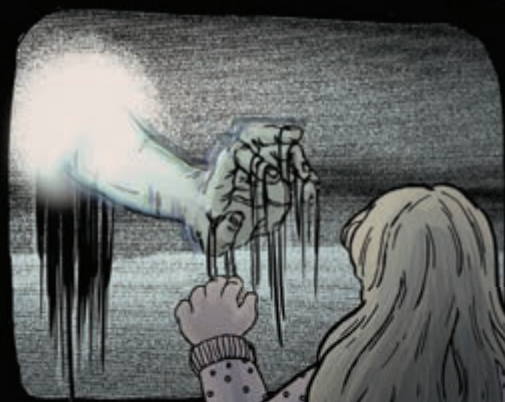


FILM
CULTURE

IN TRANSITION

The Uncanny Child in Transnational Cinema



Ghosts of Futurity
at the Turn of the
Twenty-First Century

JESSICA BALANZATEGUI

Amsterdam
University
Press

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	7
Introduction	9
The Child as Uncanny Other	
Section One	Secrets and Hieroglyphs: The Uncanny Child in American Horror Film
1. The Child and Adult Trauma in American Horror of the 1980s	35
2. The Uncanny Child of the Millennial Turn	67
Section Two	Insects Trapped in Amber: The Uncanny Child in Spanish Horror Film
3. The Child and Spanish Historical Trauma	95
4. The Child Seer and the Allegorical Moment in Millennial Spanish Horror Cinema	121
Section Three	Our Fear Has Taken on a Life of Its Own: The Uncanny Child in Japanese Horror Film
5. The Child and Japanese National Trauma	155
6. The Prosthetic Traumas of the Internal Alien in Millennial J-Horror	185

Section Four Trauma's Child: The Uncanny Child in Transnational Coproductions and Remakes

7. The Transnational Uncanny Child	219
8. Progress and Decay in the 21st Century The Postmodern Uncanny Child in <i>THE OTHERS</i> (Alejandro Amenábar, 2001)	241
9. 'Round and round, the world keeps spinning. When it stops, it's just beginning' Analogue Ghosts and Digital Phantoms in <i>THE RING</i> (Gore Verbinski, 2002)	265
Conclusion	283
Works Cited	289
Filmography	307
Artworks	313
Music	315
Film Index	317
Index	321

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Introduction

The Child as Uncanny Other

Abstract

The introduction outlines the book's focus on the cinematic uncanny child, a figure that challenges normalized ideologies of childhood by interrogating the child's associations with both personal and historical time. While the uncanny child emerged as a significant presence in American horror films in the 1980s, this figure became one of the genre's key unifying tropes at the turn of the 21st century – not only in American films, but in films from around the globe, particularly from Japan and Spain. These uncanny child films are significant not just for their self-reflexive recalibration of a long-entrenched trope of the horror genre, but because they evidence a globally resonant shift in conceptualizations of childhood at the turn of the millennium.

Keywords: Uncanny child, Turn of the millennium, Futurity, Temporality, Horror film, Transnational

The child is one of the most pivotal of modernity's symbolic constructs, around which central cultural institutions such as the family and the school, and even our very conception of the adult, revolve. Yet despite this ideological centrality, defining the child remains a fraught process. Childhood continues to be demarcated by characteristics such as innocence, naivety, cuteness, and vulnerability, which define the child in terms of its vacuity and lack of form in relation to the experienced, knowledgeable, rational, and powerful adult. In addition, these characteristics naturalize the child's subordination within a family unit and stringently institutionalized processes of socialization, while existing as remnants of formative ideologies of childhood established during the Enlightenment. The key manifestations of such notions can be seen in English philosopher John Locke's famous assertion that the child is born a 'white paper' – a *tabula rasa* or blank slate – and is gradually filled with knowledge and experience on the journey towards adulthood (1996, xix;

6-24), and the Romantic ideologies of William Wordsworth and Jean-Jacques Rousseau that idealize this 'blank' child as a natural, pre-social being. These eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century concepts represent the nascent emergence of childhood's modern configuration, and remain at the core of common-sense understandings of the child – entrenched because innocence and naivety are considered to be innate, natural conditions of childhood. Thus, it is largely through the child's perceived *lack* of reason, socialization, and social constructedness that it is defined and established as the adult's binary opposite, and is positioned as a pivotal cultural other. While the Romantic conception that 'childhood is the sleep of reason' (Rousseau, 2007, 80) remains central to contemporary assumptions about the child, it ultimately serves to position the child as an empty and somewhat unknowable vessel, within which anxieties and ambivalence constellate. As Spanish painter Francisco Goya proclaims in a sinister amplification of Rousseau's assertion, 'the sleep of reason produces monsters' – the title of one of his most famously unsettling, gothic works.

As a result of this slippage between romanticized, innocent emptiness and the eruption of monstrosity via this very lack of knowledge and reason, the child has long been a fixation of horror cinema. The first sustained cinematic vision of a truly monstrous child occurs in *THE BAD SEED* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1956), which presents the murderous child as the vehicle through which a generic shift from family melodrama to horror plays out. In fact, the film ends with a message acknowledging its novelty: 'You have just seen a motion picture whose theme dares to be startlingly different.' At first a seemingly perfect child, Rhoda Penmark is gradually established as the villain of the film, as the visual and aural cues that initially construct her cuteness are distorted to become dissonant and unnerving. For instance, her performance of 'Au Clair de la Lune' on the piano shifts from signalling her innocence and sweetness into a horror cue thick with menace – infecting the non-diegetic score in discordant form – aestheticizing a point at which childishness becomes a threat to the adult characters and all the institutions that they hold dear.

Through the child, *THE BAD SEED* demarcates an influential shift in generic preoccupations, as from the late 1950s onwards the family comedy and melodrama started to wane just as the domestic or family-focused horror film emerged.¹ Within the film, Rhoda's corruption of the security

1 This pattern of generic decline and emergence has been charted by Kathy Merlock Jackson (1986), Shelley Stamp Lindsey (1991), Tony Williams (1996), and Robin Wood (1979). That the cinematic monstrous child archetype emerged with the release of *THE BAD SEED* has been reinforced in the work of Dominic Lennard (2015), Merlock Jackson, William Paul (1994), and Julian Petley (1999).

and sanctity of the nuclear family works in tandem with her provocation of the film's self-conscious generic shift. *THE BAD SEED* thus demonstrates the extent to which the terrible child is a key trope of the modern horror genre. As Kathy Merlock Jackson states, 'THE BAD SEED proved a real innovation for its time; never before had such an evil image of childhood appeared on the screen. [...] THE BAD SEED made its mark as a box-office success, thereby providing the germination of a filmic image that would reach its peak in the 1970s: the child-as-monster' (1986, 112).

THE BAD SEED's deformation of the signifiers of childish innocence and cuteness – in particular the sweet, nursery rhyme-esque refrain – had a great deal of influence upon the aesthetics of post-1950s horror film, to the extent that this device has become an oft-used and recognizable cliché of the genre. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the child became solidified as a central trope of the modern horror film via the release of the (un) holy trinity of evil child films: *ROSEMARY'S BABY* (Roman Polanski, 1967), which features a baby born not as a blank slate but the devil incarnate; *THE EXORCIST* (William Friedkin, 1973), which depicts a twelve-year-old girl's possession by the devil; and *THE OMEN* (Richard Donner, 1976), which, like *ROSEMARY'S BABY*, centres upon a child Antichrist, this time a five-year-old boy. Andrew Tudor points out that the release of these three films marks a cultural moment in which the horror genre 'transcended its specialization and attained real mass success' (1991, 63) – as Andrew Scahill observes of this phenomenon, 'one of the remarkable features of all three of these films is that the monstrosity at the centre of each text is, in fact, a child' (2015, 4).

Yet post *THE BAD SEED*'s indubitably evil child, each of these possession and devil films construct the child as an empty vessel for evil to inhabit. This mechanism entails something of an evasive manoeuvre, in which all that is latently unnerving about the concept of childhood is displaced onto the figure of the devil. The horror of these films is constructed around the rather shallow tension established between the children as innocent victims of demonic possession and the evil that has come to inhabit their bodies: the innocence and naivety of the child is upheld in opposition to the power of the evil force that has assumed childhood's form. For instance, in *THE EXORCIST*, while Regan's grotesque body rages against the priests who attempt to exorcise the demon, the words 'Help Me' appear inscribed on the child's flesh, illustrating a clear delineation between the body usurped by evil forces and the soul of the victimized, powerless child trapped inside.

This book focuses not on these well-examined² expressions of possessed, evil, or devil children, but instead on a movement that arose subsequent to these films and self-consciously modulates the child-as-vessel-for-evil trope. From the beginning of the 1980s, a shift occurred as horror films started to feature more ambiguous images of childhood, in which the strangeness and otherness of child characters are not so simply attributable to an invasion by supernatural forces explicitly coded as 'evil' and external to the realm of the child. Foundational instances of this figure can be seen in *THE SHINING* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980), *THE CHANGELING* (Peter Medak, 1980), and *POLTERGEIST* (Tobe Hooper, 1982), which are considered in the first chapter of this book. 20 years later, at the turn of the millennium, the uncanny child that first stirred in American horror of the 1980s became one of the genre's key unifying tropes, not just in American films but in films from around the globe, particularly from Japan and Spain. These uncanny child films are significant not just for their self-reflexive recalibration of a long-entrenched trope of the horror genre, but because they evidence a globally resonant shift in conceptualizations of childhood at the turn of the millennium.

This book revolves around this child, not possessed or evil, but *uncanny*: a figure whose affects are best expressed by Freud's definition of the uncanny as an unsettling cognitive dissonance induced by the vacillation between the *heimlich* (homely/familiar) and the *unheimlich* (unhomely/unfamiliar) (2003b, 124). The horrors of these child characters are not associated with a shallow interplay of evil and innocence, but with the complex and impalpable ways in which they seem at once familiar and alien, vulnerable and threatening, innocent and dangerously indecipherable. As a result, these supernatural horror films approach the conceptual uncertainties latent within ideologies of the child, problematizing our usage of 'innocence' and 'naivety' – terms that, after all, connote emptiness – as defining qualities. Uncanny child films strip back surface understandings of the child as the pre-social, pre-rational originary stage of adulthood, a conception inevitably welded to adult nostalgia for the lost realm of purity and simplicity represented by childhood pasts. The films analysed throughout this book instead reveal the gothic underside to the romantic conceptual entanglement of childhood innocence and adult nostalgia, as childhood is positioned as the site of traumatic, imperfectly recalled pasts that haunt the adult's present in obfuscated ways.

2 These influential films and the evil child trope that they instigated have been thoroughly explored in scholarship on the horror genre, most recently in the work of Karen Jenner (2013), T.S. Kord (2016), Dominic Lennard (2015), Andrew Scahill (2015), and Adrian Schober (2004).

The Multiple Temporal Vectors of the Child's Uncanny Otherness

Uncanny child films anxiously consider the child's complex position as a foundational but ultimately deeply paradoxical cultural other, dramatizing the dialectic tensions inherent in childhood's conceptual constitution. As Steven Bruhm suggests, 'the twentieth century has inherited – or invented – far too many contradictions in its theories about children' (2006, 98). The child can only exist in binary opposition to the adult, yet childhood also represents a past temporal stage of adulthood and is thus intimately connected to ideologies of adult identity. As childhood sociologist Chris Jenks elucidates, the child represents a:

continuous paradox, albeit expressed in a variety of forms. Simply stated, the child is familiar to us and yet strange; he or she inhabits our world and yet seems to answer to another; he or she is essentially of ourselves and yet appears to display a systematically different order of being. (2005, 2-3)

While being a subject of the present external to adult consciousness, the child is also something every adult once was, and is thus bound to teleological linear narratives of the adult self as the adult's origins and personal history. Furthermore, while childhood represents the past of the adult self, in the post-Freud era, this past psychic stage has also come to signify an ever-present but buried component of adult consciousness – almost equivalent with the *unconscious* – as is expressed in the popular idiom of the 'inner child'. Thus, the child is simultaneously opposed to, the past of, and a *part of*, the adult.

Amplifying this paradoxical constitution, through the emptiness of innocence, naivety, and unreason – the key conditions that delineate the child's otherness – the child is positioned as inherently indecipherable and enigmatic to adult consciousness. Marina Warner characterizes the child's quasi-sacred but hazardous lack of reason as a 'supernatural irrationality' (1994, 42), and suggests that 'childhood, placed at a tangent to adulthood, perceived as special and magical, precious and dangerous at once, has turned into some volatile stuff – hydrogen, or mercury, which has to be contained' (1994, 35). As Warner suggests, 'the separate condition of the child has never been so bounded by thinking, so established in law as it is today' (1994, 35) and many of our anxiously determined contradictions surrounding the child arise from this very 'concept that childhood and adult life are separate when they are inextricably intertwined' (1994, 48). By rejecting the evil child trope in favour of exploring the child's ambivalent otherness, uncanny child

films consider the incongruities of our nebulous but symbolically charged definitions of the child as both other to and 'of' adulthood.

In so doing, these films also unveil the manner by which the child as conceptual apparatus stands at a fraught crossroads between personal and sociocultural metanarratives. In addition to being defined as a prior stage of adulthood and as the adult's binary opposite, the child is also implicated in paradigms of sociocultural progress and futurity. Constantly in the process of growing up, the child is largely conceived as a 'work in progress': as Jenks explains, 'the child has come to be understood as an unfolding project, a natural trajectory, a staged becoming, and an inevitably incremental progress into adulthood' (2001, 75). Jenks further suggests that:

the roots of such a belief run deep and integrate seamlessly with the physiological demands of medicine and the logistical demands of a society based on hierarchical stratification and hierarchical distribution of provision. This is a powerful discourse that routinely structures children's experience, their time, and how their bodies are read and managed. (2001, 75)

This processual model of growing up is teleological in nature, as the child gradually ascends a set linear trajectory, with 'adult competence being journey's end – the modernist project writ small!' (Jenks, 2001, 75). As Lee Edelman explains, this notion of growing *up* is pivotal to sociocultural and political investment in teleological progression, the 'narrative movement towards a viable political future' (2004, 4). The child's growing up is thus welded to ideals of collective progress, as the child's journey towards both adulthood and futurity – that mythical realm beyond the horizon of present adult society – personifies 'the fantasy of meaning's eventual realisation' (Edelman, 2004, 4) through continual progress. Edelman points to standard political rhetoric that justifies present politics and ideologies in the name of 'the children', describing such child-centred investment in teleological progress as 'reproductive futurism': 'the Child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust' (2004, 11).

While excavating the ambivalent ways in which the child is defined as other to while simultaneously being tied to adulthood, uncanny child films start to explore and deconstruct the traditionally unquestioned ways in which the child is deployed to shore up our sense of sociocultural and intergenerational continuance. These cinematic images of uncanny children thus dramatize the usually submerged paradoxical vectors that underlie

contemporary understandings of childhood. In turn, these films expose how the child's role as embodiment of futurity – and the concomitant alignment of growing up with teleological historical continuity – sits in tension with childhood as the 'past' of adulthood, and the child as adulthood's unknowable binary opposite.

The Transnational, Millennial Uncanny Child Cycle

While the uncanny child trope surfaced as a marked trend in the early 1980s, this figure was largely displaced from the foreground of the horror genre throughout the later 1980s and early 1990s in favour of the hugely successful and prolific slasher cycle. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the ambiguously menacing uncanny child arose once again to dominate the genre. Yet, this time, it was not just North American horror films issuing forth globally pervasive visions of uncanny childhood: an assemblage of films emerged that communicated across cultural borders, as the uncanny child became central to the horror cinema of the United States, Spain, and Japan. With the release of globally successful films such as *THE SIXTH SENSE* (M. Night Shyamalan, 1999, U.S.), *THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE* (Guillermo del Toro, 2001, Spain), and *RINGU* (Hideo Nakata, 1998, Japan), the uncanny child's resonance across cultures was exposed. Of course, this is not to suggest that the U.S., Spain, and Japan were the only nations that produced films centred on eerie or threatening children during this period;³ however, from the late 1990s into the early 2000s, uncanny child films from these three sites became a concentrated, cohesive transnational body that gained global success and recognition both critically and at the box office. These films thus assembled an intercultural uncanny child trope during the transition to the 21st century that became firmly lodged in the global pop-cultural imagination: a trope with specific qualities, explored throughout this book, that interrogate the child's naturalized symbolic function.

As I chart throughout this book, this transnational assemblage of films sparked a renaissance of both the horror genre – seen during the late 1990s to be in crisis⁴ – and more specifically of the supernatural subgenre. This body of films also traversed the technological transition from analogue to

3 Works from other nations include Swedish child-vampire film *LET THE RIGHT ONE IN* (Tomas Alfredson, 2008), French film *HOUSE OF VOICES* (Pascal Laugier, 2004), British film *THE CHILDREN* (Tom Shankland, 2008), and Irish film *DOROTHY MILLS* (Agnés Merlet, 2008).

4 As Steffen Hantke (2010) points out in his overview of early 21st-century horror discourse, the notion that horror was 'in crisis' tended to pervade works that broadly canvassed the American horror film in the early 2000s.

digital filming, storage, and projection technologies. This shift underwrote the growing recognition during this period that the horror genre – previously conceived as predominantly a Hollywood genre with culturally distinct, national off-shoots – is in fact distinctly transnational, a phenomenon explored in the book's final chapters. The uncanny child trope thus became the locus for a highly visible process of transnational exchange. Suggesting the extent to which these films engage with one another cross-culturally via their child characters, North American, Spanish, and Japanese uncanny child films of the millennial turn became thoroughly entwined through transnational coproductions and remakes in the early 2000s. Such films include the Spanish-American coproduction *THE OTHERS* (Alejandro Amenábar, 2001) – one of the most critically successful and influential horror films of the new millennium – and Hollywood remakes of Japanese horror films, such as *THE RING* (Gore Verbinski, 2002), which is among the 20 highest grossing horror films of all time.⁵

A number of scholars have explored the monstrous child's expression of American cultural anxieties: for instance, Kathy Merlock Jackson (1986), Adrian Schober (2004), Robin Wood (1977), and Andrew Scahill (2015) associate terrible children with a distinctly American milieu, and the monstrous child's entwinement with American culture is implicit in the work of Dominic Lennard (2015), Bernice Murphy (2009), and even T.S. Kord (2016), who also considers a variety of non-American films. While some insightful considerations of the horror film child's significance in other cultural contexts has been carried out – see in particular the work of Karen Lury (2010), Valerie Wee (2013), and Karen Jenner (2016) – such work tends to be in the form of analyses and comparisons of particular films. No scholars have traced the overarching anxieties that shape this millennial, transnational body of films across cultures, and the precise interplay of culturally specific and globally resonant conceptualizations of childhood that these films as a body reveal. This assemblage of films illustrates with potency that the uncanny child is not an inherently American phenomenon. More specifically, close analysis of these films offers valuable insights into anxieties about the shifting ideological status of childhood at the turn of the 21st century, and reveals that these apprehensions are, to some extent, global in their broad strokes, while having specific contours that emerge from their particular cultural contexts.

I contend that this assemblage of films deploys the uncanny child to mediate the conceptual contortions surrounding millennial shift: tensions

5 See 'The 20 Highest Grossing Horror Films of All Time' (Lynch, 2017).

surrounding change, flux, and the tangling of beginnings and endings associated with the transition from the 20th to the 21st century. As is illustrated throughout this book, the child holds a particularly central yet anxiously overdetermined position within narratives of progress and identity, both personal and national, in the U.S., Spain, and Japan. The coming of the third millennium held little literal significance in any of these nations⁶, but carried a great deal of symbolic weight as a sign of epochal transition. While the millennial turn was associated with specific anxieties and connotations in North American, Spanish, and Japanese contexts, in all cases this period of global transition challenged unquestioned investment in progress, historical continuance, and futurity, which in turn fomented a reexamination of the conceptual underpinnings of the child. Thus, by positioning the uncanny child as an embodiment of millennial anxieties, these films stage a direct confrontation with the pivotal but usually obscured symbolic functions of the child, interrogating the ways in which the child is simultaneously:

1. Tasked with embodying futurity and teleological progress.
2. Entwined with the adult's origins and personal past.
3. Externally situated as adulthood's inferior binary opposite.
4. Associated with a buried, enigmatic realm still lurking within the depths of the adult unconscious.

By anxiously revealing childhood's overdetermined symbolic scaffolding, this transnational body of films exposes how traditional definitions of the child started to unravel in the popular imagination with the ending of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. Thus, despite the different cultural contexts from which these films emerge, they communicate

6 I do not suggest that these films interact with specific religious connotations associated with millenarianism (such as the Second Coming): even though all three countries adhere to the Gregorian calendar, the anxieties about all-encompassing change that the child characters of this period expose do not directly engage with Christian eschatological concerns. In fact, as Steven Jay Gould has suggested (writing at the height of millennial anticipation in 1997), *fin de siècle* anxieties about the imminent millennium represented a 'precisely arbitrary countdown' (as his book is subtitled), for which he finds little grounding in calendrics, mathematics, or even religion. In fact, while in popular culture the coming of the third millennium and 21st century was marked by the year 2000, technically, the third millennium commenced on 1 January 2001. Yet, as these child characters illustrate, such specific underpinnings of millennial shift do not lie at the core of millennial anxieties. The uncertainty that suffused the millennial period was globally pervasive: as Hillel Schwartz points out, the Anno Domini calendar is 'used worldwide for commerce, diplomacy, and scientific exchange' and combined with typical *fin de siècle* concerns, the approach of the year 2000 marked 'a momentous historical divide' (1996, xiv).

with one another through the ways their uncanny child figures express tensions surrounding this liminal period of global transition. This book revolves around the temporal disjuncture embodied by the uncanny child, for the films under discussion pivot upon an acknowledgement of the multivalent, often contradictory temporal vectors that the child is tasked with cohering.

In each of the films analysed, the uncanny child is characterized in one of two ways: as a mysterious ghost or spectre (as is the character of Sadako in *RINGU*), or as an 'in-between', seemingly alive yet acting as a mediator or being caught between the realms of the living and the dead, the present and the past, the material and the supernatural (as Cole is in *THE SIXTH SENSE*). By being associated with ghosts and a spectral realm that intrudes upon the temporal coherence of each film's 'present' diegesis, these child figures unsettle the linear flow of narrative time, drawing the past into the present and obstructing the smooth progression from present into future. As Peter Buse and Andrew Stott assert, 'anachronism might well be the defining feature of ghosts [...] because haunting, by its very structure, implies a deformation of temporal linearity' (1999, 1). They expound:

Ghosts are a problem for historicism precisely because they disrupt our sense of a linear teleology in which the consecutive movement of history passes untroubled through the generations [...] ghosts are anachronism *par excellence*, the appearance of something in a time in which they clearly do not belong. But ghosts do not just represent reminders of the past – in their fictional representation they very often demand something of the future. [...] [The ghost] serves to destabilize any neat compartmentalization of the past as a secure and fixed entity, or the future as uncharted territory. (Buse and Stott, 1999, 14)

Either existing as spectres themselves or raising the presence of ghosts, uncanny children of transnational, millennial horror films aestheticize a breach in linear and homogenous temporal continuity. This mechanism is particularly subversive for a figure whose central sociocultural function is to ensure intergenerational and historical continuity through embodying a link to the past while existing as incubator for the future.

Furthermore, across all of the films analysed in this book, the uncanny child's association with ghosts fulfils a specific symbolic function that approaches the core of childhood's ambivalently defined otherness: the uncanny child becomes a potent embodiment of trauma. The child's connections with spectrality empower a previously repressed traumatic

experience from the past to reemerge in, and disrupt, the present. All the films discussed throughout this book play on the traditional structure of the ghost narrative, revolving as it does around the resurfacing of repressed pasts. As Noël Carroll outlines:

ghost stories involve the return from the dead of someone who has left something unsaid or undone, who wishes something unacknowledged to be brought to light, or who wants revenge or reparation. Once the living discover this secret motive they are generally on their way to sending the ghost back to where it came from. (1990, 98)

The child characters analysed in this book trouble this narrative trajectory and its resolution, a result, I suggest, of the ways the uncanny child layers the ghost narrative with particularly complex anxieties about trauma, progress, and futurity. As Jeffrey Weinstock suggests, ‘as a symptom of repressed knowledge, the ghost calls into question the possibilities of a future based on avoidance of the past’ (2004, 6) – a particularly symbolically charged function when associated with childhood.

In the American films, the uncanny child’s association with trauma tends to be distinctly personal in nature, as the child becomes a symbolic vessel for the adult protagonist’s past traumas, a process that exposes the child’s continued entwinement with Freudian-inflected narratives of identity development in American culture. Yet, in the Spanish and Japanese films, the child’s association with trauma takes on a distinctly and often overtly sociocultural dimension, as she becomes associated with repressed – or *oppressed* – historical traumas and derails politically sanctioned narratives of national progress and development. The uncanny child’s association with collective traumas is then refracted in the Anglophonic remakes and coproductions of the early 21st century. It is by embodying trauma that these children challenge master narratives of personal and national progress, as is often expressed diegetically through their unravelling of the established symbolic rules of temporal continuity in the ghost narratives in which they appear. In so doing, these children subvert their status as innocent, vulnerable victims of an adult society that they are powerless to affect or change. By harnessing the painful incoherence and unruliness of a previously repressed traumatic experience, these characters simultaneously burst through the shackles of progressive teleological narratives and through definitions of the child that naturalize children’s subordination, in so doing deconstructing these constrictive models of discourse.

Theorizing Uncanny Childhood

Art, and especially cinematographic art must take part in [the] task: not that of addressing a people, which is presupposed already there, but of contributing to the invention of a people. [...] Not the myth of a past people, but the story-telling of the people to come. (Deleuze, 1997a, 217-223)

This book circulates around my conviction that in millennial horror films featuring uncanny children, conceptual tensions typically patched over by normalized ideologies of childhood dramatically emerge as a source of dread and terror. Robin Wood argues that as a genre, horror films function as ‘our collective nightmares’ (1985, 174) because ‘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’ (1985, 171). Wood’s assertion has become central to theorizations and definitions of the horror genre, which, post Wood, tends to be seen as a dramatized cultural expression of tensions surrounding conceptual otherness. Throughout this book, I follow the broad outlines of this model – maintaining that the horror films under discussion work through both ideological tensions and historical traumas that are usually repressed or obfuscated – however, I do not adhere to the Freudian orthodoxy of Wood’s return of the repressed model, associated as it is with Freud’s universalist repressive hypothesis.⁷

While Wood suggests that the horror genre’s fixation with the monstrosity of cultural otherness is usually a sign of horror’s conservative mechanisms, he also emphasizes horror’s cathartic and sometimes even progressive function in exposing these usually repressed preoccupations. I would further argue that horror’s working through of typically submerged anxieties surrounding otherness also signals the genre’s ability to perform important cultural work, as is the case with the millennial cycle of uncanny child films. Thus, while James Kincaid proposes that we ‘abandon the Gothic’ (1998, 283) in order to overcome our ambivalent cultural obsession with childhood – because, he believes, ‘most Gothic tales demand that we cease thinking as we listen and think less even as we repeat them’ (1998, 285) – I suggest that uncanny child films enable the *rethinking* of our fixations with the child in productive,

7 Following Freud, Wood suggests that specific collective primitive drives and desires are repressed to ensure the smooth functioning of civilization, and that this repressed content subsequently erupts in horror film. He combines this model with the insights of Herbert Marcuse to characterize this process as a collective, social repression.

compelling ways. Emerging as they do at the millennial turn, these films suggest a mounting unease surrounding the previously naturalized ways in which the child assembles narratives of temporal continuity, models of progressive linear time that serve not the child, but the conceptual and political needs of the adult's present.

Growing Sideways

Lee Edelman and Kathryn Bond Stockton both utilize queer theory to explore the cultural politics of the child's 'growing up.' In *No Future* (2004), Edelman decries our intense valuing of the child as the embodiment of a mode of progress that he suggests is at its core stultifying and conservative. As he states, the child 'remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention' (2004, 3-4), a privileging of futurity which is 'impossible to refuse' (2004, 2) and in fact ensures, while justifying, the continuance of present political and ideological modes: 'the image of the child [...] serves to regulate political discourse' (2004, 11). Thus, for Edelman, the child symbolizes 'the emblem of futurity's unquestioned value' (2004, 4), deployed in political discourse to resist radical change through the continued justification of present politics, a constitution that also relies upon 'history as linear narrative [...] in which meaning succeeds in revealing itself – *as itself* – through time' (emphasis in original, 2004, 4). Edelman conceives that the only way to resist the current social order is to eradicate our value in the child, for 'we are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the child' (2004, 11).

Yet uncanny child films trouble our unthinking equation of childhood with progress and futurity, as these eerie visions of childhood instead disturb the constrictive temporal structures with which the child is usually intertwined. These horror films thus challenge the child's symbolic function as 'the emblem of futurity's unquestioned value' (2004, 4). As Stockton points out in *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (2009), while Edelman suggests (conceptually) 'smashing' the child, 'there are other ways to circumvent "the child". One could explore the elegant, unruly contours of growing that don't bespeak continuance' (2009, 13). For Stockton, sideways growth functions as an alternative to growing up, revealing the 'moving suspensions and shadows of growth' (2009, 13) that do not fit with narratives of teleological progress directed towards an imagined end in alignment with heteronormative, *adult*, visions of futurity. Indeed, Scahill deploys such a framework in *The Revolting Child in Horror Cinema*

to illustrate how what he calls ‘revolting’ child characters enact ‘a mass and massive rejection of heteronormative reproductive futurity’ (2015, 122). While I do not present an explicitly queer reading of uncanny child films, I draw on the ideas of Edelman and Stockton to highlight how the horrifying qualities of uncanny child figures are located in their simultaneous resistance to national, cultural, and individual ‘growth.’

Uncanny child films dramatize processes of sideways growth in various ways, as is crystallized in particular by the fact that these child characters are typically characterized as either ghosts, or as lurking in the space between the spectral and the material, the past and the present. In fact, Stockton also employs the figure of the ghost child to discuss the potential children have to destabilize models of linear development, even though her discussion centres not on horror fiction but on the experiences of queer children. She uses the term ‘ghostliness’ in her examination of the queer child’s sideways growth, stating that ‘what the child “is” is a darkening question. The question of the child makes us climb inside a cloud [...] leading us, in moments, to cloudiness and ghostliness surrounding children as figures in time’ (2009, 2); Stockton suggests that this ghostliness arises via the uncomfortable recognition that ‘children grow sideways as well as up [...] in part because they cannot, according to our concepts, advance to adulthood until we say it’s time’ (2009, 6). Millennial horror films represent a particularly arresting moment of cloudiness and ghostliness surrounding our understanding of children as figures in time, as their uncanny children start to unsettle or even break down the narrow teleological trajectories of growth and development set for them by the adults of the present, in so doing setting off-balance the accepted hierarchy of power and knowledge between child and adult. As a result, these films problematize the ways in which the child is tasked with maintaining a coherent sense of temporal progression and historical continuance. This book exposes the aesthetic and ideological mechanisms that bind the uncanny child to these temporal incongruities.

The Child as Uncanny

As I intimated at the beginning of this chapter, my usage of the term ‘uncanny’ seeks to capture the child characters’ vacillation between the homely and the unhomely in their maintenance of a dialectic tension between the innocent child and a figure who renders the very ‘homeliness’ of childish innocence disconcerting and threatening. As Freud suggests, the uncanny encapsulates the felt movement from the familiar and the homely (*heimlich*) to the unfamiliar and unhomely (*unheimlich*), a transition that unsettlingly

reveals the entwinement of these supposedly opposed categories: *heimlich* thus becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*. The uncanny (*das Unheimliche* “the unhomely”) is in some ways a species of the familiar (*das Heimliche*, “the unhomely”)⁸ (2003b, 134). The child in millennial horror cinema elicits the cognitive dissonance that results from this movement between familiarity and unfamiliarity, and, in so doing, she incarnates a moment in which familiar, safe visions of childhood suddenly become profoundly unnerving, a process at the heart of this film cycle’s resistance to the innocence/evil dichotomy of earlier works. While I do not dwell in this book upon specific psychoanalytic models of childhood development – the films and cultural conditions examined do not suggest preoccupations with childhood psychosexual stages – what is refracted across this transnational body of films is the child’s aestheticization of a tension between self and other, safety and threat. More specifically, all of these films play on the anfractuous temporal vectors between past and present that are inherent in Freud’s characterization of the uncanny psychical relationship between child and adult consciousness. As I suggest in Chapter One, in its broad outlines, Freudian psychoanalysis has shaped contemporary understandings of childhood, particularly in an American context. Freudian definitions of childhood have significantly contributed to the child’s overdetermined temporal function in the late 20th and early 21st centuries – even in Eastern cultural contexts such as Japan.⁸

Freud famously contends that uncanny sensations are induced by the reemergence of ‘something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed’ (2003b, 148). This assertion points to the complex ways in which Freud situates childhood as the passed and ‘past’ temporal stage of adulthood: the symbolic site of the dark, repressed secrets from an earlier psychic stage that threaten to reemerge and disrupt the coherence of the adult’s ‘present’ psyche. This model of child-adult psychic

8 As Nina Cornyetz and J. Keith Vincent have shown in their examination of the history of psychoanalysis in Japan, ‘psychoanalysis was first introduced to Japan in a series of articles published in 1912, just seventeen years after Freud had first used the term “psychoanalysis” to describe his method of psychological interpretation’ (2010, 3). Japanese psychoanalysts, most prominently Heisaku Kosawa and Takeo Doi, would go on to adapt Freud’s Oedipal model and stages of psychosexual development for a Japanese context. Thus, notions of the child’s intimate connections with the adult psyche have long been a facet of Japanese culture, even if the specifics of Japanese psychoanalytic narratives may vary from Freud’s own theories. Indeed, Anglophonic psychoanalytic discourse contains many variations of such developmental narratives as well – while, of course, similarly working through various translations of Freud and Lacan – as is suggested by child sociologist William Kessen’s assertion that ‘child psychologists have invented different children’ (1983, 28).

relations, in which childhood is positioned as a realm partly obscured from adult consciousness but at the core of adult complexes and phobias, has had a broad influence on popular culture and conceptions of childhood worldwide throughout the 20th century. The cultural construct has become amplified, as Kincaid has pointed out, in contemporary moral panics about the widespread repression in adulthood of sexual abuses suffered in childhood, the fractured memories of which threaten to erupt in enigmatic ways in adulthood, only to be 'recovered' with a psychological delving into the darkest depths of the adult psyche. A related component of this Freud-inflected notion can be seen in popular discourse surrounding rediscovering adulthood's lost 'inner child': as Jenks elucidates, 'psychiatric and psychotherapeutic regimes tend to be conducted through regressive narratives with individuals "finding their way" through the excavation of roots and attachments from the past – the "inner child"' (2005, 111). This temporally clouded relationship between child and adult psyches hangs over all the films analysed throughout this book, and is, I suggest, central to the child's paradoxically constituted otherness. As Hugh Haughton points out, the uncanny 'reminds us not only that there is no place like home, but that, in another sense, there is no other place. For Freud, our most haunting experiences of otherness tell us that the alien begins at home, wherever that may be' (2003, xlix).

My usage of the term uncanny also relates to the specific ways I read these child figures as embodiments of trauma. Within the narratives of all of the films I discuss, the children are usually victims of trauma, or at least have privileged insight into traumatic experience. More than this, they come to harness this trauma and propel it back into the realm of adult experience, subverting their victimized position to become threatening and powerful through their very trauma. The uncanniness of the children in these films is thus entangled with their association with the aesthetics and temporal mechanics of trauma. Overarching this book is Cathy Caruth's influential characterization of trauma, strongly influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis and, in particular, his notion of the uncanny, as

the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language. (1996, 4)

In uncanny child films, the child's trauma represents a challenge to the entrenched security, coherence, and power of adult knowledge and discourse.

In its incomprehensibility and suggestion of a submerged reality, traumatic experience in these films functions as an intensified expression of the child's 'sleep of reason', while signifying the means by which children's victimization at the hands of adult society is monstrously turned against those that oppress them.

Furthermore, in resonance with the uncanny, Caruth emphasizes the eerie temporal quality inherent in traumatic experience, in which trauma becomes known only belatedly: 'trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on' (1996, 4). Caruth's deconstructionist model of trauma has been criticized by subsequent trauma scholars for its commitment to the 'unrepresentable' event: for instance, Dominick LaCapra suggests that a fixation with unrepresentability risks 'sacralising, or making sublime' the compulsive repetition of traumatic pasts (2004, 121). Yet, just as I do not draw on Freud in order to uncover the universal truths of childhood, I do not seek to pathologize the films I analyse: to dwell on whether they undergo processes of melancholia/mourning, acting out/working through, and ultimately, unhealthy/healthy responses to trauma. To use Adam Lowenstein's terms, I do not wish to echo the tendency in trauma studies to 'diagnose representation as if it were a patient' (2005, 4). Instead, I use elements of Caruth's model – along with the insights of other scholars who discuss cinematic expressions of trauma – in order to unpack the conceptual tensions expressed by these traumatized (and traumatizing) child characters. In embodying trauma and subsequently inflicting it upon adult characters, and, by extension, the film viewer that functions as their proxy, these children incite an uncanny process of traumatic repetition which continually points to a past event that the adult protagonist is unable to perceive or understand, but which threatens their very self-identity and temporal grounding. These figures in turn throw into sharp relief the adult's belatedness to acknowledge the traumatic event, a frightening process of delayed cognizance which is built into each of these film's narratives and aesthetics in various ways, and enhances the sense that the uncanny child is privy to a layer of nonrational understanding not accessible to adult consciousness.

As is suggested by my sketching of the uncanny child's trauma and the trauma of the uncanny child, I see the child's association with trauma not only as negative and monstrous, but as the means by which the child is empowered to rebel against the strictures of linear progress and rational adult discourse. To emphasize how this occurs, my analysis often draws on

Deleuzian conceptions of cinematic time in order to elucidate the disturbing but often productive ways that the child harnesses trauma to disrupt homogenous, progressive time consciousness. As Deleuze scholar Jack Reynolds suggests, 'Deleuze's oeuvre is best understood as a philosophy of the wound, synonymous with a philosophy of the event' (2012, 107), and, in resonance with the trauma theory of Caruth, Deleuze describes the temporal disjuncture of the wound or 'agonizing' event as 'always and at the same time something which has just happened and something which is about to happen; never something happening' (2004, 73). Deleuze's theorizations of cinematic time offer a compelling framework through which to consider the uncanny child's temporal subversions, and the way that this figure harnesses trauma to disrupt the child's typical sociocultural function of personifying intergenerational continuity.

Through their trauma, cinematic uncanny children continually puncture linear continuity, and thus can often be associated with Deleuze's 'time-image', a mode of cinematic expression that contrasts with the norms of Hollywood continuity editing in that we are 'plunged into time rather than crossing space' (1997a, xii) when watching such images, and are forced 'beyond the purely empirical succession of time – past-present-future' (1997a, xii). By challenging linear narrative temporality and the aesthetic practices that buttress such linearity, uncanny children tend to immerse viewers and adult characters into a dimension in which, to use Deleuze's example from *Hamlet*, 'time is out of joint' (1997a, xi). The uncanny child's transgressive relationship to linear time (or 'clock time' in the words of Deleuze) is dramatized by the fractured temporal processes of supernatural horror film, the narratives of which are structured around the eerie revelation that an asynchronous spectral realm lurks alongside normality's linear – and previously homogenous – time consciousness. In this way, supernatural horror films tend to sustain a continual tension between the regimes of what Deleuze calls the movement-image (broadly associated with linear, continuity editing structured by the continuous bodily movements of the characters) and the time-image, and the uncanny child – the horror film's dominant fixture at the turn of the 21st century – embodies this breach in coherent continuity.

This book is constituted of four sections, each of which contains two or three chapters. Section One: *Secrets and Hieroglyphs* explores the uncanny children of American horror film, and sets out a model for the child's aestheticization of trauma that reverberates through subsequent chapters. In Section Two: *Insects Trapped in Amber*, I focus on Spanish horror films featuring uncanny children, exploring how, in post-Civil War

Spain, the child became thoroughly embroiled with a tightly controlled narrative of national progress through the autocratic Franco dictatorship. Subsequently, the uncanny children in Spanish horror films *THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE*, *THE NAMELESS* (Jaume Balagueró, 1999), and *THE ORPHANAGE* (Juan Antonio Bayona, 2007) function as terrifying but cathartic eruptions of the historical traumas that were long concealed by the claustrophobic ligatures of Francoist discourse.

In Section Three: *Our Fear Has Taken on a Life of its Own*, I address the explosion of globally successful Japanese horror films of the millennial turn that have become designated 'J-horror'. I consider how the child is a pivotal component of post-World War II Japanese national identity, which is buttressed by a quasi-sacred belief in rapid national progress. This competitive model of progress seeks to displace the spectres of intense national trauma, and also locks the child into an overdetermined fixation with national development, which led to pronounced anxieties about childhood when Japan's economy collapsed in what has become known in Japan as the Lost Decade, 1991-2001. Films such as *RINGU* and *JU-ON* (Takashi Shimizu, 2000-2002) expose the traumatic extent of the child's conceptual rebellion during this period.

In the final section, *Trauma's Child: Transnational Remakes and Coproductions*, I consider the Hollywood J-horror remakes and Spanish-American coproductions that emerged in the early 21st century as a response to the transnationally successful boom of uncanny child films from America, Spain, and Japan. These films self-consciously suggest the emergence of a postmodern conception of childhood that resists traditional ideas about the child's incremental, teleological progression towards adulthood and futurity.

Throughout, this book charts the complex ways in which 'the sleep of reason produces monsters' in cinematic constructions of the child at the turn of the 21st century. These supernatural horror films question the entrenched symbolic functions of the child in ways that previous cinematic models of monstrous childhood – in particular possessed and evil children – do not. Thus, I suggest that the transnational assemblage of child-centred horror films released around the millennial turn are a symptom of broader conceptual shift. These films signal a burgeoning awareness of the child's overdetermined function within narratives of identity and temporal continuity that serve the needs of the adult's present. Furthermore, they also start to point towards an understanding that, in a postmodern context in which the very status of such symbolic scaffolding is breaking apart, modernist investment in the child can no longer function as it once did, thus anxiously heralding new, more empowered visions of childhood.

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