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Mainstream Satanic Cinema in the Seventies: A Generational Crisis of Assimilation

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Abstract: A particularly fertile period for satanic presence can be found in mainstream Hollywood during the early to mid 1970s. Encouraged by the success of *Rosemary's Baby*, major studios produced *The Exorcist* and *The Omen* series, not to mention a flurry of independent productions across the decade. Neither before nor since this decade has satanic content in cinema achieved such widespread popularity, and so this particular moment ought to warrant deeper consideration. In general, these narratives appealed to countercultural notions of conspiracy, especially with respect to authority figures and/or the government. But at an even more subconscious level, these satanic films spoke to a pervading fear, at this particular time, of relinquishing a former sense of control over one's destiny. This article explores and elucidates the cultural conditions attributable for the emergence and popular embrace of these films in this particularly modernist cultural moment.

Keywords: Satan, satanic, witchcraft, witches, Hollywood, conspiracy, counterculture, countercultural, modernist, modernism.

In 2004, when Kelly J. Wyman published her article "The Devil We Already Know: Medieval Representations of a Powerless Satan in Modern American Cinema," she declared a review of literature on her topic as "nearly impossible," due to "little scholarly investigation into the subject of Satan in film."[1] She considers two then-recent monographs on the topic, Nikolas

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[1] Kelly J. Wyman, "The Devil We Already Know: Medieval Representations of a Powerless Satan in Modern American Cinema," *Journal of Religion & Film* 8, no. 3, October (2004): 1.

Schreck's *The Satanic Screen: An Illustrated Guide to the Devil in Cinema*[2] and Charles P. Mitchell's *The Devil on Screen: Feature Films Worldwide, 1913 through 2000*.[3] Although the latter of these certainly behaves more as a fan-oriented reference guide, akin to Marc Scott Zicree's *The Twilight Zone Companion*[4], her dismissal of the first book, at least, is hasty. According to Wyman, Schreck "does not attempt to make any connections between the films, nor does he discuss the philosophical or religious nature of the representations of Satan."[5] Such a claim is inaccurate. In fact, Schreck injects both reasonable insight and historical context into his attempted cultural trajectory of Satanic cinema from its inception among French silent films by Georges Méliès to its would-be culmination in Roman Polanski's 1999 film *The Ninth Gate*. For example, Schreck provides relevant examination of British occultist Aleister Crowley's infamy and how his legend is narrativized through so many male Satanic cult antagonists on screen through the decades. And Schreck notices important shifts in popular perceptions of Satan, for example, as "a cultured being who offered his adherents infinite knowledge" degenerating into "a one-dimensional cartoon representing adolescent nihilism."[6] At the same time, Schreck's colorful lineage of the "Satanic screen" is palpably biased against some of its most powerful exercises through his own dedication to the Luciferian "left hand path," a black magical tradition he admits is "almost entirely obscured beneath the detritus of popular notions of Satanism."[7] In other words, the question of however 'inauthentically' Satanism, per se, is depicted in these films may not be the most productive lens through which to evaluate them as a collective cultural phenomenon. Rather, as Schreck himself affirms, Satan has personified "whatever force was perceived by consensus consciousness as cosmic maleficence at the time."[8] That is, a more appropriate survey of

[2] Nikolas Schreck, *The Satanic Screen: An Illustrated Guide to the Devil in Cinema* (Creation Books, 2001).

[3] Charles P. Mitchell, *The Devil on Screen: Feature Films Worldwide, 1913 through 2000* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2002).

[4] Marc Scott Zicree, *The Twilight Zone Companion*, 2nd Edition (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 1992).

[5] Kelly J. Wyman, "The Devil We Already Know," 2.

[6] Nikolas, Schreck, *The Satanic Screen*, 217.

[7] Nikolas, Schreck, *The Satanic Screen*, 9.

[8] Nikolas, Schreck, *The Satanic Screen*, 6.

visual narrative invoking 'Satan,' 'the devil,' etc. as either a physical or metaphysical entity should refrain from questions of ideological authenticity, especially since such a designation has proven to be so chimerical in occidental culture.

Embarking from Schreck's acceptable delineation of Satanic cultural trajectory in cinema, I am particularly interested in the so-called "consensus consciousness" of the 1970s, although I prefer not to deem any cultural perception of "maleficence" in this span of years as necessarily "cosmic." Of course, unless one genuinely believes in the birth of Christ, decades, so designated, are arbitrary. Cultural events have, nevertheless, served to affirm a semblance of their integrity, and so we continue to subscribe to this pattern of historicization. Schreck, as well as more rigorously academic scholars publishing after him, have already reinforced the notion of 'the Seventies' as the apex of Satanic cinema, at least in terms of mainstream feature film production and including content produced even for television consumption. It might be more accurate to trace an equivalent period spanning from the release of *Rosemary's Baby* in 1968 to that of *Halloween* in 1978, when the serial killer replaced Satanic forces to some extent (or they merged). But placing a definitive end to this 'decade' of films with any one particular film is certainly not as plausible as commencing it with *Rosemary's Baby*, a film so obviously pivotal in establishing a demonic paradigm for subsequent releases. Rather, and this is one of my crucial purposes here, it may be more effective to consider narrative trends *beyond* the 'Satanic' context. I prefer to associate this categorical proliferation, along with its own range of subcategories, all (or mostly) within *modernist* tendencies of motion picture production serving more effectively to characterize 'the 1970s' as a cultural construct. Already since the dearth of academic attention Wyman noticed in 2004, Brad L. Duren has contextualized one of the major Hollywood Satanic entries, *The Omen* (1976), within "1970s America," so characterized by "national identity crisis"[9] accumulating through major cultural upheavals like the Vietnam War and President Nixon's Watergate scandal. While doing so facilitates a deeper understanding of this film, and

[9] Brad L. Duren, "Reckoning the Number of the Beast: Premillennial Dispensationalism, *The Omen* and 1970s America," in *Divine Horror*, eds. Cynthia J. Miller and A. Bowdoin Van Riper (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2017), 64.

Duren contributes more specifically in the religious context here, I believe it is critical to explore larger modernist trajectories from the 1960s and even extended into a larger postwar context of cinema culture beyond 'Satanic,' 'horror,' or other genre distinctions.

First, it is helpful to locate characteristically 'modernist' transformations in global cinema culture of the post-WWII era toward a re-evaluative and even pessimistic stance toward technologization, industrialization, corporatization, urbanization, and other manifestations of an overdeveloped, space-age society. Of course, cinematic harbingers of dystopian critique, as such, are easily located in German silent and eventually Expressionist cinema in pre- and post-WWI years, wherein legendary Faustian narratives explored in *The Student of Prague* (1913/26), *The Golem* (1915), and *Faust* (1926) correlate to and even anticipate the futuristic context of *Metropolis* (1926). This body of films collectively indicates a flawed and opportunistic human nature and the larger society implicitly emanating from empowered individuals. A 'contract with the devil,' wherever it may appear in these early films, is less a cautionary motif against black magic or occult metaphysical dealings, per se, than a handy and well-established allegorical device. That is, these films share a stake in social critique, mobilized by a larger cultural climate of concern and doubt, especially in the German aftermath of the First World War. Another aspect to these films' larger agenda, pronounced more readily through *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), is a symptomatic degree of psychological trauma, even to the degree of an entire society 'going insane.' In this film, the protagonist Francis (Friedrich Feher) recounts his experience with a malicious carnival showman Caligari (Werner Krauss) and his murderous sleepwalker Cesare (Conrad Veidt) deployed eventually to kill his friend Alan (Hans Heinrich von Twardowski) and make off with his love interest Jane (Lil Dagover). But such an account, affirmed through a maze of trapezoidal corridors, proves unreliable, since this character and his would-be fiancé turn out to be inmates of an asylum. This film's portrayal of an 'unreliable' society, wherein hidden, conspiratorial forces are at work against the common citizen should be understood as a key progenitor of the *paranoid* narrative mode in cinema. And when these conspiratorial forces are associated with occult practice, this is merely an aesthetic option among other options within this mode.

A metaphysical dimension is typically conferred upon these forces in the 'Satanic' case, although this approach is not at all essential to mobilizing the same critique suggested through paranoid films like *Caligari* wherein no such "cosmic" forces are at work. Regardless, these narratives portray sympathetic protagonists becoming victims of social forces beyond their control. And, accordingly, these characters' communities prove analogous to a collective mind disintegrating from within.

Figure 1. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*'s use of angular settings to imply its subjective, unreliable narrative anticipates the inclusion of dream sequences in subsequent paranoid films.

If the concerns implied through German Expressionism, as an artistic movement, seem merely local to 'German' or 'European' sociopolitical circumstances at the time, scholars of Satanic cinema can and should consider the immediate aftermath of the next world war, for it is here that conspiratorial narratives really pick up momentum, and well beyond occult contexts. If a larger societal decadence can be perceived as emanating from empowered characters like Faust, Dr. Caligari, or Fredersen (Alfred Abel) in *Metropolis*, the 'next phase' of this dystopian critique can be understood as such individuals accumulating followers in order to reinforce and maintain this power over others. Considered in a vacuum, American films involving Satanic covens could be traced from *The Black Cat* (1934), with Boris Karloff presiding over an intended human sacrifice in a remote Hungarian mansion, to *The Seventh Victim* (1943), with an underworld cult absorbing new members into its Manhattan ranks, and eventually to *Rosemary's Baby*. Although women are victims in each of these films, they are nonetheless very different releases in terms of their cults' allegorical function. On the surface, the 1930s film appears to be commenting directly on the evils of the previous world war. And yet personifications of opposing 'Russian' and 'Austro-Hungarian' factions pit Karloff against Bela Lugosi, or essentially 'Frankenstein's monster' against 'Count Dracula,' with two American honeymooners (David Manners and Julie Bishop) caught in between. The Satanic cult, appearing only briefly in the dramatic climax, is merely an accessory to further demonize not only Karloff's character but the entire 'European theater' here. And so this film would moreover suggest an American *isolationist* theme within the immediate climate of Nazi Germany's increasing ominousness. According to the recent Hollywood horror-castle hits it references, although modernized through its incorporation of Art Deco architecture, *The Black Cat* admonishes American audiences to 'keep out' of Europe. (Only a few years later, *Casablanca* would express an opposite theme through the following character dialogue: "My dear Rick, when will you realize that in the world today, isolationism is no longer a practical policy?")

Figure 2. Although retaining Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi in sinister roles, *The Black Cat* replaces the gothic horror-castle with more contemporary Art Deco architecture.

Although it is straightforward enough to align Satanic ritual with the atrocities of violent international conflict in the earlier film, *The Seventh Victim* incorporates its own Satanic cult for less accessible implications. Somewhat vaguely, psychological trauma, in the character of the protagonist's missing sister (Jean Brooks), is associated with 'evil,' in the form of a secret society of devil-worshippers. However, the film becomes relatively obscure precisely through a contradiction of portraying these folks as committed to "non-violence," on the one hand, while dedicated to 'evil over good' on the other. Thus, it is never clarified just what 'evil' is in such a context, save, perhaps, for their absolute insistence on maintaining their secrecy to the point of murdering those who would compromise it. And the fact that they attract a suicidal woman into their fold is not enough to imply they should all be deemed 'mad' necessarily, but only 'misguided' somehow—and away from ostensibly Christian values. But even aligning this film with tendencies of contemporary American *noir*, that is, films pursuing crime narratives within nocturnal urban settings to reflect the trauma of returning GI's, is not as accessible here, since the suicidal 'victim' is atypically female. Recent considerations of this quirky film like to find a theme of repressed lesbianism,

which is certainly available in the hairdresser character's implied attraction to the female protagonist (Kim Hunter), as well as her compromising loyalty to the protagonist's sister, who the rest of the cult insists must die. What must otherwise be interpreted as mere kindness and goodwill on her part is totally incompatible with her Satanic cohorts' stated dedication to 'evil.' In a very classical Hollywood turn, the film also eventually couples the protagonist with an 'appropriate' mate—her sister's former husband (Hugh Beaumont). And so, indeed, it would seem the film's larger interest is in portraying a female form of social aberration, or, rather, various 'manifestations' of women struggling to comply with the standards of 1940s American society. Besides the protagonist, her sister, and the Satanists, another implied social aberration in this narrative is the male "poet" character (Erford Gage), who by overcoming his lapse in productivity saves himself from association with the other deviants. Even the Satanic sister's ultimate suicide is condoned in this film in order to reinforce its conformist agenda. Men must produce, and women must become their steadfast wives, even if it means forfeiting a higher education, as the protagonist does ultimately. And Christian values may serve moreover to frame this societal configuration. Such a theme does not really adhere to postwar modernist critique, of course, and so, really, a wider net must be cast in order to understand the proliferation of Satanic content in the 1970s.

As I have suggested, an available 'through-line' between these two films, if they are to be treated as harbingers of the Satanic cinema to come, is their shared implication of 'conspiratorial' evil, per se. Even if 'evil' remains sufficiently abstract to be infinitely adaptable across so many manifestations of popular fear in mainstream cinema, the notion here that 'evil' individuals may congregate followers can be understood as paradigmatic. But such a means to allegorize what amounts to any form of collective paranoia in a culture extends well beyond imagining occult societies. Rather than proceeding from *The Seventh Victim*, for example, to the 'next' available Hollywood entry incorporating a Satanic cult, I would correlate this film moreover to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and other Cold War alien invasion films. Its portrayal of a typical American community as 'infiltrated' by alien entities whose influence transforms citizens into a mindless conformity of zombies ostensibly explores 1950s America's rampant fear of communist ideology, especially as demonized by Senator McCarthy. But it is moreover the protagonist's

experience of everyday, law-abiding citizens steadily ganging up on him that can and should be correlated to past and concurrent films incorporating Satanic cults. In other words, 'Satanic' congregation is really only one of many imagined forms of societal malignancy that, if taken to nightmarish extremes, become paranoid narratives of helplessness and the inability to resist the social force of accumulated influence, no matter from where or from whom that influence may have spawned. It is worthwhile to point out, in this cultural moment, that the optimistic ending with the escaping protagonist (Kevin McCarthy) finally able to convince outside authorities to prevent further spread of the invasion was tacked on at the insistence of studio producers, who felt the original ending was too bleak for American audiences. Eventually, however, such endings would become characteristic of modernist cynicism and critique in film, as in its 1978 remake, wherein the protagonist (Donald Sutherland) is himself eventually absorbed by apathetic masses. In the 1960s, the rising tendency toward social critique was even turned against Cold War paranoia, for example, in *The Twilight Zone* television episode "The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street" (1960), wherein suburban neighbors wax hostile toward each other in order to secure themselves from an impending alien attack never ultimately occurring. And, in certain cases, no premise of alien invasion was even necessary to target societal paranoia for its own sake, as in *The Chase* (1966), where an innocent man (Robert Redford) is persecuted and killed by a small town's unruly mob. By the time Hollywood cinema reaches the late 1960s, however, modernist critique of Cold War paranoia returned to the mode of paranoid narrative—coinciding with the rise of the American counterculture and its disillusion with the establishment of their parents' generation.

Beyond the sporadic harbingers of Satanic content in earlier decades, the 1960s should be understood as the most significant period of narrative influence from overseas, particularly in terms of British cinema and its own cultural legacy of occult folklore. But even the British emergence of these narratives in the Sixties should be understood more widely within postwar cultural fears of "maleficent" infiltration, from outside *and* within, such as in *Village of the Damned* (1960), wherein children possessed by strange powers begin appearing all over the globe. Among the Satanic cult entries, in particular, I notice a pattern of establishing a country/city dichotomy, wherein occult

practices appear to be construed as a 'legacy' of pagan ritual among medieval countryfolk. But, in a modern context, these pre-Christian beliefs persist among the landed gentry or residual British aristocracy, who can afford to maintain inherited estates in provincial hamlets, far from middle-class urban centers like London. Here, there is at least an implicit 'gothic' association between domestic affluence and pagan/Satanic ritual—with the countryside as their mutually indigenous habitat. A characteristic cultural progression of these British (or British-American) films could include, for example: *Night of the Demon* (1957), *Night of the Eagle* (1962), *Devils of Darkness* (1965), *Eye of the Devil* (1966), *The Devil Rides Out* (1968), *Curse of the Crimson Altar* (1968), *Blood on Satan's Claws* (1971), *Psychomania* (1973), and reach its apex with *The Wicker Man* (1973), wherein a pagan Scottish lord (Christopher Lee) rules over an entire island of nubile fertility ritualists. More importantly, these films often attempt to establish a conspiratorial link between a pagan/Satanic gentry and the youth generation. In other words, these films employ the gothic trappings of classical Hollywood horror in order to exploit middle-class fears of a sexually charged, recalcitrant youth culture, which had already been the focus of Kitchen Sink films across the 1950s. At the same time, it is arguable the British youth culture could identify with these films *themselves*, even if their portrayed peers were being absorbed into Satanic cults. But it should be understood that these 'mod-horror' films, as such, would never have appeared without the success of two pivotal Hammer Studio films, *The Blood of Dracula* (1957) and *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1958), together reviving the gothic narrative paradigm (with actor Christopher Lee at the helm) for new generations of movie-goers, and especially in America. It is really not so different from understanding 1934's *The Black Cat* as an attempt to cash in on the marriage of Poe's legacy to an implicit 'Count Dracula vs. Frankenstein's monster' configuration. This time, the English (or neighboring French) countryside could be exoticized as the 'Transylvania' for new American audiences, while also appealing to British popular audiences younger and older alike. Britain's own heritage of a 'pagan' countryside, where old estates and stone circles coexist, made the gothic trappings of more remote contexts in the previous century more immediate and palpable, akin to *The Black Cat*'s Art Deco 'castle' or *The Seventh Victim*'s Satanic society in New York.

Figure 3. The implied view from a window inside the Lord of Summerisle's grand manor in *The Wicker Man*, one of many films exploiting Britain's pagan heritage within a paranoid narrative.

In terms of anticipating *Rosemary's Baby* specifically, one should not fail to notice the British MGM film *Eye of the Devil*, appearing only two years previously and overlooked in America. It isn't as relevant to prove director Roman Polanski watched this film in preparation for adapting Ira Levin's novel for the screen. However, its producer Martin Ransohoff also produced Polanski's next film *The Fearless Vampire Killers* (1967). And on the set of this film, he met his future wife Sharon Tate, who had just had a prominent role in the previous film. Similar to the 1965 film *Devils of Darkness*, *Eye of the Devil* actually roots its occult conspiracy in the *French* countryside, where gothic chateaux are more readily to be found. This film's chateau, with its many hidden corridors, becomes the gothic Dakota building in the Upper Westside of Manhattan, straddling Central Park, as the 'epicenter' of Satanic conspiracy in *Rosemary's Baby*. Such a transference

also removes the traditional horror castle from the countryside and *urbanizes* it, closer to *The Seventh Victim*, at least in this respect, although subsequent American Satanic entries did not necessarily follow suit here. The narrative nevertheless concerns a Parisian woman (Deborah Kerr) whose husband (David Niven) must return to his family estate in Brittany to attend to the failing vineyards there. Despite his admonitions against it, she insists on arriving with their two small children, and then attempts to uncover the occult relationship between her husband and the rest of the village community. As a mode of modernist critique, the paranoid narrative should be understood as gratifying the experience of paranoia, or in other words, *negating* paranoia as such. In *Eye of the Devil*, the well-intending wife/mother protagonist unwittingly intrudes upon an occult-based society, in which the landowning family must periodically offer up its members for human sacrifice. Ultimately, she cannot prevent her husband from (willfully) being killed, and then her son (Robert Duncan), unbeknownst to her, is positioned as the next in line. This is very close to the narrative of *Rosemary's Baby* where the female protagonist's husband (John Cassavetes) is absorbed into a Satanic society, and her offspring is committed to their cause in turn. More specifically, both films narrate a similar process of investigation leading to an "all of them witches" discovery. The trusted local physician in both films also turns out to be complicit, although only the first film includes even a gendarme (Colin McKenzie). Both protagonists even experience a similarly surreal nightmare as a montage sequence of encroaching threat, whose inclusion introduces some degree of ambiguity in the narrative as potentially unreliable. Nevertheless, in the end, both films' Satanic covens appear to triumph in their agendas, with their protagonists merely capitulating to their inescapable dominance.

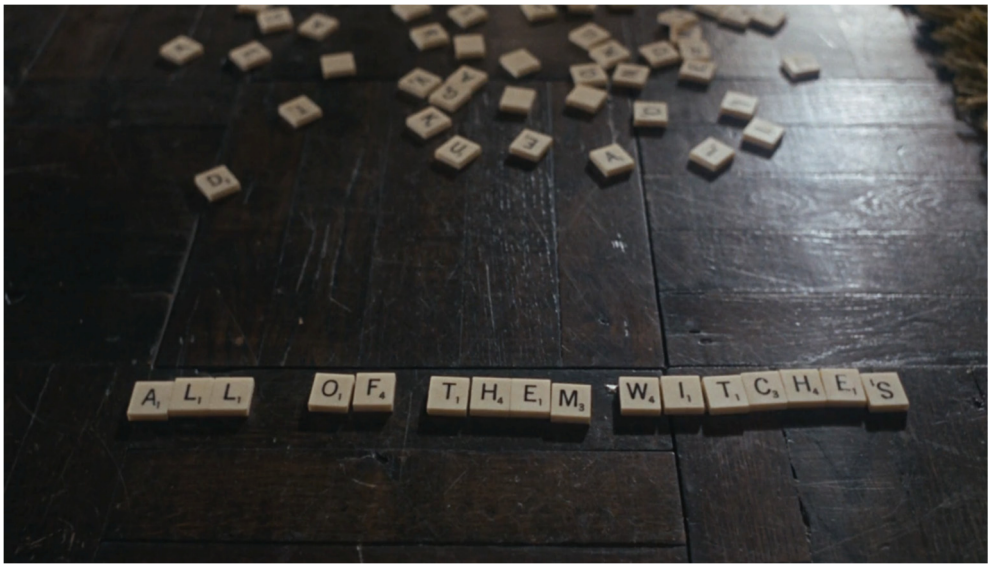

Figure 4. Ratiocination becomes indistinguishable from paranoia in *Rosemary's Baby* when the protagonist must 'decode' a book's title as an anagram for the leader of the Satanic coven.

In the ways *Eye of the Devil* would appear to export the British gothic narrative of Satanic conspiracy to America via *Rosemary's Baby*, it is through the latter film's key divergences that a larger modernist context for the spree of subsequent Hollywood films in the 1970s can be understood. For one, the New York *urbanization* of the gothic epicenter for Satanic ritual normalizes conspiratorial presence in everyday American life, rather than allowing it to remain exoticized within the 'pagan' British countryside or more distant European locales. In this adjusted configuration, by implication, the next-door neighbors themselves could be and are among the conspirators. Also, the British film comingles two sibling ambassadors (Sharon Tate and David Hemmings) of the ambivalently 'beautiful' or 'sinister' postwar generation with the older villagers together as coconspirators. On the other hand, *Rosemary's Baby* decidedly associates conspiratorial 'evil' with older generations. At one point in the film, Rosemary (Mia Farrow) even insists

on throwing a party whose guests should be "young," echoing the American counterculture's celebrated distrust of their parents' generation. The husband's Faustian pact in this film is also more palpable than a wealthy landowner sacrificing his life to restore the vineyards and the villagers' livelihood thereby. Instead, Rosemary's husband compromises his own wife in order to succeed as a Hollywood actor. This is also a metaphysical bargain, although the protagonist's delusional experience of fornicating with a humanoid Satan, or Goat of Mendes, encourages a more figurative interpretation of the larger conspiratorial agenda here. In other words, Baby Boomer audiences did not have to come away with any impressions of actual occult activity in their midst as much as a firm warning not to trust older Americans. And yet another form of modernist critique in this film, as a digression from previous British films, targets American postwar suburbia and matrimony's potential to maintain patterns of female domesticity and dependence. Accordingly, Rosemary's husband, who assumes responsibility for the scratch marks on her back, has simply personified 'Satan' for prioritizing his career and impregnating her in the same 'Satanic' gesture. And, by the same token, their newborn also becomes something hideous and alien to her—and so will perpetually remind her of her domestic predicament. Regardless, the paranoid narrative would persist as such in the wake of this film, with or without Satanic rituals.

Demonized children, although appearing in films as far back as *The Bad Seed* (1956), would become a cliché in 1970s cinema thanks to the impact of *Rosemary's Baby*, as in, for example, *The Nightcomers* (1971) and *The Other* (1972), both sans any Satanic reference. Specifically, the narrative climax of a demonic birth was even reconfigured as a critique of technologization in the 1977 modernist film *Demon Seed*. But, of course, the release of *The Exorcist* in 1973, despite the film's eschewal of conspiratorial forces, would reinforce this tendency beyond estimation. Where this subsequent film may appear merely to exploit a reliable premise of metaphysical "maleficence" at work in American society, it actually behaves moreover as social satire—ruthlessly targeting the decade's characteristic social malaise. America's capital is transformed into an urban wasteland of divorcees, alcoholic priests, incompetent physicians, and student protestors coopted by Hollywood productions. More specifically, the film portrays its female protagonist (Ellen Burstyn) as a high-strung single mother struggling to raise an adolescent

daughter (Linda Blair) and maintain her acting career at the same time. At the same time, the film traces a disillusioned Catholic priest's path toward resignation, for whom the mother's maniacally possessed innocent becomes the catalyst in correlating him to the protagonist as the 'male' counterpart of a spiritual dearth less specifically 'Christian' and more symptomatic of the time. The ambiguating device of the dream sequence appears again in this film, although it is the guilt-ridden priest (Jason Miller) whose psychological health is called into question. Eventually juxtaposed with the demon-child, the nondiegetic insert of a demonic visage in the dream montage suggests the 'evil' in this film has already taken root in the adults, or, rather, is a projection of their own troubled psyches. Essentially, then, the film may not demonize adolescence for an audience of struggling divorcee parents as much as it demonizes the influence of these parents on their children, just as the demon's abject swearing satirizes parental influence. In particular, a scene where daughter Regan 'witnesses' from around a corner her mother's neuroses on the telephone sets up this notion, well before the girl exhibits any demonic possession on her own. And, later, when the dualistic protagonists finally meet face-to-face, the traumatized mother bums a cigarette from the priest, and so this exchange becomes the film's most satirical moment of modernist irony. In terms of vulnerable female characters under Satanic influence, varied derivatives of this film and/or its predecessor *Rosemary's Baby* would appear in each's wake, such as *The Dunwich Horror* (1970), *The Mephisto Waltz* (1971), Mario Bava's reedited *Lisa and The Devil* (1973), the ABC television film *The Devil's Daughter* (1973), and the British-German coproduction *To the Devil, A Daughter* (1976). But in their somewhat obvious pursuit of Satanic narrative formulae for their own sake, these films were relatively impotent as modernist critique. Stripped of its demonic allegorical hyperbole, *The Exorcist* would find its modernist corollary moreover in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974), again starring Ellen Burstyn as a single mother struggling to support herself and her adolescent son (Alfred Lutter). In both films, the female protagonist ultimately survives the storm, as it were, and presses on toward an uncertain future. In this sense, at least, there is no 'final' capitulation to a conspiratorial force, as in *Rosemary's Baby*, although these films certainly retain the probability for more stormy weather ahead.

Figure 5. 'Demonic' influence is implied in *The Exorcist* through a long take, wherein the camera pushes out from the mother swearing down the phone, and eventually frames her eavesdropping daughter in the foreground.

Rosemary's Baby, positioned as a paranoid narrative rather than as merely an 'Americanization' of any given British Satanic cult film or films, can also be correlated to forthcoming modernist entries ostensibly targeting corporate and government institutions. These mostly post-Watergate films can be understood as the 'masculinized' paradigm of the female protagonist steadily uncovering a network of conspiratorial force, and yet, in this case, so intrinsically established as to seem institutionalized. Such a pattern of films would certainly include *The Conversation* (1974), *The Parallax View* (1974), *Three Days of the Condor* (1975), *Marathon Man* (1976), and *Capricorn One* (1978), but could commence even earlier with the film *Executive Action* (1973), portraying John F. Kennedy's assassination as conspiratorial. If there is any additional cultural trajectory detectable within this range of films, it is a progression from absolute defeatism to one of relative optimism. *The Conversation*, on the darker end, portrays a surveillance professional (Gene Hackman) embroiling himself too deeply in one of his assignments only to find he has been positioned as an accessory to murder. His clients represent an unnamed "company" marred by internal politics

whose power to tap into his own personal life are beyond even his expertise—the ultimate conspiratorial irony of the film. As in both *Eye of the Devil* and *Rosemary's Baby*, this film includes a surreal dream sequence wherein this male protagonist also struggles toward an evasive and horrible truth. Harkening all the way back to *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, these intrusions of subjective content within an otherwise ratiocinative progression through these films serve to undermine any potential finality. We are left suspended between impressions of palpable conspiracy and paranoid delusion. By the time *Capricorn One* arrives, on the other hand, American moviegoers have already embraced a return to an optimistic finale, thanks to the blockbuster release of *Jaws* (1975), *Star Wars* (1977), and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). In this late modernist entry, a male journalist (Elliot Gould) continuously evades assassination in order to rescue at least one of the uncooperative astronauts (James Brolin) already targeted for extermination, and so 'triumphantly' exposes NASA's faked Mars landing thereby. Audiences might have stood up and cheered for such an ending if their craving for social critique hadn't been superseded by the irresistibly dazzling new spectacle of special-effects-oriented escapism on screens everywhere else.

Figure 6. Similar to the priest in *The Exorcist*, the protagonist of *The Conversation* wrangles with his conscience in a dream sequence, here shouting out excuses through the mist to the recent target of his surveillance work.

The pattern of masculinized paranoid narratives eventually found a Satanic context in 1976 with the 20th Century Fox release of *The Omen*. As in *Rosemary's Baby* and *Eye of the Devil*, this film's protagonist (Gregory Peck) must pursue a ratiocinative process of uncovering an occult conspiracy, also requiring almost the entire duration of screen time. However, this protagonist is a *male* American ambassador stationed in Britain, and such a premise at least vaguely harkens back further to *Night of the Demon*, in which an American man (Dana Andrews) arrives in Britain to investigate occult activities emanating, as usual, from an estate in the English countryside. At the same time, *The Omen* trilogy of films embraces its two 'maternal' narrative predecessors' inclusion of demonized offspring, more decidedly appropriating the birth of Satan's mutant son in *Rosemary's Baby* and allowing this 'antichrist' character to mature across its three installments. And, at the end of the first film, the protagonist's fatal attempt to dispatch his false son (Harvey Stephens) leaves the boy in the foster care of the American President, implying the 'evil' conspiracy will infiltrate the government inevitably. The next entry, *Damien: Omen 2* (1978) associates the adolescent antichrist (Jonathan Scott-Taylor) with corporate America, whose interest here is to exploit agricultural resources in underdeveloped countries. And then the third film, *The Final Conflict* (1981), positions this character (Sam Neill) as the President of the United States himself. So these films' hardly veiled antiestablishment allegory conflates agendas of *The Conversation* and *Parallax View*, for example, by literally demonizing both corporate and governmental influence in America. But, as I suggested with respect to these other films, moviegoers were already gravitating away from modernist narratives by the time *Damien: Omen 2* appeared, and so the ultimate defeat of Satan's son in the third film only looked like a desperate concession to the spectacular optimism of *Star Wars* and other blockbusters. Beyond the trilogy's demonization of children, nevertheless, Andrew Scahill locates additional demonization of the American white bourgeoisie, lower-class insurrection, and homosexuality all at the same time, concluding that "a single narrative spectrum can animate both a critique and a reactionary defense of whiteness, childhood innocence, and normative development."[10] While his examples from the films certainly support this

[10] Andrew Scahill, "It's All for You, Damien": Oedipal Horror and Racial Privilege in *The Omen* Series," in *Lost and Othered Children in Contemporary Cinema*, eds. Andrew Scahill and Debbie C. Olsen (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012), 104.

aggregate perspective, I find it more productive to recognize a *shift* in sympathies between the first two installments. The first film actually expends great energy in building sympathy for its wealthy white protagonist Ambassador Thorn, whose affectionate dedication to his increasingly victimized wife (Lee Remick) is celebrated on screen in multiple scenes. This inversion of Rosemary's alienation from her conspiratorial husband does not support a case for allegorizing these two toward a critique of bourgeois whiteness, and, if anything, compels the audience to associate their demonized antagonists exclusively with the larger modernist agenda of similar paranoid narratives appearing at this time. However, in the next entry, the wealthy white couple assuming parental duties for the Satanic adolescent become estranged in their attitudes toward the boy, and the woman (Lee Grant) finally murders her husband (William Holden) to protect Damien. This artificially lamebrained female character could certainly be understood to satirize a bourgeois 'ignorance' of all manifestations of invasive otherness as personified by the devil-boy and his enablers, the latter of whom, according to Scahill, are representatives of a homosexual underclass. But also unlike the first film, the 'apostate' characters are now white representatives of corporate and government interests. For example, the ambitious younger executive (Robert Foxworth) proposing agricultural exploitation must invoke Satanic forces to kill an opposing elderly colleague (Lew Ayres), and then must circumvent his CEO, who, as Ambassador Thorn's brother, is treated just as sympathetically as that character is in the first film. So, in this case, the narrative does not configure 'opposing' demographic categories as readily as Scahill would have it. And this is another reason I prefer to associate these Satanic films, in light of their narrative differences, with other paranoid films of the era.

Concurrent with the stream of paranoid narratives depicting 'loner' male protagonists pitted against the establishment, all of which can be traced back to countercultural road films like *Easy Rider* (1969) and *Vanishing Point* (1970), there is a number of conspiratorial Satanic cult films putting young couples 'on the road' and/or sending them out to peripheral zones off the highway and straight into deadly rituals. These films include: *The Brotherhood of Satan* (1971), *Race with the Devil* (1975), and *The Devil's Rain* (1975). The first of these three films, for example, sends a couple and their daughter into small desert community whose children are ultimately

possessed by the members of the town's Satanic coven. And *Race with the Devil* reconfigures Peter Fonda's rebel biker character as a settled, married man, who merely wants to enjoy a motorhome trip across the country with his wife and another couple. As in the previous film, they also discover that even the elderly and the local police are complicit in a Satanic ring who sacrifices its members. *The Devil's Rain* also sends a couple to a peripheral ghost town of Satanists from which there is proverbially 'no return.' By demonizing small-town communities, these films are less invested in behaving as British pagan narratives than in exploring the increasing angst of Baby-Boomer couples settling into their parents' middleclass suburban existence, which they had previously sought to avoid through fantasies of liberation, portrayed in *The Graduate* (1967), for example. The emergence of so many 'wild' motorcycle gang films across the 1960s was simply another manifestation of countercultural fantasy—eventually negated by *Easy Rider* and the 'conspiratorial' assassination of its biker protagonists by conservative Americans populating small towns across the United States. And so these subsequent films merely swapped out the bikers for married couples, and murderous rednecks for Satanic cults. Also more readily comparable to the narrative template of *Easy Rider* is the film *Werewolves on Wheels* (1971), whose sympathetic biker gang is eventually consumed by a Satanic coven. And this film would find its British corollary in *Psychomania*, although the latter film is more in keeping with the 'British' Satanic narrative paradigm from the 1960s, since its motorcycle gang of attractive, rebellious youths is aligned with an aristocratic, albeit Satanic, estate in the English countryside. In this way, New Hollywood and its peripheral American production companies sought to perpetuate a countercultural critique of the establishment, while also expressing fears of the counterculture's inevitable conformity to middleclass American domesticity. These modernist narratives were eventually eclipsed by the release of *Halloween* in 1978, which would introduce the 'slasher' antagonist to a younger generation of moviegoers less interested in or attuned to social critique. This emerging subgenre sought, rather, to entertain teenagers curious about sex and yet afraid of defying their parents. Satanic premises would, of course, be subsumed into some of these 1980s-era films, just as Schreck affirms in his attempted trajectory of Satanic cinema.

Figure 7. The Satanic urn entrapping souls for eternity in *The Devil's Rain*, especially through its bluish hue, points more readily to the impact of television on suburban malaise in America.

My purpose here has been to reconfigure Satanic films according to their specific cultural context, and particularly in the Hollywood mainstream context of the 1970s, where the proliferation of these films should be understood within New Hollywood's larger modernist agenda for social critique. Films involving characters positioned as victims of Satanic cults should also be reconceived more broadly within a trajectory of paranoid narratives whose roots are closer to the unreliable narrative of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* than to *Faust*, for example, even though the latter two German films' 'contract with the devil' also applies to *Rosemary's Baby*. I would emphasize, however, that, in treating Polanski's film as responsible for mobilizing the mainstream Satanic content to follow, regardless of *Eye of the Devil* and other British harbingers, one should nevertheless acknowledge that the once-Faustian protagonist, appearing in *The Devil and Daniel Webster* (1941), for example, is now relegated to a secondary role—to be associated

with other secondary characters conspiring *together* against an ambiguously delusional protagonist as their victim. In this way, a more productive cultural trajectory of cinematic narrative should be traced from *Caligari* to *Rosemary's Baby*—and then onward to *The Conversation*. Intermediary narratives including Satanic cults, namely *The Black Cat* and *The Seventh Victim*, also feature female characters as victims, but their own exploration of social fears are not as productively correlated to Polanski's film, merely for the sake of their Satanic conspirators. That is, these two films do not behave so readily as paranoid narratives, especially in their dearth of psychological ambiguity. Of course, Satanic road films appearing in the wake of *Rosemary's Baby* are no less unambiguous in their positioning of peripheral American towns and their surrounding desert landscapes as epicenters of occult ritual, but the point is that these films are the 'bestial' offspring of *that* film, although hybridized via the just-as-pivotal release of *Easy Rider*, as well as *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), also demonizing policemen within a road-oriented context. Ultimately, paranoia for its own sake becomes the driving force of these modernist narratives, rather than occult ritual or its impetus to summon metaphysical entities, per se. Even *The Exorcist* and *The Omen* series, in their portrayed affirmation of metaphysical demonic forces, have more stake in exposing the plight of the American individual within a 'demonized' establishment than reinforcing Christian faith for a mostly faithless audience. In any case, if and when one attempts to achieve an aggregate perception of 'Satanic' media, as in Schreck's nonetheless engaging survey, it must inevitably correlate cinematic practices wholly antithetical in their agendas. Underground filmmaker Kenneth Anger's work immediately comes to mind. Rather than behaving as modernist critique, films including *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969) and *Lucifer Rising* (1972) are spiritual experiments. These films do not exploit Satanic ritual for narrative purposes as much as they emulate its subcultural intentions as an authentic alternative to mainstream ecclesiastical practice and social conformity. And, for this reason, such films, even if they are certainly to be associated with the same American counterculture that mobilized the New Hollywood and its many cynical releases across the 1970s, must be treated as a different cultural phenomenon.

Thus, I would prefer to dedicate a chapter to Satanic mainstream cinema within a larger study of 'modernist New Hollywood' or even 'modernist cinema' more broadly, rather than attempting to define 'Satanic cinema' for its own sake. If he were to reflect moreover on his running, aggregate disappointment with Satanic content onscreen, I imagine Schreck would agree with me.

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