372
3	Poltergeist	5/22/2015	20th Century Fox	PG-13	$47,425,125	5,625,756
4	Unfriended	4/17/2015	Universal	R	$32,789,645	3,889,638
5	Crimson Peak	10/16/2015	Universal	R	$31,090,320	3,688,057
6	Sinister 2	8/21/2015	Focus Features	R	$27,740,955	3,290,741
7	The Lazarus Effect	2/27/2015	Lionsgate	PG-13	$25,801,570	3,060,684
8	The Gallows	7/10/2015	Warner Bros.	R	$22,764,410	2,700,404
9	Paranormal Activity: The Gh…	10/23/2015	Paramount Pictures	R	$18,297,124	2,170,477
10	It Follows	3/13/2015	RADiUS-TWC	R	$14,674,077	1,740,697
11	The Woman in Black 2: Angel…	1/2/2015	Relativity	PG-13	$11,473,908	1,361,080
15	A Girl Walks Home Alone at …	11/21/2014	Kino Lorber	Not Rated	$385,325	45,708
18	Spring	3/17/2015	Drafthouse Films	Not Rated	$49,970	5,927
19	The Nightmare	6/5/2015	Gravitas Ventures	Not Rated	$28,281	3,354
21	The Hallow	11/13/2015	IFC Midnight	Not Rated	$8,967	1,063
22	Hayride 2	3/6/2015	Freestyle Releasing	R	$2,571	304
Total Gross of All Movies					$374,324,652	

2016						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2016 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	The Conjuring 2: The Enfiel…	6/10/2016	Warner Bros.	R	$102,470,008	11,846,244
2	Don't Breathe	8/26/2016	Sony Pictures	R	$89,217,875	10,314,205
3	The Purge: Election Year	7/1/2016	Universal	R	$79,042,440	9,137,854
4	Lights Out	7/22/2016	Warner Bros.	PG-13	$67,268,835	7,776,744
5	The Boy	1/22/2016	STX Entertainment	PG-13	$35,819,556	4,140,989
6	Ouija: Origin of Evil	10/21/2016	Universal	PG-13	$35,144,505	4,062,948
7	The Witch	2/19/2016	A24	R	$25,138,705	2,906,208
8	Blair Witch	9/16/2016	Lionsgate	R	$20,777,061	2,401,972
9	The Darkness	5/13/2016	High Top Releasing	PG-13	$10,753,574	1,243,187
10	Green Room	4/15/2016	A24	R	$3,220,371	372,297
11	The Other Side of the Door	3/4/2016	20th Century Fox	R	$3,000,342	346,860
12	The Disappointments Room	9/9/2016	Relativity	R	$2,423,467	280,169
13	Busanhaeng	7/22/2016	Well Go USA	Not Rated	$2,125,786	245,755
14	The Neon Demon	6/24/2016	Broad Green Pictures	R	$1,333,124	154,118
15	Goosebumps	10/16/2015	Sony Pictures	PG	$936,590	108,276
16	31	10/21/2016	Saban Films	R	$779,820	90,152
17	Southbound	2/5/2016	The Orchard	R	$205,048	23,704
18	Demon	9/9/2016	The Orchard	R	$104,039	12,027
19	Clown	6/17/2016	Dimension Pictures	R	$55,007	6,359
20	Under the Shadow	10/7/2016	Vertical Entertai…	PG-13	$28,884	3,339

21	The Eyes of My Mother	12/2/2016	Magnolia Pictures	R	$27,099	3,132
25	The Monster	11/11/2016	A24	R	$12,544	1,450
28	Satanic	7/1/2016	Magnolia Pictures	R	$252	29
Total Gross of All Movies					$479,942,549	

2017						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2017 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	It	9/8/2017	Warner Bros.	R	$327,481,748	36,508,556
2	Get Out	2/24/2017	Universal	R	$175,484,140	19,563,449
3	Split	1/20/2017	Universal	PG-13	$138,141,585	15,400,399
4	Annabelle: Creation	8/11/2017	Warner Bros.	R	$102,092,201	11,381,516
5	Alien: Covenant	5/19/2017	20th Century Fox	R	$74,262,031	8,278,933
6	Happy Death Day	10/13/2017	Universal	PG-13	$55,683,845	6,207,786
8	Jigsaw	10/27/2017	Lionsgate	R	$38,052,832	4,242,233
9	Rings	2/3/2017	Paramount Pictures	PG-13	$27,793,018	3,098,441
10	Wish Upon	7/14/2017	Broad Green Pictures	PG-13	$14,301,505	1,594,370
11	It Comes at Night	6/9/2017	A24	R	$13,985,117	1,559,098
13	The Belko Experiment	3/17/2017	BH Tilt	R	$10,166,820	1,133,424
14	The Killing of a Sacred Deer	10/20/2017	A24	R	$2,291,900	255,507
15	Jeepers Creepers 3	9/26/2017	Fathom Events	Not Rated	$2,235,162	249,181
16	Raw	3/10/2017	Focus World	R	$514,870	57,399
17	The Bad Batch	6/23/2017	Neon	R	$180,851	20,161
18	The Void	4/7/2017	Screen Media Films	Not Rated	$151,042	16,838
19	7 Witches	4/21/2017	Indican Pictures	Not Rated	$31,100	3,467

20	XX	2/17/2017	Magnolia Pictures	R	$30,911	3,446
21	Jasmine	6/16/2017	Indican Pictures	Not Rated	$24,284	2,707
22	The Recall	6/2/2017	Freestyle Releasing	R	$22,233	2,478
23	The Blackcoat's Daughter	3/31/2017	A24	R	$20,435	2,278
26	Dead Awake	5/12/2017	FilmRise	Not Rated	$11,528	1,285
27	The Fiancé	11/11/2016	Indican Pictures	Not Rated	$9,866	1,099
Total Gross of All Movies					$1,039,425,572	

2018						
Rank	**Movie**	**Release Date**	**Theatrical Distributor**	**MPAA Rating**	**2018 Gross**	**Tickets Sold**
1	A Quiet Place	4/6/2018	Paramount Pictures	PG-13	$188,024,361	20,961,467
2	Halloween	10/19/2018	Universal	R	$159,342,015	17,763,881
3	The Nun	9/7/2018	Warner Bros.	R	$117,450,119	13,093,659
4	The First Purge	7/4/2018	Universal	R	$69,488,745	7,746,794
5	The House with a Clock in the walls	9/21/2018	Universal	PG	$68,549,695	7,642,106
6	Insidious: The Last Key	1/5/2018	Universal	PG-13	$67,745,330	7,552,434
7	Goosebumps 2: Haunted Hallo…	10/12/2018	Sony Pictures	PG	$46,697,321	5,205,944
8	Hereditary	6/8/2018	A24	R	$44,069,456	4,912,982
9	Slender Man	8/10/2018	Sony Pictures	PG-13	$30,564,825	3,407,449
10	Winchester	2/2/2018	CBS Films	PG-13	$25,091,816	2,797,304
11	The Strangers: Prey at Night	3/9/2018	Aviron Pictures	R	$24,431,472	2,723,686
12	The Fog	2/1/1980	Avco Embassy	Not Rated	$21,445,318	2,390,782
13	The Possession of Hannah Grace	11/30/2018	Sony Pictures	R	$14,682,696	1,636,866
14	Hell Fest	9/28/2018	CBS Films	R	$11,107,431	1,238,287
15	Unfriended: Dark Web	7/20/2018	OTL Releasing	R	$8,866,745	988,489
17	Get Out	2/24/2017	Universal	R	$556,525	62,042
18	But Deliver Us From Evil	2/9/2018	Indican Pictures	Not Rated	$285,169	31,791
20	Ghost Stories	4/20/2018	IFC Midnight	Not Rated	$135,095	15,060

21	Gonjiam: Haunted Asylum	4/13/2018	Well Go USA	Not Rated	$115,252	12,848
23	Holy Hell	7/20/2018	Indican Pictures	Not Rated	$34,366	3,831
27	The Cured	2/23/2018	IFC Films	R	$20,261	2,258
31	The Lodgers	2/23/2018	Epic Pictures Group	R	$7,362	820
Total Gross of All Movies					$901,529,308	

Appendix C: Coding Results

Theme	Sub Theme	Sub Theme 2	Key Concepts	Thoughts for Film	Film Example	Specific Quotes	General Thoughts	Sample Summary
A Laboratory of True Horror	**True Crime**		referred belief (pg 22)	Alignment with other cases	Pg 3 C2; pg 6 The Conjuring	"Since the 1960s, Ed & Lorraine Warren have been known as the world's most renowned paranormal investigators. Lorraine is a gifted clairvoyant, while Ed is the only non-ordained Demonologist recognized by the Catholic church. Out of the thousands of cases throughout their controver	Modern society exists between truth and fiction. Like True Crime TCU has to bend towards fact (but still make it fantastical) see pg 23	

						sial careers, there is one case so malevolent, they've kept it locked away until now. Based on the true story."		
			Revelation of a different reality (23)	One of the most televised cases of all time	Conjuring 2 page 1; c2 pg 14 (news cast) Pg 23; DMD pg 4; A12	Reporter asks, "How does it feel living in a haunted house?" "most documented cases in paranormal history." "The exorcism of eight-year-old David Glatzel was meant to end the months of torment.	Cult of commiseration-unable to do anything to change it but can sympathize	

						But for Arne Johnson, it was just beginning. The tragic events that followed made nationwide headlines and led and Lorraine Warren to the most sinister discovery of their career. Based on a true story."		
			Carnival of Crime pg 19 (has to be tied to the revelation in true crime for film examples to work well)	Case of Arne Cheyenne in 1981 (not guilty by reason of possession); news media interviews and voice of entity	DMDI pg 1 C2 pg 14-15 DMD pg 6	"You've proven it to the church. This is a court of law. The standards of evidence are completely different" "I like to hear	"Real" world impacts from the world of "true" crime/horror. What is real and what is true is not always aligned.	

						them scream,"		
			Normal Accident (Perrow 2011) pg 22	Para"normal" Accident Cult and evil in relation to murders	Pg 3 C2; pg 8 c2; C1 pg 29; A24		These kinds of accidents are in every film. Foundational to the universe; invisible but ever present possibility for harm	
			Cult of Commiseration		C1 pf 7 for write up			
	Truth and Deception Inside the Imagination (Not a ton to say in current lit review but a ton of examples)		Scary and disbelief pg 26 Have source on intermediaries in law (just an example). Should I include?	Warrens as Investigators Saviors Frauds	C1 pg 18 (not everything is a demon) Exorcisms cannot be performed unless there is proof. C1 pg 27 C1 pg 28 E and L	demonologists, ghost hunters, paranormal researchers…" Lorraine interjects "kooks," but ends this scene saying, "but we prefer simply to be known as Ed & Lorraine Warren."	Disbelief in the paranormal can be suspended when characters in the film believe it. Film acts as a image to allow the suspension of disbelief of suffering. The role of	

					build a case for church DMD 9 DMD 13	“investigate, gather evidence and provide proof.” “We know the dangers, better than you might think.” “You are so close. I would hate for you to give up now.”	absolute truth is important to biopolitical institutions in the universe. Highlights the subjectivity of suffering.	
			Scary and disbelief pg 26	Skeptics and Believers Lorraine believes the family eve	C2 pg 16 (Chruch does not believe) C1 p 6 C2 pg 5 C2 19 C2 20 (evidence of fraud) DMD pg 10	“your people can’t.”.	Disbelief related to suffering and legitimacy David believes Arne because he has experienced the same things	

			Scary and disbelief pg 26	Secular Mediaries	Frenchie Nun pg 5, pg 6, 24; DMD 11		Disbelief fully suspended by character; return to the distinction between true and real. Demon is a lasting presence that is not physically there even though Frenchie is.	
			Marketability is seen as personal development; rooted in moralistic language (20) (39) Citation for personal responsibility in C1 on pg 41	Personal responsibility	C2 pg 5 C1 pg 22 C1 pg 41 DMD15 A28 A30 AC-entering the bedroom (never explicit	"Exorcisms can be very dangerous, not only for the victim, but for anyone in the room." "Diabolical forces are formidable. These forces are eternal, and they exist	Characters that invite evil in (c2 based on desire to have normal home and family) Dangers for those who are not possessed- responsibility for keeping them safe	

					ly stated but implied)	today. The fairy tale is true. The devil exists. God exists. And for us, as people, our very destiny hinges upon which one we elect to follow.” “I failed as a priest. I failed as a father. Please God don’t let me fail at…” “demons can’t just take souls, Mia. A soul needs to be offered to the demon before he can take it.”	Lorraine convinces the police that she is legitimate	

						"I made the mistake, and she paid the price."		
	Danger / Primordial Evil		Gothic crim reintroduces discussions of evil as a social construct (31)	Overlay of Crime and Evil	DMDI pg 2 A10			
			Park rejected for focus on evil; gothic crim diff than soci because Ross described his "new monster"	Popular Crim belief that theory on violence	DMDI pg 2	"Diabolical forces are formidable. These forces are eternal, and they exist today. The fairy tale is true. The devil exists. God exists. And for us, as people, our very destiny hinges upon which one we elect to	New monster was the robber Barron in gothic crim; in neoliberal gothic it is neoliberalism itself. Culture doing the work of gothic crim rather than academics	

						follow." C41		
			Monstrosity and evil linked to it guard the borders of what is possible				Gothic criminology, true crime, cultural criminology, and horror are all concerned with boundary work. Sets the stage for the work around institutional degradation in the universe.	
			"Primordial evil" has been explored through horror (vampires) and serial killing (criminology/ true crime) pg 32	The demon as a primordial evil across the universe. Ties back to our sense of			Narrative patterns have been used across gothic criminology. Unique new pattern in that the evil	

				deviance			cannot be killed; only contained.	
	Isolation		Isolation comes up a lot in gothic works but not as much in gothic criminology or cultural crim. Not much (anything really in lit review) Not sure what to do with this. I do have it mentioned in the first findings chapter as a symbol. Is that enough?	The Convent; Emotional isolation; isolation after possession in C2 C1 House Kastner House Tunnels Bringing isolation to the suburbs and city	Nun- no real page number; C2 18 C2 C1 p 8 C1 17 C1 pg 19 (basement) C1 32 DMD (Arne in jail generally) DMD 11 DMD 14 DMD 15 A9 A39 AC5	"Look, I know how it is. I know how to lose your friends because you're different. But I also know that one person can change everything and you just have to open up to them." "I remember what it felt like. You're always cold, and you're never alone. That's why you can't sleep. Because its never		

						quiet in your head. Sometimes, you think something, then you're not sure if it was really you. But now you're seeing it. It's here with you. And its telling you to do things."		
	Symbols **AC1**		Traditional gothic symbols highlight how modern horror engages with social formations (pg 31) Classic modes of gothic story telling				Addresses critics complaints that the same tropes and cliches are used throughout. Briefly situate how each symbol HAS been used and how it is used here; Note how these are the more	

							minor symbols in the work and other major symbols are included throughout	
		The Crow	“The name for everything hidden that ought to have remained secret” Pg 35.	Moves beyond traditional depictions of Unheimlic as just repressed memories	Nun pg 4 and pg 15 C1 p 15 C1 pg 39		Harbingers; Unheimlic	
		Bells and Burials			Nun pg 5-6; Nun 7; pg 11; pg 12; pg 13; c2 pg 15 C1 pg 8; C1 pg 30; C1 32; DMD 7; AC 7	“That kid will either live or die depending on what you two find.”	Boundary work around life and death	
		The Snake			Nun pg 7-8; pg 11		Parts of the psyche that are unknown (self); Chaos;	

							uncontrollable danger	
		(un) Holy Women			Nun 8; Nun 17; Nun 18; Occultist in DMD (no real page number)		Boundary work around femininity and the ideal woman	
		Fear and the Cross			Nun pg 3, pg 9, pg 12 C2 pg 17; AC 9; AC 22; AC 26		Boundary work on our ability to control and contain.	
		Moving Objects	The invisible hand in c2 ph 10-11		C2 10-11; Dolls moving on their own, toys, televisions, sewing machines		Moves both big and large things	

Theme	Sub Theme	Sub Theme 2	Key Concepts	Thoughts for Film	Film Example	Specific Quotes	General Thoughts	Sample Summary
Decaying and Ineffective Institutions Neoliberalism has eroded liberal democracy (10)	**The Church** The Church and the State are aligned in the universe as they both represent biopolitical control Almost all families across the universe are religious in some way. Not coded		Power of the state to foster life or disallow it (38)	State seeks distance for possible illegitimate cases; church does not respond in time for help; Evil coming from within the church	Nun Suicide (Nun pg 3) C2 16 C1 38 DMD 15		Evil transgresses power; systems no longer decide but rather the entity; lack of responsiveness and bureaucracy	
			Spectrum of control generally reserved for the state (pg 39); Church as law	Vatican investigation; Ed and Lorraine as representatives of the church; Reps of the church do not know what to do	Nun pg 4-6 C2 pg 16 A28		Highlights the ways in which biopolitical governance is largely unquestioned.	
			Erosion of institutions (11).	Perversion of religious symbols - ties to	C1 11 AC 7; AC 11		Mocking of the trinity	

	elsewhere but worth noting AC 11		Coercive public policies. Workfare and Prisonfare	cross as representing fear				
			Situates the self in sites of power (38)	Burke and disbelief	Nun pg 6		Burke's disbelief is tied to his marketability as an impartial investigator	
			Law happens in a field of pain and death pg 39	Failed Exorcism Burke David exorcism only works because Arne invites the evil in	nun 9 DMD 4	"Leave him alone and take me!"	Exorcism act as law-sometimes evil is confined and sometimes the attempted containment leads to death	
			Religion entering the public sphere in US politics (pg 11)	Church as the only possible source of salvation despite ineffectiveness;	Nun 15; C2 throughout; C1 religious provocation pg 30; C1 pg	"Bathsheba, by the power of God, I condemn you to hell!"	No room for dissent or other ways of approaching a problem.	

				real salvation found through relation to others (see notes in home) Church as solution to personal problems Confession	40; DMD pg 8; DMD 14; DMD 16 A 22; AC12	“Remember me. She tried to turn you against me because she thinks our love is a weakness. Its not. Its not. It’s our strength Now, open your eyes.”	Love is ultimately what defeats the evil in C1 and DMD	
			Coercive public aide (pg 20)	Constant prayer; praying surrounded by holy water; faith is seen as a prerequisite for salvation	Nun 15; prayer pg 20 DMD 12; A6		Constant appeals to state power for help in the face of neoliberal programs is similar to constant appeals to The Church and faith in the face	

							of possession	
				Surveillance to try and achieve safety. Church as surveillance and record keeping	C1 29 also in C2 no particular page number but references to investigative materials; C1 pg 41 DMD (put things they want to forget- relates to containment)		Bureaucratic structures divorce people from possible sources of help. Power exists for powers sake much like evil within the films	
			Weber occult creation of corporation	Church exists as an institution but not as salvation	C1 pg 36 A 41			
	The State		Presents a positive power over	State ineffective against evil	C2 pg 12; C1 pg 29; DMD pg 6; DMD	"Something terrible is going to	Positive power does not extend to	

			life (37)	State only involved after the event has occured	7; DMD 9; DMD 10; A15; AC 27	happen” “The court accepts the existence of God every time a witness swears to tell the truth. I think it’s about time they accept the existence of the devil.” “only interested in leads that are grounded in reality.” “It is believed that they had interest	something that is outside the realm of life itself. The inability to protect against something inhuman is non-existent; Lorraine tries to call the police	

						in the occult, that they did this to prove their devotion. Violence for violence sake.”		
	The Family and The Home **The home is also related to enlightenment principles because traditional gothic modes have resisted the creation of**		Cultural Orthotaxy (pg 21) - correct ways of being	The Family as the primary unit- also touches on abandonment	Characters in ever film are situated in family. No specific page numbers. Its just across the universe- even side characters (Higgins Family a7); A8; AC 15		When the family is held as the traditional unit by which we interact with the universe the issue of abandonment makes the family pathological from the outset.	

	defining conceptual barriers (breaching the walls of a castle). Dangers inside and outside the home also resist this idea.			Pure Final Girls/ Lack of Sexualization/ Gender without Sex -	Sister Irene Nun pg. 4-5; 10; 11;		The women in the films are examples of correct and non-deviant patterns, the feminization of evil are representation	
		Gender Gender relates to enlightenment because it ties back to Focaults concept of man (those who do not fit being institutionalized) Relates to physical nonnormativity	Cultural Orthotaxy (pg 21) - correct ways of being	Ideal Mothers and Women Men as Patriarchs Carolyn is only saved when thinking about her children Patronizing femininity (Ed about Lorraine's dress in DMD)	C2 pg 11 (mom scolding) C2 pg 14- Lorraine reading and watching her child C2 20 (Ed fixing house) (Kids happier with man in house) C1 pg 14- Ed as Patriarch	has "never been happier…and that's because of you.". "When I go into labor, John, you'll save the baby over me." "working yourself up over nothing."	The films all spend a great deal of time focusing on the right ways to be a woman in the face of evil. When women do not act in orthotax ways they are punished. Stands in stark contrast to Bathshe	

				Women without mothers	C1 24 Lorraine willing to help; C2 pg 31; DMD 4 (Debbie and family); DMD pg 5-nurturing; DMD 8 DMD 14; A8 john worried about baby; A9 A16 (roles of women in the film) A20; A22; A26; A34	do what you think is right, to do what you have to do." Mia cries "please, there has to be another way!" "Your soul" is written on the window and the window slowly opens.	ba see page 28 of C1 Occultist grew up without a mother inhered fathers obsession	
			Femininity as its own form of transgression in that the ideal	Vulnerability	pg 18 Nun; c2 pg 4 C1 13 (Lorraine); C1 pg		The women in the universe are particularly vulnerable	

			woman is the one who suffers		40; A13 A16- well just Mia in general honestly		because the roles they inhabit in relation to their families; vulnerable families	
			Final girl evolution has always been based on desirability	lack of sexual appetite	pg 25-26 Nun		The ideal femininity is not linked to sexuality in these films but rather in gendered behaviors and roles	
			We Need to Talk about Family in C1 on page 28		C2 19 C1 14 A26		Most of the families are religious in these films.	
The Home and Safety			Focus on property and ownership as power structure (in	Ideas of ownership after death. Living can't leave home	C2 pg 6 The home and the body as sites of	"my house!" "Demonic spirits don't posses	The home and the body as sites of ownership. Ghost claim	

			c2 pg 6 McIntosh 2010)	for financial reasons Oozing hole in wall	owner ship. Ghost claim owner ship of places; demons claim owner ship of bodies; C1 p 5 C1 pg 25 DMD pg 4 A25	s things; they posses s people. It wanted to get inside of you. “ghosts haunt specifi c places, usually where someth ing terrible has happe ned.”	ownersh ip of places; demons claim ownersh ip of people	
			Disrupt ion of family life as own source of horror (in C1) Other resear ch regardi ng films in the univers e has highlig hted	Home in total disarray after possess ion; home shakes during exorcis m; life continue s on after exorcis m but scars are still visible in home;	C2 22-24 C1 38-39 DMD pg 3 DMD 5; DMD 15; A9; A26 AC 3 (death and orphan s); AC 5; AC 9		When someon e is not in control of their body (their self) the home is in total disarray . The home represe nts both the family as an institutio n and	

			how the gothic nature and setting of the films reflect the decay of the family and traditional values (Baker and Rutherford, 2020	dilapidated homes after loss; dollhouse as ideal			the cultural body	

Theme	Sub Theme	Sub Theme 2	Key Concepts	Thoughts for film	Film Example	Specific Quotes	General Thoughts	Sample Summary
The Body and The Self Carnival Mirror Diunital thinking regarding the body and the self A 4-5	Dispossession (the doll, animated sleeping bodies) and Possession		Bodies turned into communication ps 22 The body stands as a symbol for the cultural body (31)	Tied to bed to control body; body as a vessel; Bills voice through Janet's body; seizure activity; Cindy sleep walking; manipulation of voice on recording; Carolyn's possessed body being used like a doll	C26-7 C2 10 C2 pg 14 C2 16 C1 p 5-6 C1 14 C1 pg 16 C1 20 C121 (Synthesis) C1 pg 27; C1 pg 33; C1 pg 38 DMD pg 3 DMD 6	"This is my home. Get out now." "someone is with her" "Whatever happened that day, it was not Arne"	The body in an animated state but devoid of personal intent is a category crisis in which ourselves and our bodies are not always the same thing; reinforced property; entities speaking through but not possessing; possession and pain	
	Physical Pain and Death (Blood and Bile)		Death is the most salient evil (38); law happens in a field of pain and death.	Blood and bile as a source of terror House oozing body fluid;	C1 pg 31; C1 32; C1 pg 35; C1 pg 38; C1 pg 40; DMD pg 3; DMD 4;	The demons," Lorraine tells her, matter-of-factly,	Universe shows that some things are worse than death; possessi	

			See Park reference to blood here; physical suffering	symbol of home as living Ed continues to investigate even when physically in pain-ties back to gender Body's while possessed or under evil influences are pained bodies Fragile or pained bodies	DMD 5; DMD 7; DMD pg 10; DMD 11; DMD 16; AC 6; AC 21	"are worse." "Look what she made me do" "she possesses the mother to kill the child, she's feeding off her!"	on creates a living Zombie. Rather than mindless and roving it is calculated and pervasive; Exorcism as law- a desire to control but not always effective; Religious symbols as tools of law (law must arm itself) Ability of evil to destroy life through another. Entity can interact with people but seems to need to possess to	

							actually take a life Demon trying to make Arne commit suicide	
	Physical Nonnormativity and Monstrosity		Physical disability has often been used to mark character as “Other” in gothic works (Anolik, 2014)		C2 pg 6 C1 Bathsheba has a deformed and distorted appearance DMD 5 DMD 6 A23	“There was a crooked man, and he walked a crooked mile He found a crooked sixpence upon a crooked stile He bought a crooked cat, which caught a crooked mouse And they all lived together in a little crooke	Can incorporate instances of peoples nonnormative states highlighting them as more vulnerable under self or the body (wheel chairs, canes, pregnancy, stutter)	

						d house”		
	The Self (Mirror)		Interiors as communication 22; observation as theater 22; little room for self determination (15); market logics of investment	Every time Lorraine has a vision it takes a piece of her Lorraine see’s a physical copy of herself in the tunnels John concerned about role as new father	Nun 12; Nun 15 C1 16 C1 pg 32 C1 pg 39 C1 pg 40 DMD 6 DMD13 DMD 15 A8 A27 A29 AC16 AC25	“when the music stops, you’ll see him in the mirror standing behind you, but you have to twist the key.” Carolyn is “is already gone and now you’re all going to die.” “I think I hurt someone.”. “may God have mercy on your soul.”	Mirrors offer an inverted image if ourselves in relation to the world around us; Ties to concepts of gender and women as self-sacrificing. The self is always assumed in The Conjuring universe. It is completely centered but largely unquestioned Sacrificing someone else to save the self	

Theme	Sub Theme	Sub Theme 2	Key Concepts	Thoughts for Film	Film Example	Specific Quotes	General Thoughts	Sample Summary
Permeability and Inescapability Constant renegotiation (Nun 27) Pg12 Nun	Awake and Asleep (dream state) A body in stasis A body that is absent		Carnival of Crime	Dreams having physical impacts in waking world (C2). Interactions to physical bodies during sleep Real life danger feeling like a dream; trauma	Frenchie Nun pg 5; Irene 12; Irene 18; C2 19 C1 14 (foot grab) C1 p 18 C1 pg 37 DMD 8 A9 A18	"I didn't know what happened. It all felt like a dream, and no one believed me when I told them.".	The distinction between real and true Permeable boundaries between body and self; real and narrative	
GC see's media as, "a projection of anxiety that strives to reinforce cultural boundaries" 31 "disrupt these	Life and Death Through the veil		Park work on King of Belgium (30) Find a place to add about blood troubling the boundaries of	Fresh blood and old death	Nun 7		"Life blood being sucked out of Congo" blood as a signifier of life- spilled blood absent a body- life separate	

very same boundaries and to expose their cultural fragility."(Sothcott, 2006: 436) AC1			inner and outer world in gothic works				d from the self Could use thunderstorm examples (not coded) here	
			Phenomenology of place and presences that are not actually there (22)	Daniel; Bill in C2; Bruise in C1; C1 pg26 hanging body; house is cursed	Nun 11; Nun 23 C2 pg 20 (dentures) C1 10 A16		BUT they are there and they are not tied to a place. This is a phenomenology all its own. I don't know what to call it	
			Death is seen as the newest and most salient evil (pg 37)	entity controls a human soul after death- death is not salvation or evil	C2 21	The demons, " Lorraine tells her, matter-of-factly, "are worse."	Loss of self in neoliberalism is the new form of evil. Death is chosen offer the loss of self throughout Conjuring	

				Entity controls the human body in life and in death	C2 21 DMD 12		POSSESSION not death is the most salient evil; similar to work on Zombies but rather than being mindless we are trapped in our bodies with something no ourselves. Evil can make us zombies though. The most disturbing aspect of possession is the possibility of self awareness	
	Senses and Shadows		Silence and very common and prominent in movies	Blindfold game	Nun 13; Nun 14 silence		Ties to bells Have to include something about the	

					C1 9 DMD 11 A 18 A20		sounds: thunders torms, screeche s, static ect to distort the senses	
			Paranoia is central to gothic crim (in C1 pg 1)	Lack of trust in own senses Not seeing entities that siblings see Overwh elmed senses	C1 pg 17 DMD pg 6 DMD 13; A14; A21; A24; A26; A32	“There’s someon e standing over there,” “manifes tations of your anxiety.”	Invisible harm-still present but unseen	
			America n conserva tive moveme nts brought many faults in neolibera l logics to light (10)	Disemb odied things (ideas) come to have real world impacts	Nun 17; Nun 18; C2 pg 11; C1 19; DMD pg 5; DMD 12; AC13	“Then your God has damned you.”.	Make visible/a udible and known Sounds that mislead (piano) Entity visible in widow Lorraine seeing the occultist	

			Gothic genre and crime media link pg 35		C2 pg 1; c2 13; DMD Kasner basement A23; AC10		Darkness and a sense of foreboding. Inability of catagorize	
			Horror as a site for catharsis related to the dark side of industrialization and changing social formations (3)	Hallway and presenting Hiding in plain sight (armoire scene)	Nun 19 C1 20		Visible and Terrorize; ability to confront what we can see	
			Relates to true crime and the distinction between the normal accident and the paranormal accident; citation about internal and outer geographies and	Dangers Inside and Out	C2 8-9, C2 9-10 C1 pg 14 C1 19 C1 pg 35 DMD pg 4 DMD 16 A7 A15 A18	"We have to start locking it, John, it's a different world now.". "You've got to remember that we moved here to get away from what	The house itself is a permeable boundary because its not always known if the danger comes from within the home or outside of it.	

			the gothic in C2 pg 9		A19 A24 A31 A42	happened. We packed up our clothes, we packed up our furniture, we packed up the good memories. But the fears and the anxieties, we promised to leave those behind.”	Chaos is caused whether the entity is possessing someone or not. Dangers inside and outside the body Ability to manipulate perceptions to have others harmed	
	The Entity Demons and Dolls Doll as representative of human form that is disposed (p 4 in C1) “Since the		Monster is very different than traditional gothic crim monsters (9) “Flexible monstrosity”	Rosary Destruction; Evil takes on whatever form it desires at the time. Same entity presents itself differently ties to	Nun 17; Nun 19; DMD 12 A21 A27 A33 AC14 AC 30	“God gives everyone the right to defend themselves.” “Demons can sometimes use objects as conduits to achieve their desired goal -	Operates similarly to a vampire representing unbound capitalism BUT there is truly no escape from these monsters just as there is not escape from	

	beginning of civilization, dolls have been beloved by children, cherished by collectors and used in religious rites as conduits for good and evil." Dolls in both gothic fiction and popular culture have long been used to represent the boundaries between girlhood and womanhood, beauty,			paranoia		our souls."	neoliberalism	
			Neoliberalism frames EVERYTHING in economic terms (11)	everything was Valak Evil frames everything as a vessel; everything is up for grabs; everything can be utilized Focus on ownership of a soul/body	Nun 21-22 A4 Remember to include totem from DMD A31	It doesn't matter where you go, this dark entity has latched itself to your family and its feeding off you." Evil, it's presence… I saw it, I felt it… I felt how much it wants to take her soul…"	The inability to escape the entity is much like our inability to escape neoliberalism. We may be able to change our surroundings but it has become so embedded in our lives it is impossible to simply leave it behind.	
			See Park about life blood		C1 pg 26			
			Tears away from sympathetic transgressors (3) neoliberal logics	Stands in stark contrast to the idealized version of womanhood we see	C2 pg 18 C1 pg 18 Ci pg 28 DMD 8	"Yes, the spirit wants to hurt you." "it wants my family dead."	The evil exists purely for itself. Absolutely impossible to escape because any form	

	and fragility (Frever, 2009)		are an eroding force across society that reduces individuals into metrics of marketability and profitability (15) or in CU good and evil	in Lorraine		“and when the baby was 7 days old, Jetson caught her sacrificing it in front of the fireplace. She ran out to the tree by the dock, climbed up, proclaimed her love to Satan, cursed anyone who tried to take her land and hung herself. The why does not matter. “counter to everything that Satanist stands for. His sole aim	of sympathy and empathy will be weaponized. Frames these connections as weakness	

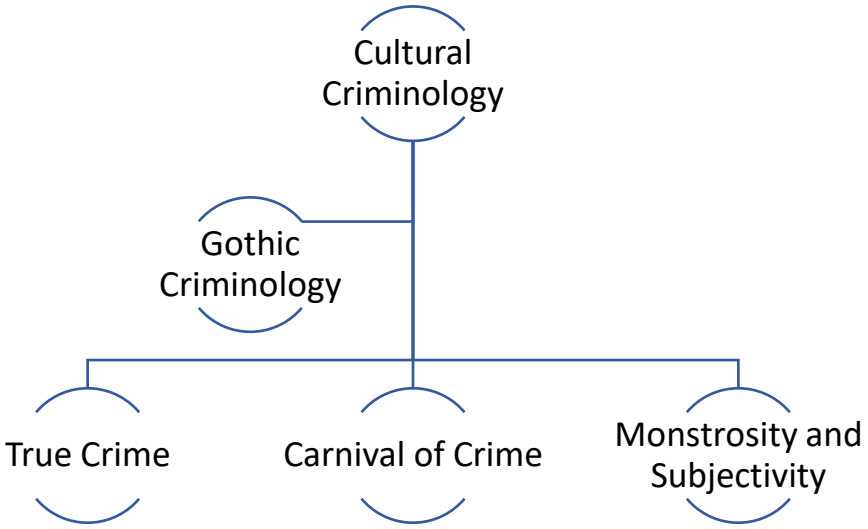
						is chaos. His nectar is despair. ”.		
			Struggle to name exactly what neoliberalism is and why it’s a problem (was in before and removed; found article to add it back in.	Not feeling anything in the house but believing it is there	C2 13 C2 19 C2 21 (naming) C1 pg 39-40	“WHO ARE YOU?! WHAT DO YOU WANT?!” “I am given and I am taken. I was there at your first breath. You didn’t ask for me, but I will follow you until your death.”	The ability to name to try to control see notes in Conjuring on page 39	
	Containment and Control		Biopolitical power to control and confine the body pg 38	Annabelle doll in case; inability to contain Valak; totem signal for evil-evil associa	C1 11 C1 12 DMD 6 DMD 7 DMD 9	“Everything you see in here is either haunted, cursed, or has been used in some kind of	Warren museum in C1 kind of like a demon prison Arne in prison after murder	

				ted with things rather than being able to be manipulated by them (she was able to control entity via the object) Kastner keeping occult artifacts Storage at Kastner home Storing of chalice in museum	DMD 14 DMD 17	ritualistic practice.” “that would only destroy the vessel. Sometimes it’s better to keep the genie in a bottle.” , “Demons just don’t disappear like this. There is something going on here. Something we missed the first time.” keeping, “guns off the street.”. “It’s where they put the things,		

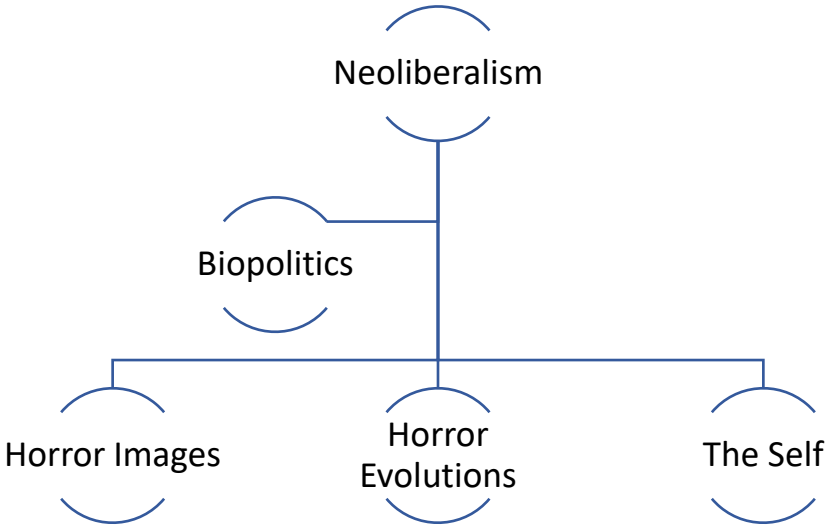
						they were afraid of. Things they didn't understand."		
			"Primordial evil" has been explored through horror (vampires) and serial killing (criminology/ true crime) pg 32 Example work on HotSpot Policing in C2.		Nun 16; Nun 22; Nun 24 C2 17-18 DMD pg 2 DMD 9 A35 AC 9	says "The threat of evil is ever present … We can contain it as long as we stay vigilant, but it can never truly be destroyed."	Connects back to true crime and primordial Evil as boundary work. This will be a reiteration True evil cannot be contained; containment as opening up others to more risk	
			Identified sites where neoliberalism creates chaos (42) so we are able to address	Containment is possible once we are able to name and understand what	C2 23	"Your name gives me dominion over you, demon, and I do know your		

			it at specific sites but still not the logics	we are facing.		name." "you are Valak, the defiler, the profane, the markee of snakes."		
			Social control of the poor pg 20	Neoliberalism controlling a life limits the possibilities	C1 38		Entity controls body and what it does when it is not contained.	

Appendix D: Cultural Criminology Relationship Map



Appendix E: Neoliberal Horror Relationship Map



VITA

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