

## Assembling Ghostly Voices: Music, Temporality, and Memory in *The Conjuring* (2013) Rachel May Golden

George Lipsitz has commented upon a variety of complexities at work in the dialogues among cultural forms and historical memory. Among his observations, he notes that American cultural expressions, “speak to both residual memories of the past and emergent hopes for the future... [employing] collective popular memory and the reworking of tradition.”<sup>1</sup> This notion is apt for films revolving around ghosts, whose narratives disrupt the present time with the “spectral temporality of haunting,” renegotiating boundaries between nowness and history.<sup>2</sup> Ghost stories and horror films typically invoke memories of the past and manifestations of the transgressive or immaterial. James Wan’s film *The Conjuring* (2013) intriguingly explores these themes, with striking use of music and sound, especially to realize audibly otherworldly elements of the film that are visually imperceptible or inexpressible.

The film is based on a purportedly true piece of New-England history--the haunting of the Perron family during the 1970s in their newly purchased home in Rhode Island, and the investigation of the case by real-life psychic researchers Ed (1926-2006) and Lorraine Warren (b. 1927). Their investigations uncover the spirit of a nineteenth-century witch Bathsheba, who has cursed all subsequent occupants of the house. Bathsheba gradually occupies the body of the mother, Carolyn, aiming to compel her to murder her own daughters.

Meanwhile, the soundtrack introduces numerous temporal markers that complicate this ostensibly 1970s real-life narrative. American 1950s and 60s pop tunes play diagetically as emblems of nostalgia, with Betsy Brye’s “Sleep Walk” (1959) addressing Carolyn’s spectral possession. Contemporary bands Dead Man’s Bones and Breaking Benjamin speak to the dark plot. Sounds of childhood--wind chimes, clapping, and a musical jack-in-the-box--audibly stand in for spirits. And, these elements variously interact with Joseph Bishara’s modernist, atmospheric score; further, Diamanda Galas’ avant-garde vocals sonically represent demonic incarnations.

These multivalent sonic experiences reinforce a temporal disorientation, or “suspension in time and space,” a phenomenon that Lloyd Whitesell has noted in soundtracks of other ghost films.<sup>3</sup> In considering the film’s exploration of horror and time, I place *The Conjuring* within a post-9/11 resurgence of haunted-house films. Further, I argue that, through disjunct sounds and musics, *The Conjuring* negotiates ghostly layers of temporal meaning, sounding out fragmented memories and reassembled experiences, as the film interrogates past and present, living, and dead.

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<sup>1</sup> George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 16.

<sup>2</sup> Bliss Cua Lim, “Spectral Times: The Ghost Film As Historical Allegory,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 9, no. 2 (2001), 288.

<sup>3</sup> Lloyd Whitesell, “Quieting the Ghosts in *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others*,” in *Music in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear*, ed. Neil Lerner (New York: Routledge, 2010), 219.

## Ghosts and Post-9/11 Horrors

Movies of ghosts often emphasize the disjunctions between differing experiences of time. Media scholar Bliss Cua Lim writes, “ghost narratives productively explore the dissonance between modernity’s disenchanted time and the spectral temporality of haunting in which the presumed boundaries between past, present, and future are shown to be shockingly permeable”<sup>4</sup>

This kind of temporal rupture is particularly emblematic of, and in keeping with the experience of, post-9/11 culture of the United States. John Hall argues that the events of 9/11 altered our experiences of time and common views of history;<sup>5</sup> it challenged a linear view of time by introducing an apocalyptic moment of rupture; and, on the other hand, it obviated a “postmodern fragment[ed]” view of time, by demonstrating that seemingly unconnected events were by definition globally interconnected.<sup>6</sup> Hall thus maintains that “the recognition of “multiple temporalities” helps us understand that modernity is “a hybrid composition of social activities within and across multiple fields of temporality.”<sup>7</sup>

Lipsitz applies similar ideas to American popular culture and music more broadly, in noting disjunctions in time that tie to musical relationships, memories, and re-inventions. While Lipsitz was writing before 9/11 with his text *Time Passages*, his ideas have proven newly salient in post-9/11 experiences and ideologies, in a time of additional ruptures, echoes, and losses. Further, his ideas clearly link with many of the premises of horror films focused on ghosts and haunted houses, as they negotiate past lives with present ones, ideals with realities, living and dead.

## History, Temporality, and Haunting

*The Conjuring* engages a number of histories, temporalities, and hauntings in creating its sense of horror, reflected in the plot, setting, and characters of the film. First the film self-consciously invokes history, making the claim to be based on a true story within the opening text scroll. It draws from a real life paranormal incident, known as the Harrisville Haunting or the Perron Family Haunting. The film itself reportedly had been in development for twenty years before seeing realization. The initial idea originated when the real Ed Warren played a tape of this case from his files for the producer Tony DeRosa-Grund.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, the real life Andrea Perron began writing a trilogy of books based on her own memories.<sup>9</sup> The supposed truth of the film is reinforced by the film’s closing credits, where the names of the cast members are paired with black and white photos of the real people on whom their characters are based.

As many films meant to be based on fact, *The Conjuring* negotiates various temporalities and truths. Mimicking real history, the Perron film family consists of Carolyn and Richard, and their five daughters--Andrea, Nancy, Christine, Cynthia and April. The family moves from New

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<sup>4</sup> Lim, “Spectral Times,” 288.

<sup>5</sup> John Hall, *Apocalypse: From Antiquity to the Empire of Modernity* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009) 208.

<sup>6</sup> Hall, *Apocalypse*, 219.

<sup>7</sup> Hall, *Apocalypse*, 219.

<sup>8</sup> Jon O’Brien, “Fifteen Things You Didn’t Know About *The Conjuring*,” *Screen Rant*, July 5, 2016, <https://screenrant.com/the-conjuring-things-you-didnt-know-trivia-facts/>

<sup>9</sup> Andrea Perron, *House of Darkness, House of Light: A True Story*, 3 vols. (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2011-2014).

Jersey to Rhode Island into a large farmhouse in the country, but soon find themselves terrorized by invisible spirits. They seek the help of Ed and Lorraine Warren, characters based on the real-life, paranormal investigators of the same names. In fact, the real Lorraine Warren consulted on the film and appears in a brief cameo.<sup>10</sup> The movie unfolds in alternation between the perspective of the Perrons and that of the Warrens. In interweaving real life events from several perspectives, the film thus displays a variety of memories. Addressing docudramas, but similarly of note here, Lipkin writes, “as docudramas perform the past, they offer us a performance of memory. Through these performances the memories of others become ours.”<sup>11</sup> Here the film is based on conflation of presumed memories and a variety imaginings.

The main plot of the movie takes place in 1971. The shooting of the film is meant to evoke this era, with long takes and frequent, disjunctive camera movements; Bilge Ebiri writes, the camera doesn’t just follow, it *stalks*. It peers, pursues, intrudes, and it never seems to let up. It starts to follow a young girl and her mother through their new house, then cuts to an ominous zoom toward another sister, then cuts to a shot that cranes up to reveal the house from outside. The family and their house--the “victims”--seem to be always in the center of the frame. Like the demons that will soon pursue these characters, the camera doesn’t let go.<sup>12</sup>

The film also variously references 1973’s *The Exorcist*, as seen in the film’s climax (discussed further below). Because the Perron’s home is a 19<sup>th</sup>-century farmhouse, many aspects of the house--its heating, furnishings, and size--evoke an earlier time than the 1971; as a result the setting often seems to reside outside of a single, specific temporality. And, while Wan made his reputation on torture porn style horror films like *Saw* (2004), this film, like Wan’s *Insidious* (2010), is substantially less violent. Indeed, he made every attempt to secure a PG-13 rating for *The Conjuring*, although ultimately it ended up rated R, for its nebulously defined “terror” (despite no nudity, profanity, or sex).<sup>13</sup> Overall, it seeks to evoke a more old-fashioned style of movie.

Likewise, the film plays on several frequent, disjunctive aspects within the plot. As the Perron family settles in to their home they notice minor oddities; the house is inexplicably cold, and occasionally, unexpectedly emits odd smells. Moreover, the home’s clocks regularly stop at 3:07 am, later revealed as a sort of witching hour. The mother Carolyn experiences inexplicable bruising, at first mild, but increasingly more serious later. The family accidentally discover a hidden, boarded-off cellar, which, once opened, proves inhospitable to the family with its creepy old furnishings, cobwebs, noises, and cold. Eventually, the daughter Nancy regresses into her earlier habit of sleepwalking, which she had previously overcome. Meanwhile, April develops a relationship with an apparently imaginary friend Rory. The children, and sometimes Carolyn,

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<sup>10</sup> O’Brien, “Fifteen Things You Didn’t Know.”

<sup>11</sup> Steven N. Lipkin, *Docudrama Performs the Past: Arenas of Argument in Films Based on True Stories* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Bilge Ebiri, “*The Conjuring* Makes Screams the Old-Fashioned Way — It Earns Them,” *Vulture*, July 18, 2013, <https://www.vulture.com/2013/07/movie-review-the-conjuring.html>

<sup>13</sup> Ian Buckwalter, “Did *The Conjuring* Really Deserve an ‘R’ Rating Just for Being Scary?” *The Atlantic* Jul 22, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/07/did-em-the-conjuring-em-really-deserve-an-r-rating-just-for-being-scary/277965/>

occupy themselves with hide-and-seek style game called “hide and clap,” in which the hiders indicate their locations to the blindfolded seeker only through occasional claps. When they do so, the ghosts find opportunities to trick the blindfolded seeker by offering their own claps from varying, surprising directions.

Such disconcerting elements of the plot increase, above all for the female characters. As the ghosts become more aggressive, conditions for the family deteriorate. Ghosts and demonic spirits increasingly attack the family members, even manifesting physically in their terrifying forms--knocking down objects, slamming doors, shutting off heat and lights, and tugging on one of the girl’s feet. But, more ominously, they possess Carolyn, breaking down her body with bruises, keeping her awake late into the night, infiltrating her psyche, and causing her to experience escalating fear and confusion. Females appear to be the most susceptible to these ghosts, who accordingly attack primarily when Roger is away.

Eventually the investigators Ed and Lorraine reveal to the family the many troubling temporalities divulged by the house’s apparitions. Several interrelated spirits from various eras haunt the house and have attached themselves to the family. Lorraine, who is clairvoyant, particularly focusses on Bathsheba Sherman (a real historical person, but with no documented ties to witchcraft).<sup>14</sup> Lorraine identifies Bathsheba as local resident descended from Mary Town Easte, a woman executed for witchcraft in the Salem Trials in 1692. She further reports that in 1863, Bathsheba married, had a child, and promptly sacrificed him to the Devil. Immediately thereafter, she professed her love for Satan, cursed any future holders of her land, and hanged herself from a tree (at 3:07 am); the tree still stands in the Perron’s yard and Lorraine. Generations of subsequent families indeed found themselves haunted by the witch, especially mothers, who, like the demonic Bathsheba herself, murdered their own children while possessed by her.

Lorraine’s ability to discern these demons reinforces her unique role as a woman clairvoyant. As a mother herself, she is particularly in tune with the ailments of women and their children. Moreover, with her extrasensory sight, she can view past entities emerging in the present moment, conflating temporalities. In one visually iconic scene from the film, past and present are overlaid, when Lorraine (and the film viewer too) witnesses the hanged body of Bathsheba swinging from a large branch, while Ed stands under an ancient tree in the Perron’s yard.

A crisis point is reached when Carolyn captures two of her daughters and tries to kill them. The Warrens have petitioned the Catholic church for an exorcism, but the request proceeds slowly. Ed Warren intervenes; an experienced demonologist he performs the exorcism himself, as Bathsheba takes over Carolyn’s body and soul, compelling her to commit murder. For the characters and the viewer, Bathsheba finally takes human form. The resulting physical erasure of Caroline represents a moment of terror, one that “evoke[s] at the same time the radical ‘loss of presence’ that haunts all human beings (the threat of demonic possession) and an irretrievable,

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<sup>14</sup> See John W. Morehead, “Perron, Roger and Carolyn,” in *Spirit Possession around the World: Possession, Communion, and Demon Expulsion across Cultures*, ed. Joseph P. Laycock (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2015), 285.

but also unconvincing, way of coping with that loss (the exorcism).”<sup>15</sup> During this climactic moment of the film, Carolyn/Bathsheba sits tied to chair and covered by sheet, subject to the tortures of exorcism. But Ed and Lorraine manage to save the family, as Ed completes the impromptu exorcism, replete with holy water and Latin liturgy. Caroline is restored; the family is safe. Time begins to move forward more smoothly, lodged safely in the present rather than the past.

### **Sounds and Songs**

The diverse sounds of the movie variously underscore the temporalities expressed within the film. Significantly, the use of childhood sounds are quite prominent, underscoring the discrepancy between the rationality of adulthood on the one hand, and youth on the other, with its imagination, playfulness, and possibility. Such childhood sounds define the activities of the Perron daughters. These include their singing of the “John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt” jingle, usage of the music box, attention paid to a favorite wind chime that tinkles in the backyard, and claps of the girls’ games. In part, these transfigure presumably innocent sounds into re-contextualized ones, ones that allow dead children of earlier eras to speak in the present, even without voices. This prominence of children’s sounds carries suggestive implications for memory, and their employment here dialogues well with Stan Link’s examination of children’s sounds in horror films like *The Exorcist*, *The Omen* (1976), and *The Others* (2001). He writes, “children in horror become a way of hearing other tales. Musically ‘childhood’ has its own story to tell...about the world outside of their world, voicing things innocence cannot know.”<sup>16</sup>

As mentioned above, hand clapping, notably the game of hide-and-clap, leads to moments of terror for the Perron family, including their discovery the frightening cellar; ghosts aurally trick the family members by impersonating with their claps the live Perron children. Clapping games are a common and cross-cultural domain of children’s expression, where children can experiment with movement, language, and sound.<sup>17</sup> Here, in the “hands” of ghosts they become oppressive but uniquely communicative. They are arresting, directional, and emerge at calculated moments. And indeed many of the ghosts are children who were killed by their mothers, women who occupied the house and became possessed by Bathsheba, subject to her century-old curse. These children, with their lives cut short unnaturally (through infanticide), speak through these games, much as live children do; thus dead children play with the expectations of the living.

The boy ghost Rory appears through combination of visual and aural cues; his image is lodged inside an old metal, circus-themed music box with a mirror and popup clown, operated by a brass key. He emerges (sometimes) in the mirror when the tune completes its cycle. The simple, child-like melody takes place within an E-flat-major scale and is typified primarily by a

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<sup>15</sup> Armando Maggi, “Christian Demonology in Contemporary American Popular Culture,” *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (2014), 778.

<sup>16</sup> Stan Link, “The Monster and the Music Box: Children and the Soundtrack of Horror,” in *Music in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear*, ed. Neil Lerner (New York: Routledge, 2010), 53. 38-54.

<sup>17</sup> See for example, Elizabeth Grugeon, “Girls’ Playground Language and Lore: What Sorts of Texts are These?” in *Where Texts and Children Meet*, ed. Eve Bearne and Victor Watson (London: Routledge, 2000), 98-112.

descending third motive (g-f-e<flat>) and an ascending fourth motive (b<flat>, g, c); the melody unfolds haltingly from the box; its timbre sounds jangly and metallic, controlled by a clockwork mechanism. The tune also appears in other movies of the *Conjuring* franchise (notably featured in the prequel *Annabelle*, dir. James Wan, 2014), drawing connections across other films in other temporalities.

Rory only appears, to some (to April, and Lorraine, but not to Caroline); he can be glimpsed once the music box plays, then stops, as the user looks into the mirror. In this way, Rory suggests an intersection with the “reflection” of the user’s self. This notion is reinforced at the close of the film when the music box is turned upon the film viewer; as we hear the music box theme one more time, we are asked to look into the mirror ourselves. As Colin Davis poses of the use of mirrors in *The Others*, “If the mirror points straight at us, and we do not see ourselves, where are we? Do we exist? The whole film revolves around the questions of what is real and what is not, who is dead and who is alive...Perhaps it is we who are the ghosts.”<sup>18</sup> *The Conjuring* poses a similar question when it confronts the user with the mirror of the music box, asking April, Caroline, and Lorraine to view themselves, and--at the end of the film--asking us to do the same. The tune comes to represent more than Rory’s manifestation, but also our own actuality--our materiality and recognizability.

Much of the popular music of the film thematically reinforces the narrative. This collection includes music that, temporally, would be retrospective or nostalgic for the characters, in the case of the mid-twentieth century songs, or that would be retrospective for the 2013 viewer in the case of the later songs. Among the earlier songs, we hear 1968’s “Time for the Season” by the Zombies, and “Sleep Walk” (1959), performed by Betsy Brye (which I discuss further below). Also employed are tracks of the early 2000s with themes pertaining to haunting, namely “In the Room Where You Sleep” (2008) by Dead Man’s Bones (the rock duo featuring Ryan Gosling and Zach Shields, purportedly inspired by their love of haunted houses and ghosts), and “So Cold” (2004) by Breaking Benjamin. No single musical aesthetic or temporal association emerges from these tunes, which range in style and era. But all seem backward-looking in their given context; further, they textually evoke the supernatural and reference the past in doing so.

In addition, composer Joseph Bishara provided the film’s avant-garde score. Like other aspects of this film, Bishara’s music proves ominous and disorienting, appropriately so, as Bishara identifies as a “composer and music producer of a darker flavor.”<sup>19</sup> Bishara had worked on a number of horror films, including Wan’s *Insidious* (2010), and went on to score other films of the *Insidious* and *Conjuring* franchises. Known for his unique style, Bishara favors dissonant sound clusters and heavy use of strings and electronic sounds, blurring avant-garde western art idioms with popular ones typical of noise and gothic rock bands. Speaking of his interest in scoring for horror films, the composer said in interview: “The realm of the supernatural has a particular flavor that speaks of the unknown, of entities and energies from places apart from or perhaps parallel to what we consider to be waking consciousness. Musically that can be filtered

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<sup>18</sup> Colin Davis, “The Skeptical Ghost: Alejandra Amenàbar’s *The Others* and the Return of the Dead,” in *Popular Ghosts: The Haunted Places of Everyday Culture*, ed. Esther Peeren and María del Pilar Blanco (London and New York : Continuum, 2010), 72. p. 64-75.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Bishara, official website, “About,” <https://www.jbishara.com/>

any number of ways, and as always comes down to looking into the particular world being opened up.”<sup>20</sup> Intriguingly, Bishara also appears on-screen as the (female) witch Bathsheba, in a manner that makes visible some of the implications of his score. He commented on the experience of acting and composing for the same film as an interrelated effort: “It kind of combines for me in my head and in my body with the motions of the characters. It grows organically..., motion will sometimes trigger a note array or rhythmic pattern or vice versa...It’s very interesting to be standing on a set, literally in a scene and hearing it as it’s happening.”<sup>21</sup> In some ways his score thus interacts with his own sonic experience of being within the film, simultaneously as a character and as a composer. Finally, as the ghosts increasingly establish themselves onscreen to the film viewer, the dynamic vocal improvisations and contributions of performance artist-musician Diamanda Galas infiltrate the score. In this way Galas’ vocality-- which is especially associated with pain, plague, and catharsis-- animates and manifests the visual incarnation of the demons in the plot.<sup>22</sup>

These elements of the score become especially prominent during Carolyn’s exorcism. The exorcism scene certainly resonates with the climax of 1973’s *The Exorcism*, but it also invokes post-9/11 fears. Cultural historian Armando Maggi connects this scene visually to pictures of the hooded man being tortured at Abu Ghraib.<sup>23</sup> Carolyn’s exorcism, Maggi contends, recalls America’s troubling history of abuse, beginning with women during the seventeenth-century Salem witch trials and spanning through the torture of Muslim prisoners during the Iraq War.<sup>24</sup> Maggi further notes how this scene conflates elements of past and present temporalities in ways that are particularly painful. Speaking of the possessed Carolyn, he writes, “The image of the woman in pain conjures up the iconic picture of the tragic Iraq War, which takes us back to 9/11... The demonic possession, however, is itself presented as the result of a historical event that took place a century before...The entire span of American history (from its colonial beginnings to 9/11 and its aftermath) becomes involved in the dialogue between the fictional exorcism of Carolyn in *The Conjuring* and the true abuse of a Muslim man in Iraq.”<sup>25</sup> In this distressing moment, filled with the echoes of numerous interconnected histories of American violence, multiple timeframes coalesce in the image of Carolyn’s tortured body, and in the often harrowing, dissonant sounds that accompany the scene.

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<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Barkin, “Interview: Composer Joseph Bishara on Scoring the *Insidious* Franchise, Working With John Carpenter, and His Favorite Horror Films of 2017,” *Dread Central*, January 10, 2018, <http://www.dreadcentral.com/news/264200/interview-composer-joseph-bishara-scoring-insidious-franchise-working-john-carpenter-favorite-horror-films-2017/>

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Schweiger, “Interview with Joseph Bishara,” *Film Music Magazine*, September 10, 2013, <http://www.filmmusicmag.com/?p=11755>

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Britta B. Wheeler, “The Performance of Distance and the Art of Catharsis: Performance Art, Artists, and Audience Response,” *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 27, no. 1 (1997): 37-49; Rebecca A. Pope and Susan J. Leonardi, “Divas and Disease, Mourning and Militancy: Diamanda Galas’s Operatic *Plague Mass*,” in *The Work of Opera: Genre, Nationhood, and Sexual Difference*, ed. Richard Dellamora and Daniel Fischlin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 315-34.

<sup>23</sup> Maggi, “Christian Demonology,” 783.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 785.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 785.

## Sleepwalking

Betsy Brye's "Sleep Walk," of 1959, underscores an affecting moment of the film, one that underlines the importance of popular song as overlapped with collective memory. About 35 minutes into the film, "Sleep Walk" plays. The song carries several levels of reference. It began as a collaboration of the Brooklyn-based brothers Johnny and Santo Farina, as an instrumental, characterized by its use of solo steel guitar. The instrumentation was significant in that it carried familial meanings; the Santos' father had encountered the sounds of the instrument while working overseas as a serviceman, and in turn encouraged his sons to learn it.<sup>26</sup> The immensely successful "Sleep Walk" carried its distinctive sound as a result, one described as "haunting" and original for the time.<sup>27</sup> Carrying a sense of history, it was the last number one instrumental of the 1950s.<sup>28</sup> The song that plays in the film is the also-popular 1959 Betsy Brye version, which transformed the song into a vocal vehicle for the new talent, adding lyrics by Don Wolf and orchestration.<sup>29</sup>

The pertinent scene, entitled "Caroline reluctantly plays hide and clap," opens upon the Perron home. With Roger out on the road, and Carolyn again alone in the house with the girls, we see her taking iron supplements, the remedy a doctor has prescribed for her inexplicable bruising, a continued reflection of her vulnerability and increasing possession by ghosts. At her medicine cabinet in the bathroom, she examines herself and her bruises in the mirror. This mirror image reiterates the film's *topos* of self-recognition, and its lack, the theme explored too through the use of the music-box mirror. The lyrics of course speak to her situation, "the night, fills my lonely place... it drives me insane. Sleep walk, every night, I just sleep walk." The theme comments too on Nancy's recently re-aggravated affliction as she had started sleepwalking again in the house. Carolyn folds laundry while listening to the song, once again viewing herself in yet another mirror, this one from the wardrobe. We surely are meant to understand that Carolyn fails to recognize herself; she is in effect asleep, sleepwalking while doing routine chores like taking pills and doing laundry, all the while failing to recognize the changes in herself and her home for what they are.

The song features lush strings, with sliding, fluttering ascents that re-invent the Farina brothers' original sliding steel guitar lines. These orchestral sounds accompany Brye's slowly moving, smooth vocals. This calm, if lovelorn, balladry, sounds odd against the stark, ominous setting of the Perron's house. The song is rich in sentimental nostalgia, evoking some of the characteristic ambience of the 1950s. As Carolyn steps away from the medicine cupboard and toward the bed, we realize that the music is directional, playing diagetically inside the movie. Unexpectedly Carolyn unexpectedly hears a brief giggle, which she takes it be one of her daughters, awake instead of asleep in bed. At the sound, she turns to switch off what appears to be a 1950s AM tube radio. As the music stops, she hears another clap. She cautiously checks on her children;

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<sup>26</sup> "Santo and Johnny," in *Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, ed. Colin Larkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), <http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/view/10.1093/acref/9780195313734.001.0001/acref-9780195313734-e-24781>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Johnny Farina, Santo and Johnny, <http://santoandjohnny.com/Bio.php>

<sup>29</sup> Numerous additional covers followed, including one by the Supremes; a list is provided as "Sleep Walk," <https://secondhandsongs.com/work/137098/all>

seeing them all asleep, she finds herself chasing the ghost of another child from a time past. The child-ghost runs, smashing pictures, clattering glass, causing doors to creak, laughing, and clapping. Eventually, the ghost pulls down and breaks the hanging portraits of Carolyn's daughters, asserting its own self in a way that begins to erase the image of their very presence. The ghost substitutes their images with its own sounds of childhood harnessed toward destruction. And it proves powerful in doing so, exercising its substance sonically, even without a visible body. Meanwhile, the clock chimes 3 am.

The use of Brye's song, and the radio on which it plays, creates another example of disjunct temporalities. Both seem to be over a decade older than the time to which Carolyn belongs, and they evoke a lost era of sentimentality. We may understand, again, that the sounds of the house are pulling Carolyn backwards in time, toward the eras that belong to the house's past inhabitants, and ultimately toward the era of Bathsheba. This trajectory serves to undo Carolyn, and to cause her to lose her fragile identity. As chaotic sounds replace musical song, as time coalesces, spatial parameters shift too; the clapping, noisy ghost pulls Carolyn from the upper floors of the house downward, eventually into the cellar, where she finds herself trapped. Even the sentimental pop song of bygone times fades away in favor of the tricky commotions of dead children. Sounding out more loudly than the living, these children increasingly fracture the mother of the Perron house.

### **Conclusion**

Writing in 1990, Lipsitz observed, "popular culture... has been one of the main vehicles for the expression of loss and the projection of hopes for reconnection to the past."<sup>30</sup> More recently, in the post-9/11 United States, we are confronted with different sorts of crises of memory, ones that rearticulate the boundaries among past, present, and future. Horror films prove an important site for negotiating these temporalities and our experiences of them.

*The Conjuring* demonstrates numerous aspects of disruption and remembrance. It folds together several layers of history, merging true accounts with realms of the fantastic. The film conflates generational accounts from seventeenth-century Salem to nineteenth-century Rhode Island into the 1970s. The music of the soundtrack complicates these temporal signposts, invoking 1950s popular culture, early-twenty-first century alt rock, and contemporary avant-garde sounds and voices. While eschewing explicit visual violence, the film--in its use of sounds, symbols, and histories--articulates recollections of our own violent past. It also pits the presumed rationality of adulthood against the unpredictability of childhood and children, particularly through the youthful sounds of play. Such sounds strike fear in the Perrons, while also proving revealing, leading the family to recognize their own dangerous environment.

Sound becomes its own substance in the absence of vital, autonomous. Ghostly entities manifest themselves sonically, clearly, and often menacingly. The film's noisy, assertive ghosts along with the eclectic scoring and soundtrack variously disorient us temporally. But they also suggest for us new memories, newly contextualized, in times of continued anxiety and reckoning.

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<sup>30</sup> Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, 12.

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