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Resume

Dette speciale har til hensigt at undersøge hvordan populære amerikanske gyserfilm repræsenterer kulturelle bekymringer vedrørende samtidens vestlige samfund. Teoretikere har været i stand til at analysere gyserfilm som kulturprodukter, der repræsenterer bekymringer vedrørende deres samtid. Ydermere har man været i stand til at kategorisere en række af disse gyserfilm som dele af tematiske klynger, som kollektivt har repræsenteret kulturelle bekymringer, og påvist hvordan disse har ændret sig igennem tiden, i takt med ændrende kulturelle og sociale strømninger. Den amerikanske gyserfilm er under konstant udvikling og ser en stigende indtjening samt assimilering ind i populærkulturen. I takt med dens stigende udvikling bliver det sværere og sværere for teoretikere at holde trit med hvilke kulturelle bekymringer den giver udtryk for og hvordan. I dette speciale er *The Conjuring* (2013) og *The Ring* (2002) blevet udvalgt, som eksempler på to populære gyserfilm der hver repræsenterer to dominerende tendenser indenfor gysergenren. De to gyserfilm vil blive analyseret som eksempler med henblik på at påvise, hvordan disse dominerende tendenser er repræsentative for en række samtidige kulturelle bekymringer. Dette vil blive udført ved at sammensætte relevante teoretiske værktøjer af Noël Carroll, Robin Wood og Barbara Creed, der kombineret med understøttende sekundærlitteratur, udgør et teoretisk fundament for analysen, som er inddelt i to afsnit. I det første afsnit vil *The Conjuring* blive analyseret som eksempel på en tendens indenfor gyserfilmen, der repræsenterer bekymringer vedrørende økonomisk krise. Analysen vil påvise hvordan *The Conjuring* tematiserer økonomisk krise og hvordan den er ude af stand til at forløse denne krise. I stedet bliver den økonomiske krise forestillet symbolsk og forløsningen opstår i stedet ved at projicere krisen i det monstrøse, som bliver assimileret og tilintetgjort. Fordi det monstrøse er konstrueret som feminint, vil det blive påvist hvordan *The Conjuring* benytter 'the monstrous feminine' tropen, for at give narrativ mening og forløse det. Dette vil udlede et argument der påtegner *The Conjuring* som reaktionær. I anden del af analysen vil *The Ring* blive analyseret som eksempel på en tendens indenfor gyserfilmen der repræsenterer bekymringer vedrørende teknologi. Analysen vil påvise hvordan *The Ring* repræsenterer bekymringer vedrørende teknologi, og hvad end ukendte der må befinde sig bagved, og hvordan det er personificeret i monstret, Samara. Derudover vil det blive påvist, hvordan *The Ring* repræsenterer bekymringer, som netværksrelationen i teknologi giver os adgang til. Disse netværk

inkluderer specifikt kommunikationsnetværk som nyhedsmedier, samt statslige og institutionelle netværk relateret til social kontrol. Derefter vil en komparativ analyse af *The Ring* og den japanske film den er baseret på, *Ringu* (1998), påvise hvordan narrativet i den amerikanske version differerer, og forener det monstrøse med femininitet, hvilket understreger den reaktionære ideologi som den giver udtryk for. Slutteligt vil de to individuelle konklusioner blive opsummeret, og der vil blive reflekteret kort over, hvordan dele af analyserne kan uddybes og understøttes af anden teori. Herefter vil der blive reflekteret over filmenes fællestræk og det vil blive konkluderet hvordan det mest signifikante fællestræk er de reaktionære repræsentationer af femininitet, og hvordan begge film gør brug af 'the monstrous feminine' tropen, i deres tematisering af samtidige kulturelle bekymringer. Af dette udledes en spekulation om hvordan den populære nutidige amerikanske gyserfilm repræsenterer en reaktionær kulturel bekymring vedrørende udligningen af politiske og sociale rettigheder på tværs af sociale grupperinger.

NIGHTMARES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Representations of Cultural Anxieties in the American Horror Film



A Master's Thesis

By Morten W. Rasmussen

Under the supervision of Bent Sørensen

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Introduction

Psychoanalysts have attempted to explain the function of dreams ever since Freud initially pointed to their significance. Freud himself claimed that dreams function as to preserve sleep by representing fulfilled wishes to the dreamer (Rycroft 41). An analogy between dreams and films has frequently been invoked in order to describe the experience of film audiences; of how they sit comfortably in the darkness of the cinema and surrender to the fantasy experience projected on the screen in front of them (Wood 202). Based on this analogy, it would make sense that we would refer to our favorite films as those which succeed in providing a similar kind of “wish fulfillment”, and that the same films would readily dominate the box office due to the consequential disinclination of audiences to “wake up” and leave the cinema. The horror film, however, has consistently proved itself as one of the most popular providers of cinematic experiences (Wood 202) and remains as such today. This seems like somewhat of a paradox, given the fact that horror films differentiate themselves from most other films in changing the alleged dream-like experience of the cinema into that of a nightmare. The popularity of the horror film seems even more curious in consideration of the real-life horrors which have threatened the stability of the status quo of western society throughout history, whether they be related to the Cold War, social crisis, or terrorism. However, scholars have argued that there exists a persistent relation between times of social stress and the rise in popularity of horror films during these times.

It is frequently remarked that horror cycles emerge in times of social stress, and that the genre is a means through which the anxieties of an era can be expressed. That the horror genre should be serviceable in this regard comes as no surprise, since its specialty is fear and anxiety. What presumably happens in certain historical circumstances is that the horror genre is capable of incorporating or assimilating general social anxieties into its iconography of fear and distress. (Carroll 207)

Robin Wood articulates this notion quite accurately in this context, and refers to horror films as “our collective nightmares” (203). Based on this notion, scholars of horror (including Wood) have set out to examine the anxieties which are represented in horror films. They have been able to categorize distinct ‘cycles’ of horror films

which respond, varying and correspondingly, to the changing anxieties of the specific time and place in which they were produced. Due to the generally rising popularity of the horror genre and its assimilation into the mainstream, the scholarly response to its most recent development stagnates, and as the horror film genre sees the growing emergence of new subgenres, it becomes increasingly difficult to categorize them as cycles. There are, however, thematic trends among today's popular horror films which suggest that they collectively represent small cycles, or thematic clusters, which respond to contemporary cultural anxieties. The box office rankings of said films testify to their appeal and thus their successful response to said anxieties. As such, by condensing a list of the top ten highest grossing American horror films released between 2000 and 2015, before categorizing them in 'cycles' or rather, 'thematic clusters', it is the attempt of this Master's thesis to examine the cultural anxieties they represent. This will be achieved by analyzing two films – each belonging to one of two popular thematic clusters. This problem statement can be formulated into the following problem:

*How do *The Conjuring* (2013, dr: James Wan) and *The Ring* (2002, dr: Gore Verbinski), as examples of popular American horror films released between 2000 and 2015, represent cultural anxieties of contemporary western society?*

Methodology

Forming a list of the ten most popular contemporary American horror films proves quite simple, assuming that the most popular films are those which gross earnings are ranked the highest. In the context of this thesis, the 'contemporary' has been limited to horror films released between 2000 and 2015. As such, the list of top grossing horror titles of all times provided by IMDb¹ can readily be condensed by picking out the top ten grossing films released within that timeline. However, the horror genre can be said to include films which are not horrific. Some parodies and children's animated rely on traditional motifs of the horror genre for comical relief. Including these films in the context of this thesis does not prove relevant as their primary concern is comical relief rather than anxiety, and have been excluded. Additionally,

the list of top grossing horror titles includes several films which are part of the same series. Including all of them on the top ten list would provide a narrow representation of the genre at its current state, assuming that films which are part of the same series represent similar cultural anxieties. Therefore, only one film per series has been included on the list. The films which remain thus constitute the list of the top ten highest grossing American horror films released between 2000 and 2015. Arguably, the attempt to examine which cultural anxieties are predominantly represented in these films necessitates an extensive analysis of them all. However, their overt themes – whether they are related to the haunted house, technological innovation, or zombies – are to be assumed indicative of the anxieties which they represent. In order to map out the dominant cultural anxieties represented on this list, the films have been categorized into thematic clusters based on their overt themes. The list and a map of the categorization of the films are illustrated in Appendix A.

When referring to said clusters, or cycles, throughout this thesis, which scholars will also be cited for doing, it is important to note beforehand, that all thematic clusters are convergent. There are many ways, and different parameters, by which one might define them. Some might be defined as time-specific, and others might include films of different decades which constitute a cluster based on themes which they share. Individual films may thus be placed within a number of different thematic clusters. It is also important to note, that clusters which are defined by themes of which they are overtly concerned, are most obvious and readily definable. Contrarily, other films are not as readily defined as part of a cluster, as their themes are represented implicitly.

Based on the number of films which represent them, the map of thematic clusters, and their representative films (Appendix A), reveals that the dominant themes of today's popular American horror films are related to haunted houses and technology. As such, one film of each of those thematic clusters will be selected and analyzed as examples. *The Conjuring* has been chosen due to its ability to climb the top grossing list despite its recent release which testifies to its success and appeal. Additionally, *The Ring* has been chosen as part of the 'technology'-cluster, simply because of its overt reliance on technology in its plot and narrative.

The analysis of this thesis is divided into two parts: The first one concerns the “haunted house” cluster. An analysis of *The Conjuring* is going to provide an example of how these films envisage the traditional Gothic trope of the haunted house, in order to represent cultural anxieties related to economic crisis. This is why the first part of the analysis is titled “Economic anxieties”. In the second part of the analysis, *The Ring* will be analyzed as an example of films which rely on technology as their primary source of horror. An analysis of *The Ring* will reveal how it represents anxieties in relation to technology, as well as others unrelated to technology, but which are expressed through imagery and motifs related to it. The analyses of *The Conjuring* and *The Ring* partially include their respective sequels and prequels to the extent that they are deemed relevant.

Both analyses rely on a composed theoretical framework constituted by selected theories authored by Noël Carol, Robin Wood and Barbara Creed. An account of this theoretical framework has been provided in the following section of this thesis which additionally includes an argumentation for their individual inclusion. However, because the analysis is divided in two separate parts, which each concern a number of cultural anxieties, both of them is going to rely on secondary literature which will contribute in analyzing the anxieties specific to each individual part of the analysis. These are not accounted for as parts of the composed theoretical framework. However, relevant theoretical accounts specific to the individual analyses are included in their introductions.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework accounted for in the following is to be considered the foundation relied upon in analyzing which cultural anxieties are represented in *The Conjuring* and *The Ring* in the context of contemporary western society. This theoretical assessment includes a historical account, and a number of selected theories, each offering different perspectives on understanding the horror film as they have been deemed necessary for analyzing it in the context of the problem of this thesis. Because envisaging these theories to each their full extent would exceed the scope of this thesis, only the parts of each theory deemed necessary have been envisaged and accounted for in the following.

In order to provide a concise understanding of what the American horror film is, a historical account of its development will introduce this theoretical assessment as a means to approach a working definition. The second part of the theoretical account includes the selected theories envisaged as a means examining which cultural anxieties the horror film represents. The last part of this theoretical assessment will provide a context for the analysis as it accounts for examples of prior anxieties represented in cycles or thematic clusters of the American horror film. In order to avoid confusion in regards to this theoretical assessment, it is important to note the difference between the historical account of the development of the American horror film provided in the beginning, and the thematic account on prior cycles, or thematic clusters, of American horror films.

Introducing the American horror film

As an introduction to the American horror film, the following is an account of its historical development – from its origin in the Gothic novel, to its variety of film genres which constitute it today. This will be achieved in order to arrive at a working definition of the American horror film, as it is to be understood throughout this project.

History

The horror genre begins to emerge in literature as early as in the eighteenth century². The sources of the first appearances of the genre were the British Gothic novel, the German *Schauer-roman*, and the French *roman noir*. The greatest importance for the development of the horror genre was the supernatural gothic, which depicted graphically “the existence and cruel operation of unnatural forces” (Carroll 4). In these fictions, the horror genre as we know it today is apparently recognizable, and a number of these fictions, such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and John Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1819), served as foundations for the first horror films to come out of Hollywood nearly a century later (4). The horror genre continued to thrive in literature published throughout the rest of the 19th century, although the realist novel stole some of the attention. The horror genre gained popularity due to the releases of Gothic fictions by authors such as William Mudford, Edward Bulwer-Lytton and James Hogg, and later, Thomas Prest and George William MacArthur. Benjamin Franklin Fisher, however, has asserted that it was when these tales started mirroring developments in the greater Victorian and American novels, that the horror

genre started to emerge as “... solidly artistic and serious ...” (qtd. in Carroll 5). This development was due to a change in the horror genre: Whereas it used to rely on “... physical fright, expressed through numerous outward miseries and villainous actions...” it started depending instead on psychological fear (5). As such, these fictions emphasized the underlying motivations rather than their terrifying consequences as the true sources of horror. The ghost-in-a-bedsheet gave way ... to the haunted psyche ...” (qtd. in Carroll 5). In America, authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville carried on this trend. By the entrance into the last decade of the 19th century, the classic novels of horror, which were later adapted and readapted for stage and screen, were published. These include Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1887), Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1891), and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) (6).

It was not until after World War 1 that the horror genre emerged in the new medium of film (Carroll 6), and it was during the early sound era that the genre started to gain popularity in the context of cinema. The initial horror films were released during the 1920s, the majority of them by Universal - and usually starring Lon Chaney. It started with Tod Browning’s *Dracula* and James Whale’s *Frankenstein* which were both released in 1931. In the following years, Universal’s horror cycle continued with the releases of hits such as Whale’s *The Old Dark House* (1932), *The Invisible Man* (1933) and *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and Karl Freund’s *The Mummy* (1932). The films which were released in the latter half of the thirties dissipated the greatness of the universal horror genre due to formulaic repetition (Thompson and Bordwell 213).

The potential popularity that the horror held, and to which the Universal cycle of horror films became a testament, was recognized by producer Val Lewton who took charge of production at RKO’s B unit in 1942. He enlisted directors such as Jacques Tourneur, Mark Robson, and Robert Wise and together they created a “consistent tone and style for the films” (Thompson and Bordwell 213). The Val Lewton films which dominated the horror scene in the forties include Tourneur’s *Cat People* (1942) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), as well as Robert Wise’s *The Body Snatcher* (1945) and Mark Robson’s *Isle of the Dead* (1945).

During the Cold War, the development of the science fiction film influenced the horror genre by freeing it from its literary roots and presenting it in a modern context. These films often portrayed the invasion by an alien and typically insect-like force such as in Christian Nyby's *The Thing* (1951), Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) or Jack Arnold's *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1956). The latter is based on the novel *The Shrinking Man* (1956) by Richard Matheson, who became an influential writer of modern horror. He is often concerned with "... supposedly 'normal' American middle-class men who ... find themselves displaced from their relationship with the world" (Jancovich 70). Matheson is also the writer of *I Am Legend* (1954), which was adapted into a feature film of the same name and released in 2007. Additionally, he is the key contributor to *The Twilight Zone* (a TV-anthology created by Rob Sterling) as well as the scripts for the Roger Corman adaptations of the fictions of Edgar Allan Poe (73). In the late 1950s, the British Hammer Studios contended the success of Hollywood in producing and distributing horror. Their \$270,000 film release, *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), was directed by Terence Fisher and made nearly \$2 million in America within the first six months of its release. Hammer studios, along with American International Pictures, sustained the baby-boom audience's demand for horror throughout the sixties in America. These horror films were enjoyed by audiences on TV as well as in theaters (Carroll 7), and horror anthologies like *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964), which were created for TV by Rod Sterling, and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1955-1962), hosted by Alfred Hitchcock himself, guaranteed the emergence of the horror genre in the broadcast television format (IMDb).

Spurred by the successful release of *The Curse of Frankenstein* by Hammer Films, the Gothic horror film saw its resurgence in the sixties with the releases of films such as *Dracula*, *Prince of Darkness* (also directed by Fisher), Corman's *The House of Usher* (1960), and *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1961) (Jancovich 73-79). *The Haunting of Hill House*, released in 1963 and directed by Robert Wise, is based on Shirley Jackson's novel of the same name and relies on the original Gothic trope of the haunted house and affirms the return to Gothic horror, typical of films of the sixties. The sixties also saw the emergence of apocalyptic narratives and demonic themes such as in Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1967) and George Romero's

Night of the Living Dead (1968), the latter of which revived the zombie trope and spurred the releases of numerous ‘zombie films’ in its wake (Jancovich 87-93).

Horror films of the 1960s, exemplified by some of those mentioned here, contributed to many distinct forms of horror films which gained popularity throughout the 1970s. Warner Brothers, for instance, recognized the success of the horror films of the sixties, and provided the then-unprecedented budget of \$10 million for William Friedkin’s *The Exorcist* (1973) (Jancovich 93). In the late seventies and early eighties, a subgenre of the horror film emerged, which has been given a variety of names: the slasher movie, the teenie kill, the stalker film, the slice and dice pic, and the splatter movie (Jancovich 104). Even though Tobe Hooper’s *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* was released in 1974, it was not until the success of John Carpenter’s *Halloween* (1978) that the genre gained popularity and “... a flood of imitations gave rise to a moral panic”. These films, including Sean S. Cunningham’s *Friday the 13th* (1980) developed into franchises as they each spurred multiple sequels, prequels, followed by action figures and videogames.

The emergence of the slasher subgenre marked a point of fragmentation in the history of the horror film, as more and more subgenres emerged and developed and have continued to do so ever since. Throughout the seventies and eighties, the ‘body-horror’ genre developed, spurred by the works of David Cronenberg, notably *Shivers* (1975), *Scanners* (1981), *Videodrome* (1983), and *The Fly* (1986). During the 90s, the horror genre was dominated by a genre of horror films greatly influenced by post-modernism and intertextuality while they started pervading the American box office, and A-list actors started inhabiting the roles they offered. Horror films started to receive award nods which continued after the turn of the century. During the early 2000s, the American horror film became “... darker, more disturbing, and increasingly apocalyptic” (Briefel and Miller 1). Scholars have deemed the events in New York on 9/11 as a major influence on this change. The turn of the century also saw the emerging trend of the found footage phenomenon, spurred by the release of *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), co-directed by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez. However, it was not until a few years later that the subgenre would gain popularity, as it initially receded from mainstream attention due to the ascendancy of the ‘torture porn’ subgenre, which was also influenced by the events on 9/11 (Heller-Nicholas 4).

The films of the found footage subgenre rely on "... amateur filmmaking aesthetics ..." which initially "... opened it up to a range of production budgets, effectively flooding the market and making it close to impossible to remain up-to-date with every new found footage horror movie released". While it initially lost attention, which favored the torture porn phenomenon, the found footage horror production spiked in 2007 with releases such as *Cloverfield* (2008, dr: Matt Rieves), *[Rec]* (2007, dr: Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza), *Diary of the Dead* (2007, dr: George Romero), and *Paranormal Activity* (2007, dr: Oren Peli). Its rise in popularity at this time has been explained as being due to the recent founding and rising popularity of YouTube in 2005 as well as the growing taste for amateur media which it allowed for (Heller-Nicholas 4).

As Mark Jancovich concludes, "... horror has developed and changed over the past 200 years since the emergence of the Gothic novel" (118) and in many ways, it has not: While the horror genre has adapted into new media formats, from the Gothic novel to film and television, the highest grossing American horror film of the U.S. box office at present is the previously mentioned *I Am Legend* (2007) which, as mentioned, is a film-adaptation of Richard Matheson's 1954 novel of the same name. Today, the horror genre is part of mainstream American cinema, although usually restricted to some audiences due to American motion picture rating systems. The horror film genre remains divided into numerous sub-categories, which converge depending on the various parameters from which one might define them. While aesthetics of the horror film and means of its production have changed, Wood asserts how the horror film has consistently been popular while, at the same time, the most disreputable of Hollywood genres:

The popularity itself has a peculiar characteristic that sets the horror film apart from other genres: it is restricted to aficionados and complemented by total rejection, people tending to go to horror films either obsessively or not at all. They are dismissed with contempt by the majority of reviewer critics, or simply ignored. (202)

This historical account allows for establishing cohesion in regards to what is referred to throughout this thesis by mention of the American horror film genre. As such, it serves as a point of reference for the 'sort' of films discussed within the

context of this thesis, while allowing for the arrival at the following theoretical definition.

Definition

Undoubtedly, there are as many variations of any subgenre of the horror film, as there are horror films which may be categorized as part of it. Therefore, a definition encompassing the variety of the horror genre in general, which the historical account in the prior regards, must necessarily be simple and basic. Wood provides such a definition of the American horror film which is to be considered the frame of reference throughout this thesis:

Normality is threatened by the Monster. I use “normality” here in a strictly non-evaluative sense, to mean simply “conformity to the dominant social norms”; one must firmly resist the common tendency to treat the word as if it were more or less synonymous with “health”.
(203)

Because of its simplicity, this definition provides a formula which covers the entire range of horror films and subgenres, whether the monster is a specter, a possessed child, or the Devil himself, and provides a basic and universal formula for understanding it. This can be achieved by considering the three variables it offers: normality, the monster, and the relationship between the two. While normality in horror films is quite “boringly” constant: “... the heterosexual monogamous couple, the family, and the social institutions ... that support and defend them”, the monster, however, changes from film to film and from period to period “...as society’s basic fears clothe themselves in fashionable or immediately accessible garments” (204). This is why, of course, that the monster, and its given nature at present, is at the heart of this thesis. The essential subject of the horror film is the third variable: the relationship between normality and the monster. Wood asserts how this too “... changes and develops, the development taking the form of a long process of clarification or revelation” (204). This is the working definition of the American horror film as it is to be understood throughout this project. It also provides a basic and general methodology for examining it. In the account which follows, the specific characteristics of the American horror film, and how it works, as well as suggestions as to how it may be interpreted and examined is provided.

How does the American horror film “work”?

Having established cohesion in regards to what the American horror film is (and has been), it is time to account for how it “works”, that is, how it may be understood, interpreted and examined. This will be achieved by reliance on Noël Carroll’s theory of the functioning of plot and narrative in the horror film which will provide a fundamental understanding for the genre while providing a vocabulary for examining it. Next, Wood’s theoretical assessment on how the horror film can be interpreted in terms of the relationship between filmmakers, the film itself, and audiences is accounted for. This relationship provides a beneficial fundament for understanding Wood’s theory of the return of the repressed which is assessed for afterwards. The theory of the return of the repressed proves particularly significant in analyzing how cultural anxieties are represented in the American horror film. This is because it offers a method for interpreting monsters of the horror film, in consideration of the way they are portrayed, as manifestations of collective anxieties. However, Wood’s theory does not take into consideration the ‘paradox of horror’ – that audiences are able to identify with monsters (in the cases in which they are invited to) despite the fact that they are portrayed as repulsive, therefore an account of Carroll’s comment on this phenomenon is provided as a contribution and addition to Wood’s theory. Additionally, while Wood attests that female sexuality and woman as the Other figure constitutes a large category of the repressed within western capitalist society, Creed provides a theorization based on Kristeva’s notion of abjection which has been accounted for because it will serve as to accommodate for the especially large category of the repressed which the female and women constitute.

Plot and narrative

Carroll begins his theorization of the plot and narrative of the American horror film by providing an assumption about it, which one might argue applies to most film genres. This does not make it any less true in regards to that of horror: “Anyone familiar with the genre of horror knows that its plots are very repetitive” (97). He explains the reason for this as being due to the limited repertory of narrative strategies which the horror genre offers. Based on the assumption that the plot and narratives are somewhat repetitive and predictable, Carroll accounts for a general theory by which they may be understood. Because the analysis of this thesis will depend on the structure of plot and narrative of American horror films, Carroll’s

theorization will be introduced in the following to serve as a theoretical foundation for doing so.

Carroll does not set out to identify every horror plot, but he provides a provisional and instructive formula for understanding plots and narrative structures in the horror film as they cross and subtend its various subgenres (98). He achieves this by asserting for the ‘complex discovery plot’: a plot structure, which illuminates the “fundamental organizing principles” of the horror film. The numerous variations which Carroll additionally accounts for will not be asserted here, as the general plot structure will prove sufficient in the context of the analysis in this thesis. The first function of the complex discovery plot is ‘onset’, which establishes the presence of the monster for audiences. The onset of the monster may be preceded or intercut with establishing scenes introducing the characters of the film. The presence of the monster, while only alluded to characters by the effects of its presence (such as footprints, bite marks, unexplained happenings) may be portrayed explicitly to audiences before it is revealed to the characters (99). The onset of the monster raises the question of whether or not the characters will be able to uncover the source, identify the nature of these effects and happenings. This question is answered by the turn of the narrative into the ‘discovery’ function. Carroll describes the discovery function of the plot as that by which “... an individual or a group learns of its existence”. The discovery may come to the surprise of characters, or it may come as a result of an investigation. While during the onset, the monster remains hidden and only the effects of its presence are witnessed by characters, “... discovery proper occurs when one character or group of characters comes to the warranted conviction that a monster is at the bottom of the problem” (100). The next function of the horror film narrative occurs by “... the discoverers of or the believers in the existence of the monster convincing some other group of the existence of the creature and of the proportions of the mortal danger at hand ...” which Carroll refers to as the ‘confirmation’ function. The group who refuses to acknowledge the presence of the monster is typically authoritative, and precious time is lost during their refusal which might allow the monster to grow in strength and further compromise the lives of the protagonists during the ‘confrontation’ function of the narrative (101). The confrontation is the culmination of the complex discovery plot: “Humanity marches out to meet its monster and the confrontation generally takes the form of a debacle”

(102). There is often more than one confrontation which may assume the shape of an escalation in intensity or complexity. The confrontation may adopt a problem/solution format: “That is, initial confrontations with the monster prove it to be invulnerable to humankind in every way imaginable; but then humanity snatches victory from the jaws of death by concocting one “last chance” countermeasure that turns the tide”. These countermeasures are typically related to a discovery made prior to the confrontation of the monster (103). Wood offers a set of variables which exist in addition to the narrative stages provided here. However, this account provides a sufficient understanding and terminology for navigating the narrative stages of the horror films examined in this thesis.

Dreams and nightmares

While the analyses of this thesis are going to rely on a foundational understanding of plot and narrative of the American horror film, they will also rely on Wood’s theorization regarding why they are structured as such, and why they tell the stories they do. These theories concern the repressed desires, tensions, and fears that our conscious mind rejects, but which are represented in the horror film.

Wood questions the fact that the analogy frequently invoked between dreams and films, which was mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, is usually only concerned with explaining the experience of the audience. He agrees that it holds true considering the spectator sitting in darkness, while the involvement that the entertainment invites, necessitates a certain switching off of consciousness, which makes the experience of the film similar to that of a dream. However, Wood claims that the analogy is also useful in the context of the filmmakers and the making of film:

Dreams – the embodiment of repressed desires, tensions, fears that our conscious mind rejects – become possible when the “censor” that guards our subconscious relaxes in sleep, though even then the desires can only emerge in disguise, as fantasies that are “innocent” or apparently meaningless. (202)

One of the functions of the concept of entertainment, he asserts, is that which we don’t take seriously – entertainment is mainly “for fun” which acts as a kind of

“partial sleep of consciousness” for both audiences and filmmakers. As such, full awareness stops at the level of plot, action, and character which makes it possible for “dangerous and subversive implications” to escape detection and slip subconsciously into the script of the film, be projected onto the audience, and ultimately, avoid their detection and slip into their subconscious. To Wood; “This is why seemingly innocuous genre movies can be far more radical and fundamentally undermining than works of conscious social criticism ...”. As such, because films “... respond to interpretation as at once the person dreams of their makers and the collective dreams of their audiences ...” we are offered an additional contribution to the definition of the horror film, that is; “... they are our collective nightmares”. Wood asserts that it is what is repressed within ourselves that dictate if a dream becomes a nightmare, and that it must be strong and powerful enough as to constitute a serious threat (203). Wood’s analogy of these nightmares, audiences and filmmakers suggests that while horror films might articulate contemporary cultural fears and anxieties, they also represent subconscious fears and anxieties due to repression which has ‘slipped’ into them subconsciously and unintendedly by their creators. Distinguishing the unintendedly and intendedly represented anxieties would arguably prove difficult and will not be attempted throughout the analysis of this thesis. This assertion of “horror films as our collective nightmares” then begs the question of what repression is, what is repressed, what it is opposed to, and if and how the repressed is represented throughout horror film history. This theoretical assertion will continue by answering these questions.

The return of the repressed

In answering what repression is, this assessment will rely on Wood’s simplified account of Gad Horowitz’s theorization and distinction between basic and surplus repression, before turning to asserting for Wood’s own theory on how repression works in relation to the representation of anxieties in the American horror film. In addition, Carroll’s contribution to this theory will be accounted as well as his explanation for the paradox of how audiences are able to identify with monsters of the American horror film despite their monstrous and repulsive nature.

Wood argues how it is the distinction between basic and surplus repression “... that is so useful in relation to direct political militancy and so suggestive in relation to the reading of our cultural artifacts (among them our horror films) and, through

them, our culture itself” (196-197). Basic repression is universal, necessary and inescapable. “It is what makes possible our development from an uncoordinated animal capable of little beyond screaming and convulsions into a human being” (197). It makes us able to accept postponed gratification and helps in the development of our thought and memory processes, our capacity for self-control as well as our recognition of and consideration for other people. Surplus repression, on the other hand, is the process by which individuals are “... conditioned from earliest infancy to take on predetermined roles within ...” a specific culture. Provided that surplus repression works within the context of western society, it makes us into “... monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists”. Wood claims that western capitalist culture offers much surplus repressiveness. When asking what exactly is repressed within our culture, it is important to distinguish between the concepts of *repression* and *oppression* as well as the continuity between them: That is, the repressed is “not accessible to the conscious mind” while the oppressed stems from an external force – something “out there”. The continuity between these two concepts becomes apparent when considering repression as fully internalized oppression. Wood provides an example of the distinction which makes it clearer: “Our social structure demands the repression of the bisexuality that psychoanalysis shows to be the natural heritage of every human individual, and the oppression of homosexuals: obviously, the two phenomena are not identical, but equally obviously they are closely connected. What escapes repression has to be dealt with by oppression” (197-198).

That which is repressed in our culture subsequently includes a number of different forms of human desire. Firstly, sexual energy itself: Wood deems sexuality the source of creative energy in general. Sexuality (and consequently creative energy) is repressed within our culture in which the ideal inhabitant becomes one whose sexuality “... is sufficiently fulfilled by the monogamous heterosexual union necessary for the reproduction of future ideal inhabitants, and whose sublimated sexuality (creativity) is sufficiently fulfilled in the totally non-creative and non-fulfilling labour (whether in factory or office) to which our society dooms the overwhelming majority of its members”. Secondly, bisexuality is repressed within our culture: bisexuality is to be understood both literally (in terms of both possible sexual orientation and practice) as well as in a more general sense. In terms of sexual

orientation and practice, bisexuality is a direct affront to the principle of monogamy, as the homosexual impulse in both men and women "... represents the most obvious threat to the 'norm' of sexuality as reproductive and restricted by the 'ideal' of family". On a more general level, bisexuality is repressed by the adherence to categorizations of masculinity and femininity and as such, "... the systematic repression from infancy ... if the man's "femininity" and the woman's "masculinity", in the interests of forming human beings for specific predetermined social roles". Thirdly, the specific desire of female sexuality/creativity is severely repressed in our culture by "... the attribution to the female of passivity, her preparation for her subordinate and dependent role in our culture. Clearly, a crucial aspect of the repression of bisexuality is the denial to women of drives culturally associated with masculinity: activeness, aggression, self-assertion, organizational power, creativity itself". Fourthly, the sexuality of children is repressed and takes different forms from infancy throughout the development into adulthood. The repression of children's sexuality develops into oppression "... from the denial of the infant's nature as a sexual being to the veto on the expression of sexuality before marriage". Wood concludes the assertion of the different manifestations of surplus repression in our culture by stating that it is present even though it is not necessary for the existence of civilization, or the development of our human-ness, but that they are all "... the outcome of the requirements of the particular, surplus-repressive, civilization in which we live" (198).

The concept of the Other is closely related to that of repression. Wood defines the Other as: "That which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with (as Barthes suggests in *Mythologies*) in one of two ways: either by rejecting and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it, converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself" (199). The concept of the Other in terms of a psychoanalytic context regards to a lesser extent that which is external to our culture or to the self. Rather, the Other regards that which "... is repressed (but never destroyed) in the self and projected outwards in order to be hated and disowned". It is repression and surplus-repressive society which makes impossible the recognition and acceptance of the Other's true autonomy and its right to exist (198-199). Wood categorizes the Other, how it operates within our culture and its relation to repression and oppression by eight different categories:

1. The Other, first of all, quite simply manifests itself in other people due to how the relations between them are characterized by power, dominance, possessiveness and manipulation in capitalist society.
2. Women constitute a significantly large category of the manifestation of the Other within western capitalist society due to their subjection by a male-dominated culture. As such, the dominant images of women in that culture are "... entirely male-created and male-controlled [and] woman's autonomy and independence are denied" and the woman category of the Other is marked by the innate and repressed femininity of men who project it onto her.
3. As a "lesser" opposition to the bourgeois, the proletariat is a convenient category for the projected suppressed sexual energy of the former, which manifests itself in myths of working-class squalor and sexuality (199).
4. Other cultures – which are typically subjected to exoticization and deprived of their true character as they are shaped by the projected suppressed sexuality of the dominant culture.
5. Ethnic groups within the culture – are also readily available for projection by the dominant culture (e.g. myths of black sexuality and "animality").
6. Alternative ideologies or political systems. Wood provides an explainable example of how the bourgeois consider Marxism as indistinguishable from Stalinism which is not unlike "... confusing the teachings of Christ with the Spanish inquisition".
7. Due to how the bisexuality of human beings is repressed within western capitalist society (in their conformity to the ideal and norm of the monogamous heterosexual union of marriage), deviants from this norm constitute a figure of the Other – notably, bisexuals and homosexuals.
8. The last category regards children: Wood claims that children are the most oppressed section of the population and that the otherness of children "... is that which is repressed within ourselves, its expression therefore hated in others... ", and which is what our parents repressed in us, and which we, consequently, repress in our children (200).

At present, the assertion above constitutes a foundation for a theory of the American horror film, which allows one to examine what it is about them we find horrific, as well as understanding why we feel that way about them. In the

concluding remarks on the account of his theory, Wood summarizes it and claims that based on his theory, of all available film genres, it is the horror film;

... that responds in the most clear-cut and direct way, because central to it is the actual dramatization of the dual concept of the repressed/the Other, in the figure of the Monster. One might say that the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization *represses* or *oppresses*: its re-emergence dramatized, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror, the “happy ending” (when it exists) typically signifying the restoration of repression. (200-201)

What accounts for all horror films, then, is the underlying Freudian thesis of Wood’s theory: “... that in a society built on monogamy and family there will be an enormous surplus of sexual energy that will have to be repressed; and that what is repressed must always strive to return” (205). This is at the heart of the social/cultural significance of the horror film as Wood theorizes it, because it is the repressed (Other) which returns to haunt us in the figure of the monster.

While Wood’s theory as accounted for here primarily concerns “... the genre’s progressive or radical elements, its potential for the subversion of bourgeois patriarchal norms ...” he claims that “... this potential is never free from ambiguity”. He asserts that within the genre of the American horror film there is a “powerful reactionary tradition” which must be acknowledged, and he attests that despite its potential to subvert bourgeois patriarchal norms, no horror film is entirely immune from reactionary inflection. While both the progressive and reactionary horror film concern the return of the repressed, there are characteristics of the reactionary film which distinguish it from the progressive:

1. The portrayal and designation of the monster as simply and inherently evil. The dominant designation of the monster must necessarily be portrayed as evil, because the repressed must always return as a threat to normality which is therefore perceived consciously as dangerous and destructive. That which makes horror films progressive is the fact that they, whether explicitly or

implicitly, consciously or unconsciously, seek to modify, question or challenge this depiction and invert it. This is achieved in the progressive horror film by providing an explanation for the destructiveness of the monster: “All monsters are by definition destructive, but their destructiveness is capable of being variously explained, excused and justified”. Contrarily, one will find no excuse or justification for the destructive actions of the monster in the reactionary horror film: “To identify what is repressed with ‘evil incarnate’ (a metaphysical, rather than a social, definition) is automatically to suggest that there is nothing to be done but strive to *keep* it repressed”. Wood claims that this holds especially true of films in which the monster is identified as the Devil who is inherently evil per definition (215).

2. The presence of Christianity in the horror film is indicative of reaction. Wood claims that it typically functions not as a comment on Christianity itself, but rather what it symbolizes in relation to the dominant ideology of Hollywood.
3. The depiction of the monster as totally non-human: It is typically the agenda of the progressive horror film to invert the unsympathetic depiction of the monster, however if the monster is not human, the arousal of sympathy proves difficult.
4. A lack of distinction between repressed sexuality and sexuality itself and confusion in regards to which of the two is represented as monstrous: “A very common generic pattern plays on the ambiguity of the monster as the ‘return of the repressed’ and the monster as punishment for sexual promiscuity” (216).

These bulletins provide aspects to consider in relation to the political or ideological project of the American horror film. They will prove beneficial during attempts to discuss horror films in terms of being either progressive or reactionary. The additional assessment of Wood’s theorization of the American horror film, and the monsters which inhabit them, allows for examining the anxieties they represent in relation to the op/repressed and how that is projected onto the figure of the Other. While Wood’s theory arguably provides us with an understanding of our fascination with the horror film and the monsters in them, he does not account for how we would want to identify with or root for the monster, despite its usually ugly and repulsive

nature. Carroll provides a comment which proves beneficial in this context which is why it is accounted for in what follows.

The paradox of horror

Because the purpose of this thesis is to examine the cultural anxieties represented in the American horror film, it will not be invested in explaining the particularities of why we are attracted to confronting these anxieties, or the monsters which embody them. However, it will prove relevant to account briefly for Carroll's explanation of how audiences are able to identify with monsters despite their repulsive nature³.

Carroll criticizes Wood's theory which he claims lacks attention in 'the paradox of horror'. Carroll defines this paradox as: "... the question of how people can be attracted by what is repulsive" (160). He claims that "... Wood's strategy is to characterize monsters as heroic because, for him, they represent what society ... unconsciously represses⁴. However, in elucidating what he takes to be the emancipatory and uplifting aspects of monsters, sight is lost of their essentially repulsive nature ... [and] their more loathsome – though essential – horrific features are all but forgotten" (160-161). In response, Carroll sets out to provide an explanation of the attractiveness of repulsion in the monsters of the horror film. After dismissing an explanation inspired by H.P. Lovecraft's notions of 'cosmic fear' as well as a number of psychoanalytical explanations all due to Carroll evaluating them faulty in providing a comprehensive explanation which spans the horror genre as a whole, Carroll develops his own which he summarizes as follows: "Horror attracts because anomalies command attention and elicit curiosity" (195). That is, while we find the monster of the horror film repulsive, this emotion is "... outweighed by the fascination of the monster, as well as, in the majority of cases, by the fascination engendered by the plot in the process of staging the manifestation and disclosure of the monster" (192). As such, the narrative staging of the horror film becomes the primary source of pleasure, as the repulsive nature of the monster initially peaks our curiosity which is satisfied by the narrative staging of the horror film. Carroll refers to this, his explanation of the paradox of horror, as the curiosity/fascination resolution. In the context of this thesis it is to be considered an extension of Wood's theory of the return of the repressed and how it applies, despite of the "essentially repulsive nature" of the monsters in the American horror film.

Abjection and the monstrous-feminine

In his theorization of the return of the repressed, Wood refers to the repression of female sexuality as “particularly severe” (198), and that the female as Other “assumes particular significance” (199) in male-dominated culture. Because women, or the female, make up such a significant category of op/repressed subjects in male-dominated culture, its representatives and how they are portrayed in the horror film deserves additional attention. Similarly, Barbara Creed notes that while Wood “... is interested in gender relations of the horror film ... he has not discussed the nature of female monstrosity in any detail” (Creed *The Monstrous-Feminine* 3). In order to accommodate for this fact, Creed’s concept of the ‘monstrous-feminine’ – “... of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject” (“Horror and The Monstrous-Feminine” 35) – will be accounted for in the following and applied in the analysis of this thesis.

By definition, the concept of the monstrous-feminine is not simply a woman-monster, that is, an inversion of the male-monster. Rather, the monstrous-feminine “... is defined in terms of her sexuality ... the phrase ‘monstrous-feminine’ emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity” (Creed *The Monstrous-Feminine* 3). The monstrous-feminine trope is as old as primitive mythology; ‘the toothed vagina’ or, its counterpart, the ‘phallic mother’ – a motif illustrative in the figure of the witch with her long fingers and nose – both of them exemplifying the significance the sexuality of the monstrous-feminine (Creed “Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine” 35). In order to successfully situate the monstrous-feminine in the context of the modern American horror film, Creed relies on Julia Kristeva’s concept of ‘abjection’ – paying particular attention to the construction of the human subject in relation to her notions of ‘the border’ and the mother-child relationship (37). Creed quotes Kristeva and her definition of abjection as that which does not “respect borders, positions, rules”, that which “disturbs identity, system, order” (qtd. in “Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine” 36). She explains the attempt of Kristeva in general terms:

Kristeva is attempting to explore the different ways in which abjection, as a source of horror, works within patriarchal societies as a means of separating the human from the non-human and the fully constituted

subject from the partially formed subject. Ritual becomes a means by which societies both renew their initial contact with the abject element and then exclude that element. (Creed 36)

Creed explains how Kristeva considers one of the key figures of abjection, and the psychoanalytic source of it; "... the mother who becomes an abject at that moment when the child rejects her for the father who represents the symbolic order" (36). This is the source of the horror which abjection inspires and it functions as necessary mechanism for exclusion which is to guarantee that "... the subject take up his or her proper place in relation to the symbolic" (38). Consequently, the abject can be experienced as separated from this context in various ways which relate to the experience of watching a horror film (38). Firstly, the bodily experience of abjection, of exclusion, manifests itself in the language used to describe the effect of horror upon the audience: "It scared the shit out of me", "It made me feel sick", "It gave me the creeps" (36). Secondly, the ultimate abject is the corpse, the ultimate part of oneself which is excluded and no longer part of oneself. It is related to bodily waste such as feces, blood, urine, and pus; "... by ejecting these substances ... for whatever reason ... the body extricates itself from them and from the place where they fall, so that it might continue to live" (38-39). In horror films, bodies without souls fit the description of a significant amount of monsters. Creed notes a couple of examples as: the vampire, the living corpse (e.g. the zombie or Frankenstein's monster), the corpse-eater (the ghoul), the witch, and the werewolf. Abjection is also at work in the collapse between the boundaries between human and animal in the werewolf, and in the collapse of the border separating the alive from the dead in figures such as the vampire and the zombie. This holds a specific significance in relation to the abject as they "... are those which highlight the fragility of the law and which exist on the other side of the border that separates out the living subject from that which threatens its extinction" (39). As such, "... that which crosses or threatens to cross the border is abject" (40). The ideological project of horror films which relies on the figure of the monstrous-feminine becomes an attempt to "... shore up the symbolic order by constructing the feminine as an imaginary Other that must be repressed and controlled in order to secure and protect the social order" (63). Viewing a horror film, from the perspective of the audience, thus functions as a modern ritual in which "... the demarcation lines between human and nonhuman are drawn up anew and

presumably made stronger for that process” (36). To Creed, it signifies a desire to re-experience abjection and eject the abject from the safety of the spectator’s seat (40). The monstrous-feminine and the concept of abjection thus provides a beneficial addition to Wood’s theory, which will prove relevant in the analysis of this thesis, due to the particular significance of the female Other in relation to the American horror film.

Cultural anxieties and prior cycles of popular American horror films

Despite the knowledge provided in this account – of what the American horror film is, and how its cultural significance may be interpreted – few examples have been provided of cultural anxieties represented in American horror films. In this last section of the theoretical assertion, examples of prior cycles of horror films and how they have “... tended to use their horrific imagery to express certain anxieties that correlate with the uneasy temper of their times” (Carroll 208) will be accounted for. This account will make its way through a number of examples of horror film cycles which have emerged throughout the history of the genre and provide a context and backdrop for the analysis of this thesis which follows.

During the thirties, when the horror genre emerged as popular on the big screen, collectively, these narratives, exemplified in both Browning’s *Dracula* and Whale’s *Frankenstein* films, were concerned with class conflicts and anxieties. As Jancovich notes: “*Dracula* threatens the bourgeoisie at a time of real economic crisis, and *Frankenstein*’s monster is denied entrance into the human world in a period during which the possibilities of social mobility were being severely limited” (58). That is not to say, however, that either of those characters represent any political or social group who oppose another. What is distinctly characteristic about these characters, however, is their individuality: they are both presented as alienated. Count *Dracula* is not only an alien figure, he is foreign, external to Americans, just like many others of his era, e.g. *King Kong* (1933, dr: Median C. Cooper), the young couple in *Murders in Rue Morgue* (1932, dr: Robert Florey), *Island of Lost Souls* (1932, dr: Erie C. Kenton). Wood suggests that this tendency can be interpreted in two ways: “Simply, as a means of disavowal (horror exists, but is un-American), and, more interestingly and unconsciously, as a means of locating horror as a “country of the mind”, as a

psychological state: the films set on uncharted ... islands lend themselves particularly to interpretation of this kind” (209).

As asserted in the historical account of the American horror film in the beginning of this theoretical assertion, the horror films produced by Val Lewton at RKO held great significance in the forties. They were dominated by themes of alienation, paranoia, and fantasy, best exemplified in *The Seventh Victim* (1943, dr: Mark Robson), *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943, dr: Jack Tourneur), and *Curse of the Cat People* (1944, dr: Gunther von Fritsch). Jancovich asserts how the Lewton films of the forties “... subtly questions definitions of ‘normality’ ... the modern world is seen as one of repression and control in which alienated characters become indistinguishable” (61). Wood concurs and asserts how *Cat People* (1942, dr: Jacques Tourneur) “... is centred on the repression of female sexuality ...” while he deems *I Walked with a Zombie* as concerned with “... sexual repressiveness in the cause of preserving family unity” (209).

During the fifties, a new cycle of films emerged which projected horror onto extraterrestrial beings or mutated insect-like creatures which invaded America (Wood 210). The monsters which dominate the horror films of the fifties are usually presented as entirely unsympathetic (Jancovich 62). This is due to the contemporary attitudes and anxieties during the Cold war towards the Russian threat, which the monsters represent. They also represent other anxieties in relation to the Cold war period, that is, “... the fear of nuclear energy and atomic experiment: the giant ants [of *Them!* (1954, dr: Gordon Douglas)] are mutants produced by the radioactive aftermath of a bomb explosion ...” (Wood 210).

Prior to the 1960s, “... the source of horror or the monster had always been represented as external to the society within which the text was produced” (79). During the sixties, however, the horror film became preoccupied with “madness, the instability of human consciousness and identity, and the role of the family as a source of horror”. Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) became innovative and influential due to its portrayal of Norman Bates. Even though *Psycho* has been praised as marking the start of the ‘family horror’-cycle, in which the monster is produced out of normality, or from within the family, these film had already started to emerge a few years before. Jancovich argues that many of the features of *Psycho*, which are related to the

family, are also present in Corman's *The House of Usher* which came out the same year. *Psycho* was rather part of an emerging cycle of horror films which were concerned with the construct of the family unit, its gender roles, and its relation to the societal context in which it was portrayed (Jancovich 80).

The horror film's concern with the family trope persisted into the seventies, however, whereas earlier horror films would present to the audience an authoritative male (and typically fatherly) figure as the hero, who would gather the necessary resources to combat the monster and protect the victims, this figure started to disappear. In more recent horror films, the main characters are the monsters and their victims, and as Jancovich notes, "... the latter's chance of survival depends upon their own capabilities, rather than the intervention of an authority figure: male lover, father, priest, scientist, police or military" (85-86). Jancovich explains that this change reflects the attitudes of the post-Fordism population; "... an increasingly anxious and paranoid population who were increasingly critical of scientific-technical rationality, and authority in general" (83). Arguably, it can also be interpreted as a cultural progression towards the equality between men and women. This cultural development proves significantly true when considering how the displacement of the male hero allowed for the focus on the typical female victim, who consequently started to emerge as the surviving hero of the horror film. Jancovich notes about these heroines that they "... refuse the role of simple victim, and in the process of combating the monster, they discover resources within themselves which are frequently unavailable to the male characters" (86). The trend which diminished the authoritative and male hero-figure spans several different cycles and genres of horror, and remains persistent in contemporary horror.

This trend is especially relied upon in that sub-genre of the horror film referred to as the slasher, which became highly popular during the late seventies and eighties. These films have received much attention from critics and academics, who are unable to reconcile the different attitudes that they deem the films to represent. On the one hand, academics such as Kim Newman and Wood have criticized the portrayal of the serial killers in these films in that they are portrayed as inherently evil, and that therefore there is nothing to do but repress and kill them and no need to change our society. Feminists have criticized the portrayal of victimized women in

these films, and have pointed out how they offer audiences a voyeuristic pleasure in witnessing violent misogyny. Due to the fact that many of the women are portrayed having sex before being killed by their male perpetrators, feminists have proposed how this reflects patriarchal culture; that women's sexuality is portrayed as threatening, and that the punishment they receive is just (Jancovich 105). In response, however, Carol J. Clover has proposed how the slasher film might hold some value to feminism, and coined the term the 'Final Girl'. She relies on more recent feminist and gender theory which have moved beyond binary gender determinism, and suggests that the narratives of these films force audiences to identify with a female leading character, who solely (and contrary to both male and female peers) manages to either escape or kill the monster by subverting its subjective gaze⁵.

Critics and academics generally agree, however, in relation to the anxieties represented in the zombie film genre which emerged in the sixties by the release of George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). In these films, the family trope is placed within a larger societal context and presented as a "... redundant and repressive institution" (Jancovich 90). Zombification is also connected to "... the processes of rational control through a preoccupation with the media and consumerism". This holds especially true to later horror films, in which zombies are drawn to shopping centers which they try to invade, as they linger thoughtlessly towards them with their arms extended. These films target the media and consumerism and represent concerns towards the threat they constitute to the self, just like how the zombies, lacking any sort of personal features or individualism, threaten the lives of the protagonists (Jancovich 91). Jancovich asserts how the representation of these concerns succeeded the emergence of the zombie sub-genre, because its appeal "... works in relation to contemporary anxieties about our lack of control over our own lives, and fears concerning the precariousness of identity and subjectivity" (92).

Carroll calls attention to another aspect of the American horror film, which, much like some of the other tendencies accounted for here, has started with the emergence of a cycle of films and developed into a general tendency represented consistently throughout later films not necessarily considered part of the original cycle.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, a trend emerged of displaying “intertextual cultural capital”. While this cycle parodied the slasher film genre, it bears comparison with the themes of postmodernism in that they refer to the particular history of that genre quite explicitly. The titles of these films alone are suggestive of how they draw on ‘insider knowledge’ and ‘a fan’s familiarity’ with that genre (Lake Crane qtd. in Hills 182). Such films include “... *New Nightmare* (1994, dr: Wes Craven), *Scream 3* (2000, dr: Wes Craven), *Urban Legend* (1998, dr: Jamie Blanks) and *Urban Legends: Final Cut* (2000, dr: John Ottman) as well as lesser known post-*Scream* films such as *Cut* (2000, dr: Kimble Rendall) and *Scared* (2001, dr: Keith Walley) ...” (Hills 182). The intertextuality of these films is not restricted to their references to one another within a specific franchise, as narratives cross over from one film to another. Rather, films such as those part of Craven’s *Scream* franchise “... draw intertextually on a corpus of previous horror films, especially in the slasher subgenre, and thus display pronounced fan knowledge within their texts” (Hills 183). This is achieved in structuring the narrative around a serial killer whose actions are inspired by the antagonist of a dialectic film-franchise⁶. This cycle of horror films has developed into a general tendency of the horror film genre the creators as well as consumers of which “... are aware that they are operating within a shared tradition ... [which is] acknowledged openly, with great frequency and gusto” (Carroll 211).

After the turn of the millennium and the events in New York on 9/11, 2001, the horror of the event begins to translate into the American horror film in a number of different ways. New York Times wrote how “... the horror movie is just sitting there waiting to deal with this ... now perfectly positioned to cop some serious attitude, to play a role where it’s not simply a date movie ...” (qtd. in Briefel and Miller 1). However, no one could have imagined all the various ways in which the cycle of horror films occurring after 9/11 would represent the anxieties related to that event. Aviva Briefel and Sam J. Miller, assert how the ‘torture-porn’ cycle of horror films is affected by the events on 9/11. It also explores how horror films of this cycle adopted the cinematographic aesthetics, and how they are informed by the media’s depiction of 9/11. These aesthetics are related to night-vision depiction of events and hand-held cameras. Through narrative and cinematographic aesthetics, these films are concerned with representing anxieties related to the events of 9/11, whether they be political (regarding mindless violence in response to the disregard for human lives on

part of whoever were to blame for the events), or aesthetic (e.g. depicting falling buildings in New York City through hand held cinematography).

Another cycle of horror films, which also emerged after the turn of the century but which saw some precluding examples in the nineties, is one concerned with anxieties in relation to technology, sometimes referred to as techno-horror. Linnie Blake and Xavier Aldana Reyes assert in the introduction to their anthology, *Digital Horror: Haunted Technologies, Network Panic and the Found Footage Phenomenon*, that; "... a distinctive stylistic tendency has emerged in horror cinema that is a purposeful embodiment, at the level of both form and narrative, of the technological innovations of the digital age" (1). This cycle of films is constituted, as the name of their anthology suggests, by several subcategories, one of the most popular of them being the found-footage horror film which became popular at the release of Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez's *The Blair Witch Project* in 1999. The overarching 'digital horror' films "... add a frisson of contemporaneity to stock generic narratives of possession and haunting, mutilation and mutation, the horrors of conflict and the terrors of war, or it may undertake more significant cultural work". In terms of the latter, it is interpreted in Blake and Rey's anthology as interrogating "... the economic conditions under which such technologies first came into being and explore their ramifications for global social formations and identity descriptors like nationhood ... [and] undertake analysis of the ways in which contemporary conceptions of human subjectivity have shifted" (1). This very recent cycle of horror films overarches a number of sub-genres, all of which may be accounted for individually. A concise overview of it proves difficult to provide, as this is a cycle which remains popular today, and which the global scholarly community will not be able to keep up with, until another dominant genre emerges and steals its popularity, due to the rapid development of the genre and the large number of released films which constitute it. However, the analysis of this thesis will examine one film which can be deemed part of this particular cycle.

While this account provides some overview of prior cycles of popular horror film and the cultural anxieties which they have been interpreted to represent, it is not to be considered comprehensive. Nor is this account meant to respond to the historical development of the American horror film which appear in the beginning of this

theoretical assertion. The cultural significance which the ‘body horror’ cycle of films holds, for instance, has not been included here⁷. Nor has more than one theme of any mentioned horror film been accounted for, even though others may hold significance in a cultural context. For instance, Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* has not only been viewed in the context of media and consumerism, but many critics have also pointed out “... that the film hits at parallels between the posse on the one hand, and the American military’s anti-Vietcong search and destroy missions and anti-Civil Rights southern lynch mobs on the other” (Jancovich 91). While this account is unable to prove exhaustive as an overview of prior popular cycles of the genre, it offers, nevertheless, many illustrative examples of how the American horror film has reflected cultural anxieties of the past. This aspect of the horror film is not lost on Carroll:

Since the horror genre is, in a manner of speaking, founded upon the disturbance of cultural norms, both conceptual and moral, it provides a repertory of symbolism for those times in which the cultural order – albeit at a lower level of generality – has collapsed or is perceived to be in a state of dissolution. Thus, horror, a genre which may typically only command a limited following – due to its basic powers of attraction – can command mass attention when its iconography and structures are deployed in such a way that they articulate the widespread anxiety of times of stress. (Carroll 214)

Whether contemporary western society is dominated by “widespread anxiety of times of stress”, is a speculative question, and one which this thesis is not going to provide a definite answer to. However, “at a lower level of generality”; economic crisis, recession, refugee-crisis, terrorism, and cyber-crime are examples of today’s collective concerns of the western world. Arguably, the place which the two films examined in this thesis holds on the list of top ten grossing American horror films released between 2000 and 2015, is suggestive of how they have both successfully attracted attention by articulating widespread contemporary anxieties. As such, they provide good candidates for examining which cultural anxieties are represented in the contemporary American horror film.

Economic anxieties

Introduction

One widespread anxiety which has provided a popular topic of western discourse since the mid-2000s is the American subprime mortgage crisis which coincided with the U.S. recession. Policy analyst Wendell Cox asserts that “profligate lending” allowed too many US residents to buy overpriced properties they could not afford. The result that followed was that said homeowners defaulted on their mortgages which contributed in spurring the collapse of the US economy and world markets (qtd. in Hahner et al. 363). Because of the wide-ranging consequences of the mortgage crisis in both time and space, it comes to no surprise that a number of recent horror films attempt to articulate these anxieties by constructing dystopic narratives of economic disaster and consequential family breakdowns. These films place the traditional Gothic trope of the haunted house at the center of their narratives (Christiansen “Suburban Apocalypse” 185) and have been interpreted specifically in the context of the mortgage crisis and damped economy of the 21st century. Examples of these films include the *Paranormal Activity* series (2009, dr: Oren Peli, 2010, dr: Tod Williams, 2011, dr: Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman) (Christiansen “Suburban Apocalypse” 185), *Insidious* (2010, dr: James Wan), and *The Conjuring* (Wessels 511). The fact that *Paranormal Activity* and *The Conjuring* are both among the top highest grossing films released between 2000 and 2015 testifies to the popularity of this thematic cluster of American horror films. In fact, *The Conjuring* is among the top three, which makes it a considerable candidate and example for examining the cultural anxieties represented in contemporary American horror films concerned with economic crisis. Before engaging in this analysis, however, two tropes which have historically been used in order to articulate anxieties related to economic anxieties is accounted for in the following, as they prove relevant to consider in relation to the analysis.

The family and haunted house tropes

Among several others, there are two recurrent tropes⁸ of American horror cinema which, throughout its history, have served as sites for representations of cultural anxieties related to economy while varying, correspondingly, to the changing collective anxieties of the American people. The two tropes in question are: the

nuclear family, and the haunted house. The relevance in pointing out these particular tropes lies in their significance to the thematic cluster or cycle of contemporary American horror films, the tendency of which it is to represent anxieties related to economy or consumerism. Because these anxieties have been represented in the family and haunted house tropes before, this tradition will be accounted for in the following to provide a foundation for understanding the tropes as they will be examined in the analysis.

As mentioned in the account of the history of the horror film, the capitalist bourgeois nuclear family is the most basic and normative familial unit to which most people are accustomed. This unit is the reason for the surplus repression which "... returns in condensed and displaced form to threaten and challenge and disrupt that which would deny its(?) presence" (Sobschack 144). Because of this, various cultural anxieties have been negotiated and represented in the trope of the nuclear family in the history of the horror film. As mentioned previously, the trend of representing the monster as produced "... within ... the family" (Jancovich 79), rather than as originating from outside society, became popular during the cycle of horror films of the 1960s. In the 1970s, some but a few classic horror films such as: *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), *It's Alive* (1974), *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), *Sisters* (1977), *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), carried on the tradition and questioned the very nature of the nuclear family and the capitalist society which was based upon it (Williams 164). While the family trope have represented anxieties regarding the family itself, during the acceleration of horror cinema history, the family trope has also come to function as the site of horrors not necessarily related to familial issues. Vivian Sobschack accounts for the thematic recognition of the horror genre, that cultural and social anxieties can be dramatized in the family:

... the social world can no longer be conceptualized and dramatized as an opposition between private and public concerns and spheres of action ... In the age of television the drawbridge is always down; the world intrudes. It is no longer possible to avoid the invasive presence of Others – whether poltergeists, extraterrestrials, one's own alien kids, or starving Ethiopian children. (145-46)

This means is that the site of the family might both represent cultural fears and anxieties which are, but also which are not, related to particularities regarding the familial. That is to say, just because a horror film portrays a family, it does not mean that the family is its primary concern. Therefore, dramatizations regarding societal and cultural anxieties are worth taking into consideration as well.

The 'haunted house' trope dates back to the Gothic novel and made its first appearance on film in the 1928 Jean Epstein adaptation of *The Fall of the House of Usher* by Edgar Allan Poe (Weinstock 320). It is closely related to the family trope, as it archetypically serves as the locus of familial drama. Wood asserts how the haunted house, or 'terrible house', typically represents an extension or 'objectification' of the personalities of its inhabitants as well as the "... dead weight of the past crushing the life of the younger generation" (212). One thing which many prior, as well as contemporary haunted-house stories have in common is "... the idea of illicit ownership and rightful inheritance" (Christiansen "Suburban Apocalypse" 190). These narratives "... characteristically recount the possession of the lives of new inhabitants of the home for the purpose of reenacting some past evil (Caroll 98). A number of recent horror films "... have returned to the trope of the haunted house to reveal the anxieties over becoming house-poor; buying into a lifestyle which then disappears" (Christiansen "Suburban Apocalypse" 185). Read through this framework, films such as those of the *Paranormal* franchise have been imagined as "... comforting parables on irresponsible spending" while "...resonat[ing] with anxieties about consumption and the mortgage crisis ..." (Hahner et al. 363). Because the haunted house trope is traditionally and historically relied upon in the context of the American horror film, its function is important to consider in relation to the analysis in this thesis.

The Conjuring

On July 19, 2013, *The Conjuring* was released across theatres in the United States. It is an American supernatural horror film and was directed by James Wan who also directed *Insidious* which came out three years prior. *The Conjuring* enjoyed moderate critical acclaim and box office success (Wessels 520). Reviewers noted

certain features of *The Conjuring* as “... germane to the post-financial crisis climate of anxiety in which they were produced and released” (Wessels 513).

In *The Conjuring*, the two tropes, the family and the haunted house, are combined and re-contextualize the question of illicit ownership in regards to property and representing it in a modern context of consumerist culture in a post-mortgage crisis economy. The analysis will examine how this theme is subtly underlined throughout the narrative, hinted at through dialogue and metaphorical imagery, while camouflaged by the suspenseful sequences of the film which arguably attract most of the audience's attention. The analysis will reveal how differences in how characters in *The Conjuring* are portrayed in the context of a theme concerned with economic crisis are distinctly based on their gender. Additionally, the analysis will rely on *The Conjuring*'s prequel, in analyzing how both films constitute, not only a theme of economy, but of consumerism as well. Gendered differences also reveal themselves in the examination of this theme, as consumerist desire is gendered feminine. Having established two main themes as central to the plot of *The Conjuring* and how they are related to the constituted cultural anxieties it represents, the analysis will examine its monster, Bathsheba, in relation to the repressed and in the context of the gendered themes and anxieties asserted for previously.

Resume

The Conjuring introduces the alleged true story of Ed and Lorraine Warren, a couple and paranormal investigators, who are based in Connecticut. Ed is a Demonologist recognized by the Catholic Church, while Lorraine is presented as “a gifted clairvoyant.” The Warrens are sought out by The Perron's who has recently moved into a new dilapidated farmhouse home in Rhode Island, when they are terrorized by what they suspect to be paranormal activity. Initially, the activity is limited to strange phenomenon, but when Mrs. Perron, Carolyn, spends the night at the house with their five daughters (Andrea, Nancy, Christine, Cindy, and April), she is locked in the basement by whatever is haunting them, while two of her daughters are attacked by a mysterious assailant. They are relieved by the return of Mr. Perron, Roger, who has been away on work. After the incident, Carolyn decides to take action and contacts the Warrens. They arrive at the house and initiate the paranormal investigation. Based on their united efforts, they come to the conclusion that the house is possessed by a demonic spirit, namely a witch named Bathsheba. Bathsheba succeeds in

possessing Carolyn and forces her to attempt to kill their youngest child. However, before succeeding, the Warrens manage to exorcise the demonic spirit from Carolyn's body and save both her and the child and restore peace.

Crisis

Although initially excited about their new home, an economic downside to having acquired it subtly comes to define the context in which the family is presented. At the same time, the paranormal activity starts affecting the family and seems to be escalating at the same rate at which the economic duress of the family is represented. By examining these two paralleled narratives *The Conjuring*, economic crisis will be proven as a central theme of *The Conjuring*. Additionally, it will be examined how the responsibility and consequential concerns of the family economy are restricted to Roger while the ability to witness the paranormal is reserved exclusively for female members of the family. This is to suggest a difference between genders established in *The Conjuring* which will prove relevant to consider in the context of the continued analysis.

As Emanuelle Wessels notes, supernatural disturbance in films which employ the modern contextualized haunted house trope "... suggests financial duress" (520). The financial duress of *The Conjuring* is initially articulated by Carolyn during the first evening in their new home: "Thanks for making this work. I know it was a lot to bite off. It's gonna be great – isn't it?" During an interview with Ed, audiences learn how the Perrons are unable to move out of the haunted house due to the fact that they have all of their money "tied up" in it. During another interview, Roger tells the Warrens how the family bought the house from the bank on auction. When confronted with this fact, Ed and Loraine turn toward one another before Ed responds by saying that he and Loraine both feel that the house needs an exorcism. It seems as if Ed reaches the conclusion based on the knowledge regarding the circumstances surrounding the purchase of the house. As such, the narratives of the supernatural haunting and the economic duress are paralleled. In tune with the tradition of the haunted house trope, the house in *The Conjuring* is haunted exactly because the circumstances of the Perrons raise "significant issues of ownership", since they have acquired the house illicitly: That is, the financial duress that they find themselves in after purchasing the house, suggests that they have overextended themselves economically. The house has thus become at the same time "possessed

and possessing”, symbolically owning its inhabitants as much as they own it (Christiansen “Suburban Apocalypse” 195). Additionally, the fact that they have purchased the house from the bank suggests the bankruptcy of the previous owners – a misfortune enjoyed by the Perrons. This raises moral questions regarding the ownership of the house, which (based on the traditional meaning applied to the haunted house trope) can be interpreted to have come back to haunt the Perrons.

Interestingly, the monster in *The Conjuring* exclusively targets female subjects as if they are the main perpetrators of the illicit ownership of the house. Contrarily, the concerns and consequential worries of the family economy are established as Roger’s. This becomes apparent during the onset of the monster, which calls attention to its relevance to the economic duress of the family. While Roger’s daughters are initiating the “hide and clap” game during their first evening in the new house, he attempts to interrupt their play saying, “Are you guys done with the pizza, I don’t want it going to waste – it’s expensive feeding you girls.” Roger’s concern is one of saving and is ignored by the girls who continue to play. Moments later, they accidentally discover the basement which has been boarded up by former inhabitants of the house. Roger investigates the basement, and by his return, he tells the girls that he does not want them to go down there due to it being filled with spiders. The contrast in reactions toward the discovery of the basement exemplifies the divided general attitudes of the Perron family in relation to the family economy: As the girls react with disgust (due to the spiders), Roger considers the discovery economically profitable, saying “We’ve got some extra square footage anyway.” The next morning, Roger investigates the basement again, and when he discovers its inventory, an argument arises between him and Carolyn: She considers the items merely as “junk, the previous owner didn’t want” while Roger wishes to go through the items systematically in the hopes that they may find “antiques ... worth a lot of money.” In the evening, Roger is portrayed having fallen asleep at a desk covered by papers unintelligible to the audience, with a flask of liquor and an empty glass which represents the concern for the family economy as his own. Later, Roger receives a phone call from his employer, who offers him a job at a rate which he finds disappointing. Carolyn provides a supportive, yet naïve response which alludes to discourses of (economic) crisis as she tells him; “we’ll get through this”. The responsibility of the family economy is also rendered male on the non-diegetic level

of the film, as the lyrics of The Zombies' "Time of The Season" play during the scene in which the Perrons are moving their belongings into the house: "What's your name? Who's your daddy? Is he rich like me?" In the context of this analysis, it is worth noting how the lyrics refer to the wealth of "daddy" in particular.

During the *The Conjuring*'s onset, the monster's presence is established for the audience and all female members of the Perron family, but not for Roger – he remains oblivious to the presence of the monster, which is witnessed exclusively by female characters, whose accounts he is restricted to rely upon. Wessels explains this observation, asserting that the "... ability to a/effectively witness the supernatural [In *The Conjuring* and *Insidious*] ... is gendered female" (515) and that "... the monster in *The Conjuring* is an obscenely excessive presence that disrupts the home and domesticated women there" (520). This trend remains consistent throughout the span of the film. During the pre-credit scene, audiences are introduced to three students who have been contacted by a demonic spirit. One male is present during the interview but he remains silent throughout, and is neither portrayed witnessing nor testifying to the supernatural activity. In contrast, both his female peers account and testify to witnessing the demonic spirit. All female members of the Perron family witness or are affected first-hand and unmediated by the paranormal at least once: Although an animal female, the family dog, Sadie, is first in witnessing the supernatural, which causes her refusal to enter the house at the family's arrival. In the following scene, April finds the music box allowing her to witness the ghost of Rory, who appears behind her shoulder. Because April is a child, her witnessing of Rory is excused as imaginary, and is therefore unable to develop the narrative into the discovery function. Carolyn, however, does not witness the monster during the onset, but witnesses the effects of its presence. She suffers from bruises inflicted by the demonic spirit, notices the clocks which have stopped working, and witnesses the pictures falling from the wall, without being able to explain how or why. Cindy repeatedly sleepwalks as a result of paranormal influence. Christine has her leg pulled during some nights and is confronted by the demonic spirit off camera, as it tells her that it wants her family dead. She, Andrea and Nancy all complain about unexplainable foul odors. Lastly, Andrea is physically assaulted in hers and Cindy's room after witnessing the paranormal presence on top of the wardrobe. Similar gender-specific roles apply to the Warrens: While Lorraine is a clairvoyant with an

exceptionally good ability to witness the paranormal, he is a demonologist recognized by the Catholic Church, and he uses his knowledge of the latter to investigate the paranormal methodically and factually, as he is unable to witness them unmediated. The contrast in the representations of Roger as concerned with the family economy, and the ability to effectively witness the supernatural as exclusively female, is profoundly represented in the scene which moves the onset of the narrative into the discovery function. During this scene, Carolyn is terrorized by the supernatural disturbance and gets locked in the basement, while Andrea and Cindy are assaulted by a paranormal presence in their room - all of them saved only by the timely return of Roger, who has been at work in the meanwhile. The discovery movement of the narrative is initiated by Carolyn's motivation to contact the Warrens, as she is convinced that the house is haunted, based on the aforementioned experience. The scene establishes a point of no return, at which both the economic distress and the paranormal activity terrorizing the family are established as critical, and the Warrens are contacted in hopes that they may relieve the family of at least their supernatural problem. There is one exception to the trend of females exclusively witnessing or being affected by the paranormal: After the paranormal investigations have been initiated, the male police officer panics after encountering a ghostly maid. Wessel notes, how the fear of the police officer is played comically unlike any female witnesses of the paranormal (523). He jumps, runs and emits a shrilly scream offering the audience some comical relief. He does so at other times throughout the film, for instance, when he accidentally draws the attention of the entire paranormal investigation team by triggering the primitive ghost-alarm on his way out of the bathroom, excusing himself by saying; "What? I had to go." As such, the exceptionality in him witnessing the paranormal is due to the comical function of his character.

When reviewing these examples, a schematic of *The Conjuring* appears, which consistently dictate the gender roles of men and women and the attributes which apply to them. While men are represented as (economically) responsible and rationally thinking subjects who approach problems pragmatically and methodically (even those as intangible as the paranormal), female subjects are represented to the audience as contrastingly irrational. While ignoring or refusing to acknowledge economic responsibility, their ability to witness the paranormal, renders them

emotionally unstable to the point of hysterical, as they are portrayed crying, screaming, sweating, tearing and fainting, as they are terrorized by the paranormal. Instances in which male subjects must assist irrational and hysterical females emphasize this contrast: When Carolyn expresses her concern toward Sadie, who is barking from outside the house which she has refused to enter, Roger dodges the problem saying that he has got Sadie on a leash. Physical restraint of this female, however, does not provide an effective solution, as Sadie is found dead the next morning. Later, Roger assists Cindy when she is sleepwalking, guiding her back to her bed. Ed catches Loraine, as she faints due to a paranormal manifestation of their daughter. Most profoundly, male rationality is contrasted to the hysteria of the female, when Roger concludes the onset in the scene mentioned previously as he yells out “Somebody, God damn it, tell me what’s going on here!”, while circled by the hysterical women of his family (See Appendix B for illustration). Although Loraine has succeeded in capitalizing on the ability to witness the paranormal, it is nevertheless rendered a sign of weakness. This is acknowledged explicitly by Ed during a class which he and Loraine attend, in which he claims that demonic spirits target the “most psychologically vulnerable” member of families.

In relation to the representation in *The Conjuring*, of anxieties which are related to economic crisis, one thing remains to consider. That is, because the narrative of the paranormal activity is paralleled with that of the economic duress of the Perrons, and because the economic duress of the Perrons reflects economic crisis in the 21st century during which *The Conjuring* was produced, what does the characteristics applied to women represent in the context of the latter? This examination will offer little more than mere speculation, as the supernatural conflict in *The Conjuring* overshadows that of economic duress, which is merely hinted at. Arguably, the characteristics of hysteria, irrationality, fear and anxiety never prove beneficial to the investigation of the paranormal activity. However, they seem to be consequential necessities of the ability to witness the paranormal which turns out contributive to the investigation, even though one might question whether there would ever have been a conflict of the supernatural kind, were it not for the presence of the female characters and their ability to witness it. While these attitudes are portrayed in *The Conjuring* as reactions towards paranormal activity, they reflect a number of arguably human and natural responses to economic crisis, which are projected onto the female characters

of the film who display them in the face of paranormal activity. Because feelings of fear, anxiety, and even hysteria are arguably natural reactions of expression in the context of economic crisis, the female characters of *The Conjuring* can be speculated to collectively constitute an imaginary Other, onto which repressed reactions and responses toward economic crisis are projected. The fact that irresponsible reactions (reminiscent of hysteria or panic) among global investors contributed in spurring the American mortgage crisis in 2008, the thematization of which this argument rests upon, contributes to the notion of why such repressed feelings and reactions are imagined in *The Conjuring*. Its projection onto female subjects, in this regard, functions as to place the fault of economic crisis with the female, or at least, project that fault onto them. The reason as to why these repressed anxieties are projected onto female subjects specifically is examined later in this analysis. The conclusion reached here is based on an analysis which does not take into account the nature of the monster which is causing female subjects to be represented as irrational and hysterical. The monster will therefore also be examined in a later part of this analysis as well as its influence on the conclusion of the representation of women.

Haunted things

Before turning to an examination of the monster in *The Conjuring* and how it influences the representation of anxieties regarding economic crisis, a number of motifs will be analyzed and interpreted as constituting a theme concerning materialistic consumption and spending. The monster of *The Conjuring* is portrayed entering the lives of its (female) subjects, using material objects as conduits (as articulated by Ed Warren in the pre-credit scene). This provides reason to consider consumption and spending as a central theme represented in *The Conjuring* through motifs of materialist objects and “possession”(s). Because said objects are exchanged primarily between female subjects, this analysis will reveal an aspect of the representation of anxieties in relation to economic crisis concluded previously, which is specifically concerned with consumption.

One indication, which points to the theme in *The Conjuring* concerned with consumption, appears in the official main trailer for the film in which the phrases, “It’s not a haunting – it’s not a possession – but the truth will consume you” (Warner Bros. Pictures) are intercut with sequences from the film. Both the words “possession” and “consume” can be related to discourses concerning consumerism,

which in the context of the trailer, as in the film, is framed as a threat to the audience. The significance of one particular material possession which appears in *The Conjuring* is emphasized by the release of *Annabelle* (2014, dir: John R. Leonetti), which is the official prequel to *The Conjuring*. It tells the story of the Annabelle doll before it came into the possession of the Warrens and was put on display in their basement. During the pre-credit scene of *The Conjuring* (in which audiences are introduced to the Warrens, as they interview the three nurses mentioned previously), Ed and Loraine assert how the inhuman spirit used the Annabelle doll as a conduit by means of possessing the nurses. Annabelle thus embodies Chuck Palahniuk's quote from his 1996 novel *Fight Club*: "the things you own end up owning you", stated by Tyler Durden as part of his anti-consumerist agenda. This inverted power relation between possessor/possession mirrors that of the Perron family and their house. It comes to no surprise, then, that in *Annabelle*, a similar relationship becomes the pivotal point of horror. In the beginning of *Annabelle*, a young doctor buys the doll as a gift for his pregnant wife. As she places Annabelle on a shelf, her husband excuses himself by saying that due to the purchase of the doll, they will be "a little short on the rent for the next few months." Later that night, two members of a demonic cult break into the couple's house and attempt to kill them as part of what is assumed to be a cultist ritual. While they are unsuccessful, the female cult member dies with the Annabelle doll in her hands. A string of blood is portrayed slipping from the wound of the cult member and into the eyeball of Annabelle, allowing for whatever demonic spirit previously possessing the cult member to transfer into the doll. Shortly after, the mother is terrorized by the demonic spirit, which she learns is attempting to consume the soul of her unborn child. Ultimately, the sacrifice of a soul is provided by an outsider, while the nuclear family remains intact and Annabelle disappears. Before the film's end, the continuance of the narrative in *The Conjuring* is established, when audiences watch the Annabelle doll being sold off to a woman who purchases it as a gift for her daughter, namely, one of the nurses in the pre-credit scene of *The Conjuring*. Tellingly, audiences learn that the doll is a collector's item, a commodity, the price of which is defined merely by its name or brand rather than its intrinsic value. The shop clerk admits it to be "prized a little higher" than the rest of the dolls in the store due to its rarity. The fact that the doll functions as a MacGuffin⁹, connecting and developing the narrative from one film to the next, emphasizes the significance of the symbolic meaning it represents in

relation to both films. That is, Annabelle serves as a conduit for a demonic spirit, which (throughout the connected narrative of *Annabelle* and the *Conjuring*) punishes consumers who buy into lifestyles which they cannot afford. Annabelle thus contributes to the established theme of both films regarding consumerism and consumerist desire. Because it is the mother of the nuclear family in *Annabelle*, who is the recipient of the conduit and exclusively witnesses the paranormal (with the exception of Evelyn), all the while her husband is busy working, *Annabelle* matches the depiction of gender roles in *The Conjuring*. Because it is the consumerist desire, which initiates the haunting of the family, that desire is gendered feminine.

With Annabelle being the first, the second material object to appear in *The Conjuring* which serves as a conduit between the natural world and that of the paranormal, is the music box found by April – the same music box, which allows her to witness the ghost-boy Rory. Just like the Annabelle doll, the music box comes into the possession of a female. Similar to how the ability to witness the paranormal is gendered feminine in both *The Conjuring* and *Annabelle*, all material objects which are used as conduits by the paranormal to engage with (and/or possess females), are in turn exclusively in the possession of female subjects to begin with. The necklace (notably) given to Lorraine by her daughter, Judy, who keeps a similar one for her own, provides a third example of this notion, as it allows the demonic spirit to affect the household of the Warrens through the relation between the two necklaces. While the previous objects serve as conduits or mediums allowing female subjects to witness the paranormal, the wardrobe in Andrea's room is neither possessed nor does it allow for mediated communication with the paranormal. However, because the function of a wardrobe is to contain clothes which are stereotypically desired by women, the wardrobe in Andrea's room can be interpreted as a motif representing mindless consumption and spending: When Cindy is portrayed sleepwalking, she continuously, and unconsciously, knocks her head against the wardrobe until Roger comes to her aid. When Carolyn thinks that she has located April inside the wardrobe during clap and hide, she blindly stumbles towards the wardrobe with her arms extended and a smile on her face, expressing her desire to grasp what she may find inside (not unlike the imagery dominating Romero's films of the sixties and seventies, in which zombies make their way toward the shopping mall). As such, the wardrobe comes to represent the target of an unconscious desire of consumption, and

just like the ability to witness the paranormal, said desire is gendered feminine. A number of these material objects, namely the Annabelle doll and the music box, are stored by Ed and Loraine Warren in their basement for the purpose of not exposing them to other (female) subjects, who might give into the desire which they inspire, and unleash the monsters inside them. The basement of the Perrons, presented previously in this analysis, similarly serves as the locus of “junk” which the previous owners of the house left behind. Both basements thus symbolically represent the loci of undesired material objects, of waste, and a place of the Freudian drives, in which the (female) desire of consumption remains repressed by the conclusion of the film by Ed’s turn of the key. The desire fueling consumption and overspending which is gendered feminine is portrayed in contrast, of course, to the role of responsibility and concern in relation to waste and spending which is reserved for male subjects as exemplified in Roger as asserted previously.

As such, the concern of *The Conjuring* and *Annabelle* with material objects, and how they are related to the paranormal activity targeted at the women who are in possession of them, is suggestive of how the consumerist desire of women must be repressed and annihilated. This is succeeded in the narratives by how the objects are removed from the women, eventually locked inside the Warren basement in which they will linger until finding their way into the possession of new victims. While this is a testament to how *The Conjuring* represents frustrations in a context of economic crisis, the reason as to why consumerist desire and irresponsible attitudes toward economy is projected onto female subjects remain unaccounted for.

Hysteria

Women are established, in *The Conjuring*, as a threatening influence in the context of economic crisis, as the desire for consumption is marked as feminine. What remains to examine then, in terms of which anxieties *The Conjuring* represents, is its monster. That is, examining who or what is punishing the female subjects of the film for their consumerist desires, and how that influences the conclusions reached in terms of the representation of anxieties about economic crisis and consumption.

The monster of *The Conjuring* turns out to be related to a non-fiction and historic persona. This consequently influences the representation of the monster and, in turn, the influence that it has upon the representation of gender as it has been presented

previously. Ed and Loraine's theory: that the entity responsible for the hauntings of the Perron family is the spirit of a witch, Bathsheba, proves true, after she has successfully possessed Carolyn whose face metamorphoses into that of the witch. Before that, when Ed and Loraine make an assertion of the history of the house as part of the discovery movement of the narrative, Loraine mentions that Bathsheba was related to Mary Towne Estye, an allegedly non-fiction character who was accused of witchcraft and consequently executed during the Salem witch trials of 1692 in colonial Massachusetts. The Salem witch trials were a series of hearings and prosecutions of people accused of witchcraft, which ultimately resulted in the executions of twenty people, fourteen of whom were women. The question as to "why" has been discussed by scholars ever since the trials, but today an exceptional case of mass hysteria seems to be the root of the tragedy. Gretchen A. Adams specifically asserts how:

The tragedy has at different times been judged by both amateur and professional historians to be the result of religious fanaticism; power-mad ministers; hysterical girls; local disputes; mass hysteria; misogyny; anxiety caused by political turmoil, frontier life, and Indian wars; hallucinations caused by rotting grain; psychological distress; or even a result of the persecution of "real" witches". (2)

Because the fictive monster of *The Conjuring* is related to a non-fictive character, who was unjustly convicted by an oppressive society, Bathsheba personifies this particular category of op/repressed Other(s) returned to be recognized and accepted. However, Bathsheba is left out of any nuanced representation which may potentially have allowed for the possibility of her recognition and acceptance, and thus she, and the real-life op/repressed which she represents, are re-framed as inherently monstrous, rather than op/repressed victims. Consequently, the Other is presented in *The Conjuring* as inherently evil and a threat to the capitalist bourgeois family. The fact that she is in league with the Devil stresses the depiction of her designation as inherently evil, especially when considering the catholic affiliation of the Warrens, who opposes her. As such, the historically op/repressed Other remains exactly as such in *The Conjuring* – op/repressed – and in lack of representation. Bathsheba is neither assimilated nor purified but rather, social order is restored by her

annihilation. As such, *The Conjuring* places itself on Wood's designated reactionary wing, due to its portrayal of the return of the repressed. Purification/assimilation of the Other instead falls to Carolyn, her doppelgänger, who may also be interpreted as the (soon-to-be) assimilated replica of Bathsheba.

The catharsis and purification of Carolyn, symbolically manifested in her exorcism, suggests that she is the doppelgänger of Bathsheba. The ritual of the exorcism also confirms the notion presented in this analysis, regarding how feminine desire for consumption and spending is constituted as a threat to society, because her realization of her over-consumerist desires is what succeeds the exorcism. While Bathsheba, in the shape of Carolyn, is trying to kill April, the influence on Carolyn's exorcism is threefold: Ed provides his catholic know-how and overlooks the exorcism. By Ed's command, Roger makes pleads to Carolyn (who is influenced by Bathsheba) of thinking about her family. However, the exorcism is succeeded by Loraine touching Carolyn/Bathsheba's head through the floorboards of the house, and telling her to remember the memory depicted in the photograph, which Carolyn has shown her prior to her possession. In the picture, which is portrayed both times in the film by accompanying flash-back sequences from when the photo was taken, the family is on a beach before they brought the house. While the beach represents all the possible horizons and the freedom of the family at that time, the picture is taken before the Perrons (had not) payed into a lifestyle, which they could not afford, resulted in the haunting of the house and ultimately, the possession of Carolyn. Because she is the female, the inhabitant of consumerist desire which has spurred the economic crisis of the family, she must pay for the house by sacrificing her daughter to its former inhabitant, Bathsheba, or repress her desire for consumption, which this analysis has revealed to be the true source of monstrosity in the film. This inspires an argument that Bathsheba is a personification of the repressed desire for consumption, which is framed negatively in the context of economic duress and projected onto the female gender. The repressed desire for consumption is what leads Bathsheba to "consume" her own child, sacrificing it to Satan, and it is the same desire which has "possessed" Carolyn, and which she must repress in order to successfully fit the ideal and prescribed role of mother and wife within the capitalist bourgeois family. Because all the female characters purposefully remain ignorant and irresponsible in relation to the economic duress of the family, it could be speculated, as mentioned

previously, that their attitudes reflect those of the global investors, whose actions and decisions spurred the American mortgage crisis, and that it is these faults which are projected onto the female subjects in *The Conjuring*. One might also speculate that the female desires, which Bathsheba embodies, might represent not only a desire for consumption, but female (sexual) desire in general. This suggestion frames Bathsheba as a heroic figure due to her attempted subversion of bourgeois capitalist repression in the name of normality. This argument, however, is problematized by the inherent evil of Bathsheba and *The Conjuring*'s re-framing of historically oppressed female subjects as monstrous, as well as their portrayed disregard for economic responsibility.

The monstrous-feminine

Because the monstrous threat in *The Conjuring* is constructed specifically as both female and maternal, it proves significant to consider the cultural anxiety it represents in relation to abjection and Creed's concept of the monstrous-feminine. This is to propose how *The Conjuring* relies on the trope of the monstrous-feminine in order to arouse horror, while consequently reaffirming its appeal in contemporary culture.

Firstly, abjection is at work at the level of representations of the monster in *The Conjuring*. That is, Bathsheba and her double, Carolyn, fit the categorization of the abject, or the monstrous-feminine, in that the body they interchangeably inhabit can be perceived as potentially soulless due to this interchange. Bathsheba's physical and bodily manifestation also spans and calls attention to a number of borders, that is, those separating the past/present, the alive/dead (both separating the past life of Bathsheba versus her afterlife), and, even, the real/imaginary (due to the historical context in which she is presented).

Secondly, abjection can be interpreted to be at work in the representation of unmotivated horrific acts committed by the monstrous-feminine. The inherent evil of Bathsheba relies on the depiction of the events of her sacrificing her seven days old son to Satan. When Loraine accounts for these events, they come across as a naturally given explanation for the supernatural hauntings of the Perron house. This notion is emphasized by Ed's reaction toward the account as he exclaims: "Well, that explains a few things." However, for some reason, Bathsheba's motivation for killing

her infant son does not seem to need explaining. In fact, it is never investigated nor questioned by anyone. As such, the desire for killing her son comes across as natural, and almost expected, albeit horrific and irrational. This illustrates how abjection works at the level of narrative and plot in *The Conjuring*: That film makers and audiences readily accept the fact that the monstrous-feminine kills her infant son without a provided explanation for her motivations of doing so. That is to suggest that this acknowledgement is due to the tradition of the monstrous-feminine trope and how abjection works in our relation to experiencing fictions.

Lastly, *The Conjuring* can be interpreted as a cultural ritual which offers audiences the opportunity to re-experience horrors of abjection in relation to excluding the abject from the safety of the spectator's seat. This argument is related to the interpretation asserted previously, of the purification of Carolyn which is manifested in her exorcism. When this is applied to the context of her representation as a monstrous-feminine, her purification marks "... the construction of the feminine as an imaginary Other ..." which is successfully "... repressed and controlled ..." allowing for a "happy ending", in which the social order is secured and protected (Creed 63). Carolyn, who represents "the feminine" in this context, is literally (re-)constructed as the imaginary Other, in her doppelgänger, Bathsheba, the repression and control of whom succeeds the happy ending. Using Wood's terminology, the "happy ending" of *The Conjuring* signifies "the restoration of repression". As such, this marks *The Conjuring* as reactionary because the repressed must remain as such because no healthy alternative is offered. Using Creed's terminology, the happy ending reflects a reactionary attitude in the context of patriarchal tradition; of how "... the demarcation lines between human and nonhuman are drawn up anew and presumably made stronger for that process" (Creed 36). As such, *The Conjuring* restages the experience of abjection and the pleasure and horror of ejecting the abject from the safety of the spectator's seat (40).

Part-conclusion

The success of *The Conjuring*, and the reason for its place among the top five grossing horror films released in the U.S. between 2000 and 2015, is arguably due to its articulation and representation of anxieties related to economic crisis, as they prove relevant to the societal and cultural context of its release. However, if this

analysis has been unable to conclude on any specific resolution in regards to the specific narrative concerning the economic crisis of the Perrons, which seems to be completely overshadowed by the one concerned with the paranormal activity (although they have been interpreted as related), this is because such a resolution never occurs in the film. An answer is never provided as to if or how the Perrons manage to invert their economic duress. Wessels provide a hypothesis, based on *The Conjuring* and *Insidious*, which provides a foundation for interpreting this ambiguous narrative:

... this new wave of haunted house horror ... is not so much about specific fear of another collapse or economic crisis as an approaching, identifiable object. Rather ... “something” dreadful, albeit vague and undefined, is worried to be impending ... [and thus] dread of “another crisis” becomes symbolized abstractly and microcosmically by the menaced family home. (512-513)

Considering the fact, that the film was released in the wake of the mortgage crisis, it is to be expected that it is unable to offer a resolution, albeit suggest a solution, to this conflict and other economic crises of the time. Instead, the supernatural crisis substitutes the economic one, the former of which the Warrens are able to resolve. As such, the “dread of crisis” is imagined as the fault of women and resolved “symbolically and abstractly” by annihilating the returned woman-figure of the Other onto which the dread of crisis is projected. By constructing a narrative which depicts an American middle-class family in economic crisis by the beginning of the film, which sees a happy ending, despite that ending derives from another conflict, the film arguably offers some consolation for audiences. What the success of *The Conjuring* is additionally a testament to, then, is the fact that the reliance on the monstrous-feminine trope in order to inspire horror remains at large in fiction, and that audiences remain attracted to the traditional concept of constructing the feminine as the embodiment of witches, hysterical women, and mothers who kill their babies.

Techno horrors and network panic

Introduction

The found footage cycle of horror films which gained popularity around the turn of the century, and even more so by the mid-2000s, was part of an overarching cycle of films which began to rely upon digital technologies as sources of horror. By the turn of the century, "... a distinctive stylistic tendency ... emerged in horror cinema that is a purposeful embodiment, at the level of both form and narrative, of the technological innovations of the digital age" (Blake and Reyes 1). While this tendency specifically concerns digital technologies, the concurrent relationship between the horror genre and technological advance is not a new one. The inclusion of the latest technologies has functioned in horror fiction ever since the Victorian age as to "... act as an identifier of continuity between the fictitious, naturalistic setting and the reader's assumed reality" (Kirk 54). Rudyard Kipling's "The End of the Passage" (1890) provides an early example of this, by its incorporation and function of the Kodak camera in relation to the ghost story narrative. In Barry Pain's "The Case of Vincent Pyrwhit" (1901), the telephone becomes a conduit of communication with ghosts, as is the television in Tobe Hooper's *Poltergeist* (1982) (Kirk 54). Both the found footage cycle of horror films, and the tendency of incorporating digital technologies specifically, can be united under a thematic cluster called 'technology-horror', or 'techno-horror', which dates back to the first horror films which incorporated technologies and made them significant to their narratives. It seems, however, that techno-horror has never been as popular in America, as it has become in the digital age. On the condensed list of the top ten grossing American horror films released between 2000 and 2015, a number of them display concerns with technology to lesser or greater extents. One example is Gore Verbinski's *The Ring* in which a ghost wreaks havoc by envisaging the use of a killer videotape. Due to *The Ring*'s success, it provides an excellent example for analyzing which cultural anxieties the American techno-horror film represents. Before turning to an examination of the cultural anxieties represented in *The Ring*, and its concern with technology, there is a metaphor typically envisaged in narratives of techno-horror films which reveal something about the anxieties they represent. Therefore, this 'network metaphor' will be asserted for in what follows.

Network metaphor

When examining the cultural or social anxieties represented in techno-horror films, one might be tempted to focus on those specifically related to our relationship with technology. However, Steffen Hantke asserts that such an examination of these films, deeming them "... a prime cultural outlet of technophobic undercurrents in a culture largely comfortable with, or even enthusiastic about, technology in general – is something of a truism". Neal Kirk claims that these readings potentially "... obscure important technological processes that enrich the relationship between ghosts and social use of new media technology" (55). This is because the incorporation of technology into the horror film narrative opens up the possibility of representing anxieties related, not only to technology itself, but to the world which has become increasingly "networked" by its incorporation (Blake and Reyes 1). While human beings have always been "connected" or "networked" since the first hunter-gatherer tribesmen started to trade and exchange information with one another, technology has greatly increased our 'connectivity', or 'networktivity' – and even more so in the digital age. Blake and Reyes explain this as due to "... distant and diverse regions having been linked together into a constant flow of information exchange facilitated by the internet, GPS-enabled camera phones, camcorders, CCTV surveillance devices and new online shopping, banking and communications practices" (1). Because our networktivity has been increased by the incorporation of technology into our lives, techno-horror films prove potential in articulating or representing anxieties about the networks which we are a part of. Because we are dealing with techno-horror films, they focus "... on the dystopian aspects of the network as it presents itself in its most recent technological manifestation, dramatizing and extrapolating its inherent dangers, its power to destabilize and rewrite social protocols, and its complicated relationship to the bodies it organizes" (Hantke 19). Hantke traces the roots of the network metaphor and its unique disposition toward the techno-horror film back to the cycle of horror/science fiction films of the fifties, accounted for previously, and their incorporation of networked military technologies (20-26). In order to explain the network metaphor and how it is represented in contemporary horror, Hantke provides the example of how *The Cabin in the Woods* "... exploits its audience's unease about technologies harnessed to various networks of surveillance, control and consumption" (26). The network is constituted by and through technology but is employed by the government in the particular case of *The Cabin in*

the Woods. Hantke further asserts that what contemporary techno-horror films articulate is still what was at the heart of the fifties horror film; "... that sense of the world as a densely interlinked network in which every player, moving or listening or watching or lurking, is subject to reciprocal forces" (26). Today, in which the world has become increasingly, and to a larger extent globally networked, the military might not necessarily be at the center of it. However, the real horror lies in knowing, not what is, but that something potentially is, able to reach you by your (technological) connectivity and relation to the network. As such, when examining films of the techno-horror subgenre, it proves relevant to consider if and how they represent anxieties related to network.

The Ring

The Ring is an American supernatural horror film released in 2002, which was directed by Gore Verbinski. It stars Naomi Watts in the lead role, and it is a remake of the Japanese film *Ringu* (1998, dir: Hideo Nakata) which is based on Koji Suzuki's novel of the same name (1991). Hantke remarks of one particular scene in *The Ring*, in which the ghost of an eight year old girl emerges from a television set and steps out from it onto the living room floor, as "... the most emblematic shot of the recent wave of horror films concerned with the menace of digital technologies" (Hantke 17).

Following a short resume of *The Ring*, its main antagonist and monster, Samara, will be examined and reveal how the film reflects anxieties regarding technology. In the context of this notion, Hantke's argument; that horror films which incorporate technologies into their narratives often articulate concerns regarding networks, becomes relevant. Therefore, the analysis will continue by examining how *The Ring* depicts technologies as forming a constituted network and how anxieties toward these networks are articulated through both the narrative and mise en scene of the film. Lastly, because *The Ring* is a remake of the Japanese, *Ringu* (1998), it proves relevant to examine the cultural exchange between the two films, by exploring the changes made between them in order to reveal anxieties specific to the American remake.

Resume

In *The Ring*, a reporter, Rachel, happens across a videotape which is mysteriously involved in the deaths of numerous individuals who reportedly died seven days after watching it. She sets out to investigate the origins of the tape and after having watched it herself, she is soon convinced that her own life is in danger. Her son, Aidan, also watches the tape and Rachel's motivation now rests on the hope of saving her and her son's life. She enlists the help of her ex-husband, and the father of her son, Noah, and the two of them discover that the videotape is linked to a young woman named Samara. Samara, as it turns out throughout Rachel and Noah's investigation, was the daughter of Anna and Richard Morgan who adopted Samara as they could not conceive naturally. It turns out that Samara possessed the ability to imprint her thoughts onto the minds of others as well as on videotapes and pictures. She would show her mother terrible images and drive the horses on the Morgan farm to suicide. Torn between his wife and daughter, Richard Morgan instated the two women at a psychiatric hospital where Samara admitted to purposely hurting people merely by using her mind. Ultimately, Anna strangled her daughter with a plastic bag and pushed her into a well before committing suicide herself. Having constructed this narrative through their investigation, Rachel and Noah assume that a proper burial of Samara will put her vengeful spirit to rest and end the curse of her videotape and so they find the well and uncover Samara's body. Their assumption proves faulty, however, as Noah, after having returned home, watches television and Samara emerges on the screen of the television and traverses it, steps inside Noah's apartment and kills him. It is not until she learns of Noah's death, that Rachel realizes that her survival is due to her having copied the tape and shown it to someone else, rather than the proper burial of Samara. In the last scene, she is portrayed forcing the fingers of her son to make a copy of the tape, knowing that inflicting another with the curse is the only way to save him.

Techno-child

In *The Ring*, anxieties which concern the relationship between human subjects and technology are represented. They become primarily evident in the portrayal of the monster of the film, Samara. This is because Samara is constructed as symbolic personification of technology. That is, she becomes a techno-child when audiences witness her being born into the diegetic real through the screen of a television in

order to terrorize her victims (See Appendix C for an illustrative still-image). This allows a reading of *The Ring* which calls out expressed anxieties toward “the beyond” behind the screens of technology, the monsters which reside there, and thus, technology itself.

While Samara is initially presented as a vengeful spirit, Rachel is too late to realize that she was inherently evil to begin with. As Rachel embarks on the quest to uncover the origins of the videotape, which has allegedly played a role in the deaths of four adolescents, she discovers that it was made by an eight year old girl, Samara Morgan. Rachel learns, however, that the videotape has not come to be through ordinary measures. Rather, Samara has allegedly imprinted the images on the videotape by using her mind¹⁰. This is an early example of the unconventional relationships between human beings and technology portrayed in *The Ring*. As Rachel uncovers more evidence pointing to the relationship between the images imprinted on the tape and Samara’s life, which was dominated by victimization on the part of the parents and culminating in her mother’s attempt to kill her, Rachel assumes that the ghost of Samara is on a killing spree in redemption for the sins of her parents. Rachel finds the well and the remains of Samara. They are removed from the well and Rachel assumes that Samara’s curse is lifted due to the proper burial of her remains. The fact that both Rachel and the audience remain convinced of the success of this methodology can be explained as due to the tradition of the ghost story narrative. Julia Briggs asserts how supernatural events of the ghost story are usually rationalized through its narrative progression:

Ghost stories commonly provide an alternative structure of cause and effect, in which the supernatural is not explained away but offers its own pseudo-explanation according to some kind of spiritual law of action and reaction: an unburied corpse, a murder victim or some other secret apparently buried safely in the past returns to haunt the perpetrator ... (123)

Rachel’s assumption relies on the tradition of this narrative; that Samara seeks retribution for being killed by her parents, as well as her remains which remain improperly buried. The surprise at the end of *The Ring*, when Samara emerges from Noah’s television screen, is effective because Rachel’s assumption proves faulty, as

the traditional ghost story narrative is disrupted when audiences learn that, in fact, Samara was evil all along. Samara took advantage of Rachel who, although well intended, but unknowingly, assisted Samara in being born into the diegetic reality of the film. The sympathy for Samara is thus inverted as she is portrayed as inherently evil rather than a victimized eight year old girl. Because this so drastically influences the portrayal of the returned repressed in Wood's terminology, the loss of sympathy for Samara is important to take note of.

As noted by Kimberly Jackson, the scene marks Samara as a technological being from the imaginary and technological dimension beyond the border of the screen birthed into the diegetic reality of the film (*Technology, Monstrosity, and Reproduction* 43). The birth-terminology is not coincidental: This notion is supported by both the imagery of that particular scene, and suggested by the portrayal and framing of Samara in scenes which depict her "life". Caetlin Benson-Allott notes that the imagery of Samara's birth is constituted by "... the water that accompanies her arrival, the vaginal well she pops out of, and the bulging, empty belly of the television from which she delivers herself ..." (115). Yet, the fact of the depiction of her as a human girl interacting in the diegetic reality prior to her death compromises the argument that she originates from the "beyond". It suggests, rather, that she was once a "real" girl who was victimized and killed before her ghost manifested itself in the "beyond", only to reemerge again through Noah's television screen. However there is little reason to believe that Samara was ever a "real" girl to begin with. In the first portrayal of Samara's past before her untimely death, she appears on a video screen as Rachel plays the surveillance tape which depicts Samara in a psychiatric hospital. In the next shot, an interviewer is monitoring Samara on a small television screen while interrogating her. As such, Samara is depicted through three different levels of mediation at once; the screen of the interviewer; the diegetic screen of the television which Rachel is watching; and on the cinema/television screen of the audience. As such, the cinematography of this scene is dominated by a play on a number of different layers of reality and mediations and. Because it depicts Samara's past, it begs the question of which one of these realities she belong(ed) to. Due to the television screen employed by the interviewer, it is worth speculating that the communication between him and Samara was made possible only through technological mediation. The wire which runs from an outlet in the wall, along the

floor, and attached to Samara also suggests her reliance on electricity or technology. As such, portrayals of Samara's past is depicted and framed by technology at all times until her "birth" through Noah's television screen. This suggests that she originates from the dimension "beyond" the diegetic television screens of the film. There are a couple of depictions of Samara which deserve further speculation though: Samara's bodily remains, for instance, testify to her past physical existence in the "real world". However, the unambiguous and paranormal depiction of the condition and state of her body, as well as the unnatural way it decays in Rachel's hands, compromises this argument. Additionally, the fact that Samara is able to emerge from the water, grab Rachel by the arm and project the flashback for her to see, only to disappear again, without Rachel being at all threatened or surprised by her (lack of) presence, suggests that the well provides a space in which the physical rules of the diegetic reality of the film do not apply. The television by the mouth of the well which shows static snow during the action of the scene surely has a supernatural influence on the conditions of this physical space although the particularities remain highly ambiguous. The only depiction of Samara's past, which is not framed by technology, is the image she herself projects in Rachel's mind during her time in the well. However, this can be explained as due to Samara's motivation to convince Rachel that she seeks redemption over the victimization of her parents, in order to manipulate Rachel into helping her be born into the diegetic reality of the film. As Jackson puts it; "Samara was thus never a human child, and Rachel is not dealing with a human crime ... Her search will neither lead her to a human victim nor a human perpetrator" ("Techno-Human Infancy in Gore Verbinski's *The Ring*" 167).

The sequel, *The Ring Two* (2005, dir: Hideo Nakata), and its narrative development offer some important grounds for consideration in light of the argumentation of Samara being a techno-child arousing anxieties toward technology and the unknown dimension "beyond". *The Ring Two* continues the narrative of the first film. Rachel learns that Aidan is still in danger and thus she attempts to learn more about Samara's past. She learns that the Morgans acquired Samara through an adoption agency and traces down Samara's biological mother, who attempted to kill Samara before being consequently institutionalized. An administrator at the orphanage tells Rachel that Evelyn Morgan attempted to kill her daughter because

she believed that “some-thing had come for her baby from the waters of the world beyond this one”. The administrator also tells Rachel that she interprets said world as Evelyn’s version of “the afterlife”. When Rachel confronts Evelyn about why she attempted to kill Samara, she learns that Evelyn was actually attempting to save Samara, and that Rachel must succeed in killing Aidan, in order to save him. She explains her reasoning ambiguously but alludes that it has something to do with “letting the dead get in”. Meanwhile, Samara seems to have possessed Aidan, however, because audiences learn that Samara is actually manipulated by an external force, it is implied that it is the same external force, rather than Samara, who is possessing Aidan. Additionally, it is suggested that this external force is demonic due to Evelyn’s reference to “the dead” as well as the scrapbook of Samara’s life which is filled with ritualistic imagery. Interestingly, Evelyn’s reference to “the dead” from “the world beyond this one” fits the description of the constituted threat of the first film as it has been interpreted previously in this analysis. That is, in *The Ring Two*, the monster (although presented this time as an external force manipulating Samara, rather than Samara serving as a personification of it) is constituted as technological (that is, dead and not alive) from the “beyond” of our television screens. *The Ring Two*, however, does assign a demonic origin to this monster which arguably contradicts this argument were it not for the fact, that the demonic theme remains underdeveloped and highly ambiguous by the end of *The Ring Two* and thus does not change, or provide foundation, for a contradicting interpretation. *Rings*, which is the third installation in the series due to be released in 2016, might develop on the demonic aspect of the origin of Samara, but until then, the interpretation of her as a techno-child originating from the “beyond” and birthed into the diegetic real through Noah’s television screen remains unaltered by the narrative of *The Ring Two*. One thing which audiences learn in *The Ring Two* which supports this interpretation is the fact that Samara (or whichever external force possesses her and Aidan) is sensitive to being submerged in water, much like any technological device reliant on electric power. In fact, the only way for Rachel to successfully end Samara’s influence over Aidan proves to be submerging him in water. This would render most technological beings obsolete and tellingly, Samara acknowledges this threat, leaves Aidan’s body and returns to the “beyond” on the other side of the television screen.

In terms of categorizing *The Ring* and its portrayal of the repressed as either progressive or reactionary, such a determination depends on one's willingness to accept or refuse the notion presented here; that Samara is a personification of technology. That is, if we consider Samara the returned Other (in the particular figure of the child) onto which the repressed sexuality of the adult is projected in order to be rejected and annihilated, the fact that she is empowered by the conclusion of the film – in contrast to the anti-thesis, which signifies the restoration of oppression – marks *The Ring* as progressive. If Samara is considered a personification of technology, on the other hand, it becomes problematic to categorize *The Ring* ideologically and determine it as either progressive or reactionary. Nevertheless, whether she represents the repressed Other, or a personification of technology, Samara is portrayed as inherently evil nonetheless, as her habit of practicing her evil powers is revealed to have preceded her oppression. Considering Wood's theory – that a designation of the monster as inherently evil places it on the reactionary wing of horror films – *The Ring* might not be the most progressive of horror films. While this remains a vague suggestion, the portrayal of Samara will be picked up again later in the comparative analysis between *The Ring* and *Ringu* in which it will be considered in relation to Creed's concept of the monstrous-feminine trope.

As mentioned previously, the scene in *The Ring* which depicts Samara crawling out of Noah's television screen is effective because her action disrupts the traditional ghost story narrative to the surprise and horror of the audience. Instead, she reaches a higher level of monstrosity by her birth through the television screen, from the imaginary world into the diegetic real. As regarded by Hantke, the moment of Samara's birth is "... the moment when technology comes alive, when the infrastructural networks of mass communication reveal that they are possessed, haunted, eerily and uncannily animate" (17). In despite of whether she represents the repressed or a personification of technology, the horror which Samara inspires is emphasized in the final scene of the film. Aidan questions his mother's morally ambiguous decision of saving their lives by copying and re-distributing the tape and asks his mother; "what about the people we show it to?" The image dissolves into static snow, simulating the end of Samara's tape, and inspires the horrific realization in the audience that Samara might just as well succeed in crossing the cinematic/television screen on which her tape was projected and viewed by them,

just as she traversed the diegetic television screens in the film. As such, Samara – the personified threat of whichever monsters lurk in the imaginary world behind our television screens – comes to represent the deterioration of the one barrier which used to serve as our only guard against them¹¹.

Network panic

In *The Ring*, technologies such as televisions and telephones are represented as mediums through which Samara is able to spread her curse, and terrorize her victims. Ultimately, she utilizes such technologies in order to enter the diegetic real. Therefore, technologies and screens become threatening and monstrous by proxy of the danger of Samara, and even more so by their integrity in contemporary western society. As such technologies arouse anxieties due to how we have been too late in realizing the threat which they constitute. The threat however, while revealing our anxieties in relation to technologies, screens and videotapes, also regards the network that they constitute collectively. This becomes especially apparent by the end of *The Ring* when audiences realize that the technological networks utilized by Samara in the diegetic reality of the film extends to the television or cinematic screen on which the film has just been projected to them. *The Ring* deals with two distinguishable networks (communication and social control networks) which will be examined in the following.

Communication networks

The network which *The Ring* is arguably primarily engaged in exploring is one related to (mass-) communication. It is engaged with thematically and narratively, through the interaction of characters and the development of the narrative, but it is also portrayed in the mise-en-scene of the film. The communication network readily becomes readable when considering the different types of technologies which constitute it as they are all related to communication:

- The videotape: The tape onto which Samara has projected her thoughts must be circulated or copied and redistributed in order for victims to save him or herself by passing the curse along to someone else. Videotapes are, or at least used to be, an important medium utilized for storing motion images and/or sound, especially within mass media corporations. The survival of the victims in *The Ring* thus necessitates that they engage in handling this technology and

use the same methods which agents of mass media employ in their line of work on a daily basis. This symbolizes how the circumstances surrounding the videotape constitute a metaphorical network through which the hauntings of Samara "... is not merely a singular, personal, temporary occurrence ... but an endemic threat to an increasingly networked and globalized contemporary society" (Kirk 57). While Kirk refers here to the network metaphor in general, it applies to the specific network of communication which *The Ring* engages in.

- Televisions: While the videotape is the original source and container of Samara's curse and allows for its physical exchange and distribution, a television is necessary for watching it. The television is a major source for mass media outlet, and therefore, this technology also testifies to how *The Ring* is engaged with a dystopic depiction of the mass communication network. Tellingly, in the Japanese original, *Ringu*, Samara's curse originated, not from a videotape, but rather a television broadcast signal which was accidentally recorded on tape by a group of teenagers.
- Telephones: While the videotapes and televisions in *The Ring* are rather restrictive forms of communication, in that they allow for one-way communication only, they are effective for Samara who, like the mass media, is interested in broadcasting, rather than receiving information. Arguably, it seems redundant that Samara uses the telephone in order to warn her victims that they only have seven days to live when she could have just as easily communicated this at the end of the tape given the fact that this fate seemingly applies to anyone who watches it. However, there is one other aspect of the telephone which differentiates it from the videotape and the television which might suggest an anxiety specific to it: That is, the telephone necessitates, to a larger extent, a here-and-now, or "live", connection between the communicating parties, who are physically separated. Indeed, it is the "live" aspect of technologies in *The Ring* which reveals itself as the most horrific, when Samara emerges from Noah's television screen and "live" exceeds its very definition and turns deadly. It will be explained in greater detail later how the horror is inspired by how she traverses the boundaries which restrict technology. Additionally, compared to televisions and videotapes, the live communication, which is usually restricted to happen

between two parties, is more intimate. In the context of *The Ring* intimacy thus inspires horror.

The concern in *The Ring* of establishing a dystopic narrative in the context of the mass communication network is revealed as early as in the conversation between Katie and Becca during the opening scene of the film. It also alludes to the relevant influence which technology will have on that narrative. Katie says, “I hate television”, which frames technology, in the very first line of the film, as Other. The reason for her hatred toward this technology, as it turns out, is due to its relation to network. Besides giving her headaches, Katie explains that she hates television because she “... heard there are so many magnetic waves traveling through the air – because of TV and telephones – that we’re losing like ten times as many brain cells as we’re supposed to. Like, all the molecules in our heads are all unstable – all the companies know about it, but they’re not doing anything about it”. Firstly, Katie expresses concerns for specific technologies which rely on “magnetic waves” and other signals which travel through air or cable. However, she also expresses anxieties toward the very network which is constituted by the flow of broadcast-signals travelling through the air and the influence they might or might not have on her health. Additionally, she expresses an anti-capitalist opinion and concern about “the companies” by alluding to their position of power and questionable liability, and consequently the information which they send travelling along the broadcast signals. As such, Katie’s anxieties are not only related to technology, but to the mass communication network as well. Her fate seems almost ironic then, given the fact that she is killed moments later, neither by physical consequences related to the broadcast signals nor a product of a news company, but rather, by a “techno-girl” who has merely become able to travel the network.

Another way in which *The Ring* is concerned with the relationship between technology and the network is through the portrayal of its protagonist, Rachel, and how her survival depends on her ability to navigate the network of communication. Rachel is a reporter and proves keen in navigating not only a variety of technologies but also the networks which they are a part of. Rachel’s profession as an investigative journalist provides her with both the resources and technological know-how of figuring out the source of the videotape which ultimately makes her complicit

in Samara's birth. As such, it is the benefit of Rachel's skillset as an investigative reporter, and her relation to the network of communications, which make Samara spare her and Aidan's life. Jackson makes a similar observation, claiming that Rachel's survival is guaranteed, not by copying the tape *per se*, but by the means through which she has discovered its origin:

The investigator has to be shown the error of her ways; she has to recognize that her methods have been rendered impotent. She has to realize that in using the internet, the VCR, the cell phone, and so on, she has long been an agent of Samara's violence— not the violence of a disturbed spirit (the dead human), but that of the distributed image. (“Techno-Human Infancy in Gore Verbinski's *The Ring*” 165)

As such, Rachel has in a sense always been a perpetrator – a journalist, an agent of the communication network. Rachel's transgression from victim to perpetrator in the specific context of the film is symbolically paralleled in her methodology and the means of discovering the truth about the videotape. Jackson observes how Rachel moves back in time throughout the narrative and regresses technologically: “She starts with the Internet and ends up in print archives of old newspapers; she starts out in a car and ends up with horses; she starts out in contemporary Seattle and travels to Moesko Island, a very small island community cut off from the fast-paced lives and advancements of the modern world” (*Technology, Monstrosity, and Reproduction* 41). It is not until Samara is released from her confinement of the well that she is no longer restricted to the “... analogue, point-to-point distribution ...” (Kirk 57) of the videotape but is able to transgress the levels of technology which Rachel regressed and ultimately birth herself through Noah's television screen. Mr. Morgan, whom Rachel encounters on his farm, realizes the dangerous potential of the mass communication network utilized by Samara before Rachel does and commits suicide. When Rachel initially confronts him in order to uncover what she believes is the unjust murder of Samara, Mr. Morgan, agitated by her questions, tells her, “What is it with reporters? You take one person's tragedy and force the world to experience it – you spread it like sickness”. Thus, Mr. Morgan is aware of the potential dangers of the network and it is this same danger which Rachel is too late to realize. Until Rachel's involvement, which proves successful due to her profession as an

investigative journalist and her ability to maneuver the network of communication, Samara has been restricted to televisions and videotapes. However, by luring Rachel to release her from her earthly confines she becomes able to employ the network to its full extent. One can imagine the potential of Samara's horror after she has emerged from Noah's television screen and stands in the vibrant city, ready to travel along all the communication networks it offers. It should be noted though, that *The Ring Two*, does not take this direction in its narrative.

Anxieties toward the communication network are also expressed in the mise-en-scene of *The Ring* and *The Ring Two*, in which technology is portrayed as forming a network. In *The Ring*, while Noah is watching the videotape for the first time, Rachel steps out on the balcony overlooking the neighboring apartments. Kristen Lacefield asserts how in this scene, "... Rachel notes with increasing discomfort the number of televisions she sees playing through the windows of the apartment building ... the scene gives Rachel an opportunity to contemplate what it means to have televisions extending their unseen tendrils of presence and influence into what should be our most private of sanctums" (11). It is of course the "unseen tendrils of presence and influence into what should be our most private of sanctums" which alludes to anxieties in relation to the network, because we never know what, who and for which purpose, it might potentially be utilized. While this scene portrays Rachel's contemplations over the looming presence of televisions, inviting audiences to do the same, televisions remain as part of the mise-en-scene throughout the film as if to remind audiences of the ever-present danger of the network. Lacefield makes a similar observation:

In nearly every important scene, a large black television sits in the corner of a room, seemingly glowering at the characters and sometimes, it seems, even at the Ring films' viewers. Frequently characters stare in foreboding at a television screen, even when it is not turned on. It is as if the mere presence of a television itself portends all manner of doom for the characters and intrinsically poses an imminent threat to humans. (10-11)

The anxiety inspired by the looming presence of televisions throughout the film is a testament to how it is related to the communication network. That is, it is not the

individual television which is portrayed as frightening, but rather, the network which it is a part of. Tellingly, when Rachel and Noah discover Samara's room in the barn and Rachel asserts how they confined her there. Noah looks to a small television and remarks how she was not alone in her confinement. He alludes that Samara was connected to the network constituted by the small TV¹². The network-relation of the television is emphasized by the over-sized antennas on top of it. Lacefield's observation regarding the looming presence of televisions and the network anxiety they represent also applies to *The Ring Two*. Additionally, in the establishing shot of the city in which it is to be assumed that the film's narrative is about to unfold, a large utility pole vitiates the picture of the city and steals the focus of the shot. Similarly, the final shot of *The Ring Two* moves away from the open window framing Rachel and Aidan, and tracks a number of utility cables which are connecting the surrounding residences. The tracking of the camera stops at the moment when a utility pole is, again, at the center of the shot. These shots frame not only the residences which they portray, but also the narrative of the film within a networked context related to, not only the communication network (symbolized by the broadcast signal which might be included in the utility cables), but also an infrastructural network (symbolized by the power-cable and the roads which they run parallel to). The anxieties in relation to the communication network, which are represented in *The Ring* through mise-en-scene, are thus constituted by the multitude of communicative technologies which collectively form that network. Each technology, e.g. television, then comes to inspire horror due to the collective network it represents individually.

Networks of social control

Until this point, the represented anxieties related to networks of communication in *The Ring* have been examined. There is, however, another network (and the anxieties related to it) which *The Ring* is concerned with. This network will be referred to in the following as the network of social control, because social control is the primary function of the technologies which constitute it. The network of social control refers to psychiatric hospitals which both *The Ring* and *The Ring Two* are engaged in portraying¹³. The anxieties represented which are related to the social control network become readable in *The Ring* due to its reliance upon surveillance technologies. In the following, they are divided into two categories: Those that stem

from Panoptical surveillance, and those related to networked subjectivity, the former of which will be examined first.

As mentioned previously, the first time Samara is portrayed in *The Ring* is on a television screen displaying the surveillance footage from the psychiatric hospital. The editing of the surveillance footage is meant to portray how Samara never sleeps. However it also reveals an important aspect of panoptical surveillance which Samara is subjected to: It portrays the surveillance as constant. This is emphasized by how Samara looks to the screen, subverting its gaze and consequential power over her, and as if attempting to provoke some sort of reaction. The panoptical anxiety which Samara experiences in the psychiatric hospital is (consequently) projected onto her victims who come to fear networked technologies, such as telephones and televisions, after they have been cursed. Becca, for instance, is institutionalized due to her traumatization of discovering Katie's body and is portrayed in the psychiatric hospital (initial to Rachel meeting her) passing through a corridor while two employees use a sheet to cover the entrance to a room which has a television on display. As such, it seems that Becca has come to suffer from the same anxiety mentioned previously in this analysis. That is, the anxiety of the looming presence of televisions in the mise-en-scene of the film. If panoptical anxieties stem from constant surveillance and that this "... permanent visibility assures the automatic functioning of power..." (Jones 30) the network anxieties which are represented by the looming presence of televisions in *The Ring* and which Becca has come to suffer from, arguably reflects the panoptical surveillance which Samara is subjected to in the psychiatric hospital. As such, Samara subverts the network of panoptical surveillance manifested in the closed circuit television of the psychiatric hospital, and turns it against her victims. Thus *The Ring* represents anxieties in relation to panopticism and not only through scenes depicting diegetic surveillance, but also by paralleling the closed network they constitute with the network anxiety aroused by connected technologies such as televisions.

The social control network depicted in *The Ring* also represents anxieties regarding our relationship with surveillance technology. Steen Christiansen refers to this anxiety as a result of the dispersion of human subjectivities across networked media technologies "... entangling the sense of self with those same technologies"

(“Uncanny Cameras” 43). This notion is also represented in the footage from the psychiatric hospital depicting the surveillance and interviews of Samara there. As mentioned previously, during the scene in which Samara is being interviewed, the interviewer is monitoring Samara on a small television screen which is in focus, unlike the depiction of her in the diegetic real, which remains out of focus. This suggests that the mediated depiction of Samara is prioritized by the interviewer over the “real” depiction of her. Assuming that other people of that institution have access to the recordings or the live feed, and that she is monitored by a number of employees rather than just one, the perception of Samara is “... distributed across network technologies rather than through a centred bodily perception” (Christiansen “Uncanny Cameras” 42). As such, the human subjectivities which form the body of the psychiatric hospital are “dispersed across media technologies” of surveillance and closed circuit television. Thus, the “unified sense of bodily experience” (Christiansen “Uncanny Cameras” 52) remains amiss in the depiction of the psychiatric institution in *The Ring*. The fact that the face of the interviewer remains outside frame and is not revealed to the audience contributes to this argument. His body is irrelevant of portrayal because he relies on the networked technology in his perception of Samara. The dispersed subjectivities which Samara is subjected under and victimized by contribute in establishing it as heartless and unjust. The network of social control thus initially manifests itself particularly in the footage of the psychiatric hospital and portrays the dispersion of subjectivities throughout networked technology. In the same scene, the social control network is constructed in the closed circuit network and translates in the representation of television screens portrayed throughout the entirety of the film. An aesthetical aspect of the social control network is also represented on a non-diegetic level of *The Ring*, as some cinematography is inspired by it and employs CCTV- and other surveillance footage in its portrayal of Samara’s past.

The Ring is concerned with portraying anxieties about the dimension beyond the screen and the monsters which might inhabit it. However, when it comes to the horror inspired by individual technologies, it is largely due to the network that they constitute collectively. These anxieties relate to the panoptical circumstances which Samara was subjected to during her institutionalization and thus *The Ring* can be interpreted as to represent anxieties related to networked power structures. This

conclusion is supported by Hantke's observation about the general condition of horror films which represent network panics. He asserts that these films: "... articulate with striking accuracy today ... what was at the heart of the 1950s horror films: that sense of the world as a densely interlinked network in which every player, moving or listening or watching or lurking, is subject to reciprocal forces" (26). Although the psychological elements which constitute networks have changed from films of the fifties (which often incorporated militarized networks) and those today, anxieties toward networks remain.

Transnational cultural exchanges between *Ringu* and *The Ring*

While the fact that "... the world has become increasingly 'networked' ..." (Blake and Reyes 1) provides inspiration for horror in the contemporary American horror film, it has also opened up the transnational cultural flow of influences which also manifest themselves in the genre. *The Ring* is a recent example of cross-cultural exchange. This is noted by Hantke, who asserts that the film "... spans the cultural divide between the Japanese market, where it originated, and the American one, where its remake kicked off a cinematic cycle of digital horror films in which so-called J-Horror, and to a lesser extent films from other Asian nations, and indigenous American products seemed to merge effortlessly" (17). The cultural exchange between the American and Japanese film industries can be traced back decades, from Hollywood's various remakes and adaptations of Akira Kurosawa's films, to Japanese-American co-productions, and numerous alterations of Japanese anime and the American science fiction and fantasy genres (Wee "Visual Aesthetics" 42). Hantke further asserts that *The Ring* marks a period in which "... cultural unease with digital technology was, quite obviously, not the provenance of any particular nation and its idiosyncratic relationship toward digital technology but a general phenomenon closely linked to highly technological cultures around the globe and, thus, to modernity itself" (17). Despite their similarities, there are small yet significant narrative differences between *The Ring*, and its Japanese original, *Ringu*. The narrative alterations in *The Ring* greatly influence its representation of evil compared to the Japanese original. These differences not only highlight the differences in cultural anxieties represented in both films, but they can be explained as due to the traditions of their respective origins. In this context, a comparative analysis will provide better understanding for the cultural anxieties represented in

The Ring, when compared to those represented in its original. This comparative analysis of representations of evil will largely be concerned with the representation of women and femininity for two reasons: Firstly; the monsters of both films are gendered, and secondly; the narrative differences between the two films concern gender.

Resume of Ringu

The Ring retains the core narrative of its Japanese original. however, the significant differences lie in the history of Samara/Sadako before her untimely death as well as in the circumstances surrounding her familial relations. In *Ringu*, a reporter, Reiko, happens across a videotape which is mysteriously involved in the deaths of numerous individuals who reportedly died seven days after watching it. She sets out investigating the origins of the tape and after watching it herself, she is soon convinced that her own life is in danger. Her son also watches the tape and Reiko's motivation now rests on the hope of saving both her and her sons life. Reiko enlists the help of her ex-husband, Ryuji, and the two of them discover that the videotape is linked to a young woman named Sadako. As it turns out throughout Reiko and Ryuji's investigation, Sadako is daughter to Shizumo Yamamura, a famous psychic who was publicly accused of fraud. Sadako was present during the public humiliation of her mother, and it is suggested in a flash back scene, that she killed the reporter accusing her mother of fraud merely by wishing for it. Reiko and Ryuji also find out that Shizumo killed herself following the incident, and that Dr. Ikuma murdered their daughter and threw her down a well. Reiko and Ryuji find the well and uncover Sadako's body, assuming that a proper burial will put her vengeful spirit to rest. Their assumption proves faulty, however, as Ryuji, after having returned home, watches television and Sadako emerges on the screen of the television, traverses it, steps inside Ryuji's apartment and kills him. It is not until she learns of Ryuji's death, that Reiko realizes that her survival is due to her having copied the tape and shown it to someone else, rather than the proper burial of Sadako. In the last scene, she is portrayed driving her son to see his grandfather, as she has realized that passing the curse unto someone else is the only way to save her son.

Ringu

In *Ringu*, the monster and antagonist of the film, Sadako, is victimized before her untimely death, similarly to her American counterpart, Samara. However, because

Sadako's victimization precedes her evil actions (unlike her American counterpart), her monstrosity is legitimized to a larger extent which coheres with Japanese literary traditions.

In a flashback scene, Sadako's initial demonstration of her lethal powers is portrayed as consequential of defending her mother who is being accused and humiliated by the press. Despite Sadako's good intentions of defending her mother, she merely makes matters worse which ultimately leads to her mother's suicide, while her father, Ikuma, attempts to contain Sadako's monstrosity by killing her. Valerie Wee makes a comparison between the narrative of Sadako and that of the classic Japanese female ghost story. In the narratives of the latter, innocent women return as vengeful ghosts after having been "... brutally murdered by a man whose socially prescribed duty is to protect her..." ("Patriarchy" 153). She asserts how these narratives derive from the ethical system of Confucian thought which dictates that "... when those in positions of power fail to fulfill their responsibilities and duties ... it is both acceptable and necessary for the oppressed to rise up against them, as only then can order and balance be reestablished" ("Patriarchy" 154). Wee argues how *Ringu* offers an ambiguous alternative to the traditional narrative of the vengeful female ghost as Sadako's innocence prior to her initial demonstration of monstrosity is questionable. In *Ringu*, it is Shizuko who is initially betrayed by her husband (the man "whose socially prescribed duty is to protect her", because he does not come to her aid when she is antagonized by the press). Contrary to the traditional female ghost story (in which Shizuko would become vengeful in death), Sadako comes to her aid in life while revealing her supernatural powers of killing merely by wishing for it. This leads Sadako's father to brutally kill Sadako which marks her as the vengeful ghost. However, because Sadako might or might not have possessed the paranormal ability to kill merely by wishing before defending her mother, the question regarding her innocence prior to her murder remains unanswered. As such, *Ringu* depicts two different generations of women personified in Shizuko and Sadako. This is also noted by Wee:

Shizuko and Sadako's respective reactions to the press event showcase the disparity between the traditional, patriarchy-respecting female and an "upstart," "disrespectful," contemporary female. While Shizuko

suffers the reporters' derision and criticism in silence and offers little resistance, Sadako (apparently) retaliates against the unfair male bullying by killing one of the aggressors. ("Patriarchy" 156)¹⁴

The narrative in *Ringu* thus depicts the construction of the traditional, patriarchy-respecting female as meeting her demise in the ultimate self-containment of suicide, while the contemporary female, personified in Sadako, is able to roam free. Wee asserts how Sadako thus comes to represent "... the uncontrollable, defiant, "modern" woman who refuses to submit to the idealized notions of femininity" ("Patriarchy" 162). Even though *Ringu's* narrative favors the existence of the "modern" woman, while dispensing with Shizumo, who represents traditional femininity, Wee deems this depiction as typically conservative because said "modern" woman is "... marked as a deviant monstrosity who is subsequently murdered by her father [and that] it is only in death that she can wreak her revenge with impunity" ("Patriarchy" 158).

Reiko might be interpreted as "... the film's attempt to break with patriarchal tradition and redeem the modern Japanese female" (157). However, because of her inability to "redeem" the modern woman by defeating Sadako (whom represents her evil counter-representative) and because she relies on male figures in her failed attempts, Wee regards such a positive interpretation of *Ringu* problematic:

The film explores the consequences of ignoring or betraying the traditional gender system and its attendant responsibilities and values ... villainy is not equated with a specific gender ... instead, the villains are those who neglect or reject their socially prescribed gender roles ... the male reporters and Ikuma are monstrous in their betrayal of patriarchal responsibilities ... while Sadako is monstrous because she reacts and kills when, as a female, she should accept and submit. ("Patriarchy" 162)

Ringu does not align evil with one specific gender, but the gender politics it represents are nonetheless traditional especially considering the fact, that the one character who attempts to subvert them is portrayed as monstrous.

The Ring

The American remake, *The Ring*, constructs its monster and antagonist, Samara, as inherently evil. Additionally, while monstrous acts are committed by both genders in *Ringu*, *The Ring* aligns monstrosity and evil with femininity, maternity and death. Contrarily, it aligns innocence and rationality with masculinity and paternity. Because Creed's concept of the monstrous-feminine offers an explanation for the traditional representation of monstrosity in a western capitalist context and its relation to representations of femininity, the representation of evil in *The Ring* will be considered in this regard.

During the interview of Samara at the psychiatric hospital, which is depicted on the tape that Rachel finds on the Morgan farm, Samara admits to purposefully hurting other people and takes responsibility for her mother's visions. This establishes her as inherently evil rather than a vengeful victim. While there is no depiction of anyone suffering as a consequence of the supernatural abilities which Sadako might or might not have inhabited prior to the victimization of her mother, it is clear that Samara's tormenting of her victims – ranging from the horses on the farm to her own mother – results in the victimization of her parents and not the other way around. Wee comes to the same conclusion and describes how the portrayal of Samara differentiates from that of Sadako:

The Ring depicts Samara as simply and unambiguously the embodiment of destructive, supernatural evil. Unlike Sadako, who is a mysterious cipher while alive, and whose guilt is at least ambiguous and possibly mitigated by her attempt to protect and defend her mother, Samara's evil tendencies are explicit from the start. ("Patriarchy" 159)

Previously, it was suggested how Samara can be interpreted as representing either an op/repressed victim which audiences sympathize with or, contrarily, a personification of technology which poses a threat to humanity. If we regard Samara simply as female, whether representing the returned repressed or a personification of technology, she fits the definition of the monstrous-feminine on various levels. Firstly, she resembles a corpse, "the ultimate in abjection", as she returns from the well and crawls through Noah's television screen. In this scene, Samara's abjection is also illustrated in her desire to highlight the "fragility of the law" and disregard it,

as she traverses the distinctive border of the television screen which separates the imaginary from the real. As Samara successfully crosses the border, she constitutes an even more significant threat as she demonstrates that she cannot be contained behind it which the abject is supposed to¹⁵. The fact that Samara successfully returns from the place where the abject is ideally contained, repressed and under control, and even threatens to cross the border separating the diegetic reality of the film from that of audiences, she inverts the re-experience of abjection in which, traditionally, the abject is ejected by the audience. This interpretation seems arguably progressive given the fact that patriarchal tradition and ritual is inverted. However, if we consider the previous interpretation – that the repressed Other subverts repression by the end of the film thus marking it as progressive, but how that interpretation proves problematic due to the inherently monstrous portrayal of the repressed – the same problem must be considered in relation to the portrayal of the monstrous-feminine: Even though she escapes repression by the end of the film, and even though she inverts the ritual of ejecting the abject, she remains a monstrous-feminine; a figure which is a danger to society and which must be repressed and controlled. The only way *The Ring* differs from *The Conjuring*, for instance, is that the narrative of the former does not offer audiences the satisfaction of re-ejecting the abject and repress it. However, their motivation and desire to do so remain the same by the end of the film and the monstrous-feminine; the abject, the maternal and woman thus remain sources of horror whether the narrative allows for her survival or not.

This simple alignment of evil with femininity becomes even more apparent when contrasting the immoral behavior restricted to female characters of the film to the innocence of male characters. This differentiates *The Ring* from the Japanese original in which male characters were presented as monstrous (i.e. Ikuma, the news reporters). Despite the fact that Anna Morgan suffers from the paranormal powers of her adopted daughter, she is portrayed as one of the first monstrous characters in the film. She is initially portrayed in Samara's videotape and thus presented in the frame of horror which the videotape constitutes. As audiences eventually experience, the horrific framing of Anna is justified when she is portrayed wrapping a black garbage bag over the head of her adopted daughter before throwing her down a well, but not before she had imprisoned the girl in their horse stable. The change in narrative from its Japanese original, in which it is Sadako's father, Ikuma, who kills the child, could arguably be considered an attempt to break away from traditional western cinematic

categorizations of male-oppressor, female-victim, and given the fact that Samara is portrayed as inherently evil and is successfully killed by another female character, Anna can potentially be read as an active female character who tries to combat inherent evil. It is problematic, however, that she fails at that attempt, and that she considers her actions immoral which must be assumed based on the fact that she commits suicide afterwards. This also suggests that killing her daughter was an action of insanity rather than justice. In terms of the monstrous-feminine, Anna fits the description as she is a mother who, much like Bathsheba in *The Conjuring*, consumes her own child before it is able to eject or exclude her. Like Reiko, Rachel initially comes across as a capable mother and investigative journalist, a leading character who audiences can trust in defeating the monster. However, Rachel becomes a monstrous-feminine at the moment when she introduces the curse of the videotape to her husband and son. Additionally, because she assists Samara in being 'birthed into the real world', she becomes her mother as well, which causes the death of Noah. As such, the remainders of female characters in *The Ring* arouse horror based on abjection; because they are mothers who threaten to consume their children. Thus maternity and femininity becomes aligned with monstrosity in *The Ring*.

Male characters in *The Ring* are oppositely portrayed as rational and innocent. Richard is the survivor in the midst of his conflicting wife and adoptive daughter the two of whom interchangeably victimize one another until Richard have them both instated in a psychiatric hospital. Richard, for some reason, is never affected by Samara's powers although he is portrayed as weighed down by grief over the fates of his daughter and wife. It is not until another woman, Rachel, shows up and picks the wounds of his family that Richard has enough and commits suicide. While Rachel is never redeemed for her sins of being a neglecting parent and Aidan's life remains compromised by the end of *The Ring*, Noah is purified of guilt. He is confronted in the film with his fault of neglecting Aidan, excusing himself that his own father was a disappointment and that his neglect of Aidan stems from an anxiety of carrying on that tradition. However, Noah is redeemed for his sins in that his life is sacrificed for that of Aidan's, because the death of the former functions as a warning for Rachel; that Samara's curse is still active, and that she must take other measures in order to save Aidan's life, which leads her to force him to make a copy of the tape. Aidan himself is the exact opposite of Samara: While they are the same age, Samara is

female and inherently evil, and Aidan is male and completely innocent. Thus, female characters are portrayed as monstrous while aligned with death and/or maternity compared to their male counterparts who represent rationality and innocence. Alternatively, male characters are redeemed for their sins throughout the progression of the narrative while female characters remain inherently monstrous by the end of the film.

While this comparative analysis shows how *Ringu* and *The Ring* adhere to different cultural traditions of representing women in fiction, it also reveals something about the cultural anxieties of contemporary western capitalist society. That is, the narrative alterations in the American remake from the Japanese original serve as to align monstrosity with femininity and are a testament to how woman remains constructed as Other onto which repressed anxieties is projected in fiction. The box office success of *The Ring* is a testament to the appeal of this, the monstrous-feminine trope, and its function in the American horror film.

Part-conclusion

Even if the first part of the analysis of *The Ring* – which concludes how it represents technophobic anxieties regarding the imaginary unknown behind our television screens – is to be regarded “something of a truism”, it does offer important ground for considerations regarding the representation of the repressed and the feminine. The technophobic anxieties represented in *The Ring* additionally allows for the examination of a concern with two distinct categories of network. Because both of these networks are envisaged by conglomerates, corporations and the government, the network anxieties represented in *The Ring* might be interpreted as resonating with anti-authoritarian ideologies. This is arguably as far as the subversive ideology of the narrative goes, however, as the comparative analysis of *The Ring* and *Ringu* reveals that the former re-frames its construction of monstrosity, portraying it as inherently evil and aligned with femininity. This calls into question the choice for this rather radical alteration of narrative. Assuming that Hollywood is primarily concerned with economic profit, rather than artistic authenticity, the alteration is plausibly explained by a choice to rely on a traditional construction of evil which they know will appeal to audiences. Similarly to the conclusion reached in the analysis of *The Conjuring*, the reliance on the monstrous-feminine trope is a testament to how it remains at large

in the American horror film. The only and arguably progressive difference in *The Ring*'s portrayal of the monstrous-feminine, compared to that of *The Conjuring*, regards Samara's refusal to be neutralized or contained combined with the fact that she succeeds. However, because she remains represented as inherently evil, she does not offer an alternative to her annihilation and begs repression or annihilation.

Conclusion

The Conjuring and *The Ring* have been analyzed as examples of thematic clusters which were initially categorized by their overt portrayal of haunted houses, and technology, respectfully. Both films, however, have been interpreted as to represent anxieties which extent beyond their initial categorization. The conclusion reached on *The Conjuring* is suggestive of how contemporary horror films (also exemplified by *Annabelle*, *Insidious* and the *Paranormal Activity* series) rely on the contextualization of the haunted house trope, in order to represent contemporary anxieties in relation to the subprime mortgage crisis, as well as the time of global economic uncertainties which followed in its wake. *The Conjuring* proves unable to resolve its narrative concerned with economic crisis. Instead, this crisis is imagined in a parallel supernatural narrative and projected onto the Other, in order to be disowned and annihilated. Wood's theory of the return of the repressed has proven beneficial in interpreting the monster of *The Conjuring*, as well as the implications for its portrayal. The fact that *The Conjuring* structures a narrative around the return of specific non-fictional and historically repressed women, who are reimagined as simply and inherently evil, marks *The Conjuring* as contributing to the reactionary tradition of the American horror film. Creed's theorization of the monstrous-feminine trope has proven beneficial in explaining how and why *The Conjuring* appeals to audience in its reactionary alignment of femininity with evil. However, while Wood and Creed's theories have proven beneficial in interpreting the function of the returned repressed in relation to economic crisis in *The Conjuring*, this analysis would benefit from a theoretical framework that could offer a methodology for interpreting how films articulate economic crisis or other conflicts which cannot readily be resolved. This analysis has relied on secondary literature in order to accommodate for this. However, Christiansen, for instance, relies on Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism*, in order to explain how contemporary horror films perceives

economic crisis as an apocalyptic moment (Christiansen 185-186). Hahner, Varda and Wilson envisages Kristeva's concept of abjection in order to analyze how *Paranormal Activity* positions consumption as that which both disgusts and attracts audience members. Both could prove relevant of consideration in relation to the economic anxieties represented in *The Conjuring*.

The analysis of *The Ring* exemplifies a popular trend in contemporary American horror films of envisaging technologies. These technologies are portrayed as sources of horror, but they also function as signifiers which reveal anxieties about sources of horror not necessarily related to technology. These anxieties relates to networked subjectivities and power-structures. While Wood's theory has contributed to an interpretation of *The Ring* as a narrative of the returned op/repressed autonomy of the child-figure, envisaging his theory is problematized by the disruption of the ghost-story narrative, and the reveal of Samara as a personification of technology. In despite of this, the analysis of *The Ring* has proven extensive in examining how it represents anxieties related to technology. This has been achieved by relying on the large amount of secondary literature available on *The Ring*, which has contributed in the interpretations of network metaphors and the cultural exchanges between *The Ring* and *Ringu*. Creed's concept of the monstrous-feminine has also contributed in the context of the comparative analysis of *The Ring* and *Ringu*, which revealed that the American version, like *The Conjuring*, relies on this reactionary trope in order to appeal to American audiences. While it has been analyzed how *The Ring* represents technophobic anxieties, few suggestions as to the fundamental question of why we fear technology, has been provided. Based on this analysis, *The Ring* could prove interesting to consider in relation to theorists such as Paul Virilio, especially in the context of *The Ring*'s representation of the relationship between televisions and reality, as well as the network metaphor.

While it remains outside the scope of this thesis to analyze *The Conjuring* and *The Ring* comparatively, they share some similar traits in relation to their representations of femininity which remain relevant to reflect upon due to their significance. Both analyses are concerned with representations of femininity. This has not been the primary intent prior to engaging them. However, it is arguably a testament to the significance which woman as Other still assumes in contemporary western culture.

As such, Creed's concept of the monstrous-feminine has provided a beneficial contribution in interpreting how the female Other is portrayed. It offers an explanation for the occurrence in both *The Conjuring* and *The Ring*, of mothers who kill their children, and why these acts are constructed as the foundations on which monstrosity emerges (even though Samara turns out to have been evil all along). The comparative analysis of *The Ring* and *Ringu* suggests that this trend is specifically American, or western, due to the lack of it in *The Ring*. Similar to how Creed traces the monstrous-feminine trope back to Medusa of Greek mythology (35-36), the specific tendency of mothers who commit filicide can be traced back to the myth of Medea. Its seemingly regular occurrence testifies to its appeal which, similar to Hollywood's reliance on the monstrous feminine trope, is why it is exercised in the contemporary American horror film.

The persistent occurrence of evil females in today's popular American horror films does not, of course, represent how we are afraid of women. Rather, the inherent occurrence of the monstrous-feminine in contemporary horror represents anxieties that are deeply rooted in our historically male-dominated culture. Arguably, the political and social rights of a number of social groups, which used to be referred to as minorities, are being acknowledged. Because women constitute the largest of them, they remain an obvious choice for the projection of anxieties related to progressive change by those who do not perceive that change as a benefit. As such, this contemporary and reactionary cycle of popular American horror films may be perceived as wish fulfilling to those who agree with their ideology. Others, however, might hope for a change – as that would make the nightmares just a little more enjoyable.

Notes

1. IMDb's list of the highest grossing American horror titles is due to change. For the condensed list of top ten American horror films released between 2000 and 2015, not including more than one film per series, see Appendix A. The updated IMDb list, which the condensed list is based on, can be retrieved at:
http://www.imdb.com/search/title?genres=horror&sort=boxoffice_gross_us,desc
2. In *Horror Literature: A Core Collection and Reference Guide* (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1981), entries for the genre begin in 1762.
3. For the full account, see Carroll 158-195.
4. This summarizing sentence is, due to its function as such, over-simplified and ignores many aspects of Wood's theory. Therefore, it should not be considered a satisfactory summary of Wood's theory as it is understood and applied in the context of this thesis.
5. See Clover, J. Carol. *Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film..* "The Dread of Difference. Ed. Thomas Schatz. University of Texas Press: Austin, 1996. 66-113. Print.
6. For an examination of the arguably remarkable intertextuality of past as well as contemporary horror films, see Jackson, Kimberly. "Metahorror and Simulation in the Scream Series and The Cabin in the Woods". *Technology, Monstrosity, and Reproduction in Twenty-first Century Horror*". New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 11-30. Print.
7. For an account of the cultural anxieties represented in 'body horror' see Jancovich's chapter "Body-Horror: The Crisis of Identity and the Transformation of the Body" (112-118).
8. Trope is to be understood, in this context, merely as a recurrent literary device rather than a figurative one.
9. "In a film (now also in a novel or other form of narrative fiction): a particular event, object, factor, etc., initially presented as being of great significance to the story, but often having little actual importance for the plot as it develops." (Oxford English Dictionary).
10. This idea originates from a field of study, or pseudo-science called parapsychology. For more on parapsychology and spirituality in *Ringu*, see Enns, Anthony. "The Horror of Media: Technology and Spirituality in the Ringu Films". *The Scary Screen: Media Anxiety in The Ring*. Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 2010. 29-44. Print.
11. The scene has been interpreted by various scholars. For examples, see Lacefield 17 and Jackson "Technology, Monstrosity, and Reproduction" 35.

12. Wee traces the appearance of the spinning chair in Samara's videotape to the one portrayed in this scene, and articulates its connection to the network: "The fact that a television set provided Samara sole access to the outside world when her adoptive parents locked her in their barn offers some explanation for Samara's use of the television as an instrument of vengeance" ("Visual Aesthetics" 57).
13. These institutions arguably function within a larger governmental network, the constitution of which include governmental bodies, federal institutions, correctional facilities etc. However, because this analysis is concerned with anxieties related to the relationship between technology and the network, only the specific network which is constituted by surveillance technologies, and are in fact depicted in *The Ring* will be examined.
14. Wee notes the depictions of Shizuko and Sadako as representing "... two conflicting constructions of femininity that have emerged in contemporary Japan: the *musume* and the *shōjo*" (Patriarchy 156).
15. Wee makes a similar interpretation of Samara in relation to abjection and borders ("Patriarchy" 161).

Appendix A

Top 10 highest grossing American horror titles released between 2000-2015.

Categorized into thematic clusters

(Not including more than one film per series)

1. I Am Legend (2007)	<u>Haunted houses</u>	<u>Zombie apocalypse</u>
2. World War Z (2013)		
3. What Lies Beneath (2000)	What Lies Beneath	I Am Legend
4. The Conjuring (2013)	The Conjuring	World War Z
5. The Ring (2002)	The Grudge	
6. The Grudge (2004)	Paranormal Activity	
7. Paranormal Activity (2007)	The Others	<u>Serial killer</u>
8. The Others (2001)		
9. Scream 3 (2000)		Scream 3
10. Saw II (2005)	<u>Technology</u>	
	The Ring	<u>Torture</u>
	Paranormal Activity	
	Saw II	Saw II

The condensed list of the top ten highest grossing American horror titles released between 2000 and 2015, not including more than one film per series. It is based on IMDb's list of the highest grossing American horror titles, as it was retrieved at 30-05-2016. The updated list can be retrieved at:

http://www.imdb.com/search/title?genres=horror&sort=boxoffice_gross_us,desc

Appendix B



Appendix C



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