Cinematic Ghosts: Haunting and Spectrality from Silent Cinema to the Digital Era. **Edited by Murray Leeder. Bloomsbury Academic, 2015 (307 pages).**

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Murray Leeder's exciting new book sits comfortably alongside *The Haunted Screen: Ghosts in Literature & Film* (Kovacs), *Ghost Images: Cinema of the Afterlife* (Ruffles), *Dark Places: The Haunted House in Film* (Curtis), *Popular Ghosts: The Haunted Spaces of Everyday Culture* (Blanco and Peeren), *The Spectralities Reader: Ghost and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* (Blanco and Peeren), *The Ghostly and the Ghosted in Literature and Film: Spectral Identities* (Kröger and Anderson), and *The Spectral Metaphor: Living Ghosts and the Agency of Invisibility* (Peeren) amongst others. Within his Introduction Leeder claims that "[g]hosts have been with cinema since its first days" (4), that "cinematic double exposures, [were] the first conventional strategy for displaying ghosts on screen" (5), and that "[c]inema does not need to depict ghosts to be ghostly and haunted" (3). However, despite the above-listed texts and his own reference list (9–10), Leeder somewhat surprisingly goes on to claim that "this volume marks the first collection of essays specifically about cinematic ghosts" (9), and that the "principal focus here is on films featuring 'non-figurative ghosts'—that is, ghosts supposed, at least diegetically, to be 'real'— in contrast to 'figurative ghosts'" (10). In what follows, his collection of fifteen essays is divided across three main parts chronologically examining the phenomenon.

Part One of the book is devoted to the ghosts of precinema and silent cinema. In Chapter One, "Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny", Tom Gunning links "Freud's uncanny, the hope to use modern technology to overcoming [*sic*] death or contact the afterlife, and the technologies and practices that led to cinema" (10). Gunning's principal topics are the use of photographs to document the presence of spirits, ectoplasmic manifestations, and the intersection of spiritualism with photography. He also includes a brief look at the short film *The Spiritualist Photographer* (*Le portrait spiritual*, Georges Méliès, 1903), but merely to demonstrate its trick-making technical virtuosity rather than to inspire awe at a profound spiritual mystery.

Murray Leeder continues to look beyond cinema in Chapter Two, "Visualizing the Phantoms of the Imagination: Projecting the Haunted Minds of Modernity", via the theme of uncanniness in protocinematic media within Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 1859 novella "The Haunted and the Haunters; or, The House and the Brain", the technique of sympsychography (a.k.a. thoughtography—mental projections onto undeveloped film stock) with the accompanying September 1896 *Popular Science Monthly* article titled: "The

Sympsychograph: A Lesson in Impressionist Physics" by David Starr Jordan, and the popular song "If You Could Read My Mind" by Gordon Lightfoot, before recounting the ghost-and-hypnotism film, *Stir of Echoes* (David Koepp, 1999). This film invites the audience to share the gaze of the mind's eye when a party hypnotism trick taps into the psycho-spiritual POV of a murdered girl, Samantha, who haunts both the house and the subject's mind long after the party is over. The film demonstrates "the triadic relationship between the mind, the supernatural, and projected light" (56). Leeder's examination of these diverse texts highlights the strength of the mind and the key role it plays in relation to ghosts.

Chapter Three, "Specters of the Mind: Ghosts, Illusion, and Exposure in Paul Leni's *The Cat and the Canary*", begins the more solid cinematic focus of the collection, with Simone Natale concentrating on haunted house movies wherein "the ghost, is ultimately refused and relegated to the realm of human imagination and trickery … a ghost story without believing in ghosts" (59), which contradicts Leeder's "ghosts supposed … to be 'real'" (10) claim. Natale explores the cultural history of spiritualism and various beliefs in ghosts to set the scene for her analysis of *The Cat and the Canary* (Paul Leni, 1927). Somewhat surprisingly, she contradicts herself in this analysis by first claiming that "superimposition is one of the most effective visual effects employed" (67), and then later claiming: "throughout the movie ghosts are never visually represented as superimposed images. Ghosts are in fact not represented visually at all, but rather embedded in visual or aural events that can be explained rationally or exchanged for supernatural phenomena" (70). In short, the film was creatively framed so that a viewer can mentally choose to interpret the phenomenon as either affirming the ontological existence of ghosts or rejecting them (which the author favours) by offering naturalistic explanations and/or positing mind events, once again focusing on the connections between the mind and the (supposed) supernatural.

In Chapter Four, "Supernatural Speech: Silent Cinema's Stake in Representing the Impossible", Robert Alford continues the filmic analysis with an examination of *The Ten Commandments* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1923). It is supposedly a "two sections" (78) production, showing divine text "from the clouds styled like lightning" (78) within the Old Testament sequences, and in "a more subdued fashion in the New Testament sequences" (78), along with "Danny in the New Testament portion" (88). However, this cinematic tale is not binary storytelling, but an uneven triptych comprising of: (a) Moses in Ancient Egypt, (b) the McTavish family in modern-day (1920s) America, and (c) Jesus in Ancient Israel. Danny's (supposed) NT sequences exist only within modern-day America, alongside the non-ghost projections of his unhinged mind. DeMille's supernatural speech in the film is selections of sacred Scripture that were diegetically inserted, which Alford associates with the impossible and only indirectly links to ghosts. Nevertheless, the essay offers a valuable silent cinema example of creatively visualising the supernatural, a practice that severely declined following the arrival of cinema sound technology.

Part Two of the book moves forward in time to cover cinematic ghosts from the 1940s to the 1980s, along with new methods of representation provided by technological advancements. René Thoreau Bruckner makes an interesting case for the use of audio in Chapter Five, "Bad Sync: Spectral Sound and Retro-Effects in *Portrait of Jennie*". She argues that, in William Dieterle's 1948 film, Jennie's "face is mostly obscured by shade, [but] it becomes plainly apparent that the sound of Jennie's voice and the movement of her lips are grossly out of sync with each other" (98); supposedly a deliberate retro ghost effect, not a production defect. Though this "bad sync" glitch is brilliantly argued for by Bruckner, it is difficult to detect in the film and very hard to verify.

Chapter Six, "'Antique Chiller': Quality, Pretention, and History in the Critical Reception of *The Innocents* and *The Haunting*", takes a turn to look at how the use of effects to suggest spectrality has been received. Mark Jancovich argues that *The Innocents* (Jack Clayton, 1961) and *The Haunting* (Robert Wise, 1963) "were able to eschew explicit monstrous figures and *suggest* the presence of spectral beings through evocation and allusion" (116; emphasis original). The films' 1960s reviewers judged this as "hackneyed and old-fashioned" (118), but nowadays it is read differently due to changing historical circumstances and recognition of the filmmaker's aspirations to quality. This essay offers an excellent insight into the mutability of film reviewing fashions.

In Chapter Seven, "Shadows of Shadows: The Undead in Ingmar Bergman's Cinema", the spectral becomes spiritual and psychological, linked with philosophical exploration and religion. Maurizio Cinquegrani argues that Bergman's corpus of cinema "offers the most prolific and complex exploration of spectrality in Swedish cinema … [in] his search for answers to questions about the afterlife, the silence of God, redemption, and nostalgia" (142). For example, within *Wild Strawberries* (*Smultronstället*, 1957) "his ghosts take the shape of long-lost loves, deceased parents, lovers and siblings, blurred memories, and unpayable debts" (132). However, Cinquegrani is not so much talking about Leeder's "real" ghosts but confounding the technical terminology by confusing spectral beings with phenomena more in line with nostalgic reminiscences.

On the other hand, Chapter Eight, "Locating the Specter in Dan Curtis's *Burnt Offerings*", looks at the creation of a "real" ghost through demented supernatural love. Dara Downey demonstrates how the haunted house in *Burnt Offerings* (Dan Curtis, 1976) is "ultimately revealed as a kind of demon lover" (144) wherein the protagonist, Marian, "is ultimately transformed into the living ghost haunting a mansion that she loves better than her husband and son" (145). This domesticated space turned a middle-class American woman into a patriarchal, domestic, and now malevolent, supernatural slave—"an active and sustaining component of the very entity that recruits women" (156). Unfortunately, the numerous other horror films and novels examined within this essay detract from the nominated film in order to explore interesting, but nonessential, asides, and a discussion of gender politics overshadows its ghost content. Alternatively, the author could have adjusted the essay title to better reflect its content and inform reader expectations.

Convivial, rather than destructive, ghosts are the focus of Chapter Nine, "The Bawdy Body in Two Comedy Ghost Films: *Topper* and *Beetlejuice*". Katherine A. Fowkes examines how "ghosts bring a refreshing liberation from narrow-mindedness, stuffiness, snobbishness, and a lack of engagement with life" (160) in a flouting-the-law fashion in these two films. Both *Topper* (Norman Z. McLeod, 1937) and *Beetlejuice* (Tim Burton, 1988) punctured many generic ghost conventions; most notably, the living are less "alive" in these films than the ghosts who "celebrate and promote an appreciation of physical, earthly joy" (175) via the antics of the dead. This positive psychosocial message is well suited within the more uplifting comedy genre than in the potentially depressing horror genre.

Part Three of the book moves on to the topic of millennial ghosts. In Chapter Ten, "'I See Dead People': Visualizing Ghosts in the American Horror Film before the Arrival of CGI", Steffen Hantke lauds *The Sixth Sense* (M. Night Shyamalan, 1999) for finding a surprising new way of exploring the key question inherent in all ghost films, namely: how do we know whether we have actually seen a ghost? Hantke goes on to question: how are spectators made to see dead people, and how do the cultural and technological tools used to

create these cinematic ghosts determine what they will actually look like? Many strategies for answering this exist, including "emphasizing exactly those gaps in the cinematic text that the classic Hollywood style is working so hard to conceal" (189). For Hantke, "so many horror films about ghosts are really films about the space they haunt" (184), which aligns with the movement from spiritual horror toward body horror that forces "real" ghosts to become marginal figures.

The figure of the ghost is central in Chapter Eleven, "Spectral Remainders and Transcultural Hauntings: (Re)iterations of the *Onryō* in Japanese Horror Cinema", which looks at its broader cultural usage. Jay McRoy examines the avenging spirit of the *Onryō* in Japanese folklore—typically a monster–female hybrid wearing funereal white attire, with long black hair and a pale visage with a staring expression, for example Sadako from *Ring* (*Ringu*, Hideo Nakata, 1998). These horrifying paranormal entities exist in the interstitial space between the realm of the living and the realm of the dead, and their stories "offer an avenue through which spectators may confront larger cultural and historical traumas" (201). As with the *Onryō*, the harder society tries to repress, oppress, or push away unwelcome experiences and memories (e.g., militarism, avarice, hubris), the more powerfully they will return to haunt the evader. McRoy's concluding advice: "we should exorcise them by allowing them to speak" (217) makes practical social sense akin to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

An exploration of cultural mythology relating to the ghostly figure is continued in Chapter Twelve, "*Painted Skin*: Romance with the Ghostly Femme Fatale in Contemporary Chinese Cinema". Li Zeng showcases "a triangular love relationship between a man … his wife and a fox-spirit—the mythological Chinese character of a fox that transforms into a woman" (220) in *Painted Skin* (*Hua Pi*, Gordan Chan, Andy Wing-Keung Chin, Danny Ko, 2008). This malicious-cum-amorous fox-spirit that feeds on human hearts falls in love with General Wang and transforms his wife into a demon. However, when Wang commits suicide, the fox-spirit sacrifices herself to revive both Wang and his wife. Ironically for Murray's collection, writer-director "Gordon Chan changed the ghost character into a fox-spirit" (222), which is not a ghost, but a spiritual entity. Regrettably, Zeng's frequent back-and-forth references to the classic story of the same name, found in the collection of supernatural stories *Liaozhai zhi yi* (*Strange Tales from Liaozhai*), and on which the film is based, undermine the value of the film, as does Zeng's overemphasised phallocentric ideology-cum-exploration of other Chinese ghost films for non-crucial comparisons.

In Chapter Thirteen, "'It's Not the House That's Haunted': Demons, Debt, and the Family in Peril Formula in Recent Horror Cinema", Bernice M. Murphy discusses *Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2007) along with three other high-profile haunted house movies: *Insidious* (James Wan, 2010), *Sinister* (Scott Derrickson, 2012), and *The Conjuring* (James Wan, 2013). Surprisingly, as her essay is included in Leeder's ghost film book, Murphy admits to the "preeminence of the demonic rather than the ghostly threat" (242) in these films, especially since each climaxes with the demonic possession of a protagonist. Murphy erroneously conflates demons with ghosts, and is possibly confused because of the "earnest use of clichéd signifiers of spookiness" (250) in these films. Also problematic is her tenuous and unsupported linking of a "sense of sheer *unfairness* running through these films … [with the] sheer unbridled greed of major financial institutions across the world" (251; emphasis original).

Chapter Fourteen, "Glitch Gothic", returns to notions of aesthetics as Marc Olivier examines some found-footage horror films, such as *Grave Encounters* (The Vicious Brothers, 2011), wherein "[v]isual glitches, or temporary disruptions to the flow of information such as unexpected pixilation, chromatic shifts, and other error-based distortions, now constitute essential tropes in the language of cinematic ghost stories" (253). These deliberately engineered interruptions in the fabric of virtuality (or digitality) are material forms of noise that have now become signifiers of spectrality (something we do not, or dare not, understand). They are the logical consequence and applied cousins of Bruckner's Bad Sync effect examined in Chapter Five and, as a new form of ghost, they will continue to invade our increasingly digital lives.

Links between ghostly figures and cultural memory are once again made in Chapter Fifteen, "Showing the Unknowable: *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*". Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano's essay examines Buddhist supernaturalism in the Thai film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (*Loong Boonmee raleuk chat*, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2010) wherein Boonmee's ghost wife and son return to help him on his path towards death. Following the logic of reincarnation with its notion of cyclical time, the audience accompanies Boonmee as he recounts his past lives and personal memories as a water buffalo, a princess, a catfish, a bug, a Monkey Ghost, and a soldier killing communists, all of which are distantly tied to Thai culture and history. Wada-Marciano errs when these past lives are treated as ghosts instead of separate *life* experiences, but the "real" family ghosts are treated with authentic intimacy and calmness congruent with Buddhism, if culturally at thematic odds with Western style ghost families who typically promote anxiety, fear or terror.

The collection concludes with Jeffrey Sconce's "Afterword: Haunted Viewers", in which he whimsically reminisces about the hot-rod teenpic, *Ghost of Dragstrip Hollow* (William Hole, 1959), another (supposed) ghost story with no "real" ghosts, engineered by an unemployed, attention-seeking actor. However, Sconce does make a useful terminological distinction between "poltergeists" and "hauntings". Poltergeists frequently erupt suddenly and violently (e.g., throwing and breaking things, generating paranormal ruckus) usually related to sexual and/or emotional conflict, whilst hauntings encompass more lingering and intermittent apparitions (e.g., creepy shadows, inexplicable footfall sounds, cold spots with associated bad vibes) usually triggered by distant emotional traumas attached to specific spaces. This afterword does nothing to assess the merits of the collection but exists merely as another (undeclared) chapter that stridently proclaims: "of all the dead media, the cinema is *particularly dead*" (292; emphasis original), which I suppose is one way to honour cinematic ghosts.

Production-wise, the book is of good quality, but could benefit from a detailed Filmography, a List of Figures, and the correction of a few annoying blemishes, notably, incorrect film titles, conflicting release dates, and the many mismatches between the Contents, Introduction and individual essay headings. However, there is much to interest readers and the book will (dare I say it) leave them in good spirits. It will certainly sensitise them to the historical and technological range, cultural influence (e.g., American, British, Chinese, Japanese, Swedish, Thai), and engaging pedagogic potential of ghost films. Despite Leeder's claim that his volume marks the first collection of essays specifically about cinematic ghosts (as reflected in the book title), with a focus on "real" ghosts, it dealt with so much more *not* related to cinema (e.g., spiritualism, sympsychography, reincarnation, the aesthetics of technological glitches). This undeniable fact should have been reflected in a

more encompassing book title and more accurate essay headings, which might have attracted additional readers. Nevertheless, the text is a thoughtful and entertaining addition to any film or religion studies collection, whether for personal or professional purposes, at undergraduate or postgraduate level. Hopefully, *Cinematic Ghosts* will whet the appetite of readers to delve deeper into this important supernatural subgenre under the religion-and-film umbrella. One looks forward to the editor's future works analysing other notable exemplars in the field.

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