Journal for the Study of Religious Experience

Vol. 10, No. 1 (2024)

Halloween Special

Edited by

Andrew Dean and Jack Hunter

ISSN: 2057-2301

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Vol. 10, No. 1 (2024)

ISSN: 2057-2301

Editorial

Halloween: Cultural and Experiential Entanglements

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Welcome to Vol. 10 No. 1 of the *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience* - a special Halloween themed issue that has been curated for us by Dr. Andrew Dean. In this introductory editorial I would like to briefly outline a few ideas and questions around Halloween and extraordinary experience before introducing the papers that make up the rest of the issue.

The Dark Side of Extraordinary Experience

There is a dark side to religious and spiritual experience (Grafius & Morehead, 2021; Childs & Howard, 2023). There are demonic encounters, just as there are angelic ones, and frightening experiences as well as beautiful ones. Rudolf Otto wrote of the 'mysterium horrendum,' for example, describing how this 'feeling-response' manifests as a 'gristly horror and shuddering […] in the presence of […] that which is a mystery inexpressible' (Otto, 1958, p. 13). I have explored elsewhere how this feeling-response seems to be a common thread that runs throughout a whole variety of paranormal and extraordinary experiences, and which seems to be entangled with a range other of phenomenological characteristics, such as a sense of the 'weird' and 'eerie' (Fisher, 2016), the 'uncanny' (Freud, 2003), the 'Oz factor' (Randles, 1988) and the 'highly strange' (Hunter, 2021; 2023). Rachael Ironside has recently proposed a 'Dark Spiritual Experience Spectrum' (Ironside, 2023) to help make sense of this often neglected aspect of extraordinary experience. Many paranormal experiences - from ghost sightings to alien abduction experiences - are frightening (Coelho *et al.,* 2021), sometimes even seeming to pervade a sense of malevolence, and Halloween is a celebration during which this mood and atmosphere is very publicly acknowledged and embraced.

Fright Night

October 31st is one date in the calendar when dark, frightening, and sometimes disturbing, experiences and ideas - often gravitating around notions of death - are

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brought out into the open to be confronted and indulged in the public sphere (Santino, 1994). Children dress as ghosts and monsters, and tell each other spooky stories, while adults get their fill of horror movies about vampires and serial killers (McKechnie & Tynan, 2008). It is also a time when social and cultural norms are inverted, as Cindy Dell Clark notes: "Halloween is a holiday when adults assist children in behaviors taboo and out of bounds, as children impersonate creatures evil and dead in an atmosphere of carnivalesque, norm-suspending liminality" (Clark, 2005, p. 183). At Halloween people actively seek out frightening experiences purely for the thrill, where normally they would not. Ghost stories and horror movies have the capacity to induce both physiological and psychological effects in the reader or viewer. As Wesselman *et al.* point out:

> "The appeal of horror entertainment is paradoxical because the success of these products hinges upon provoking negative emotions like anxiety, disgust, fear, and dread in audiences. In everyday life, people normally avoid such emotions, yet they actively seek them out in horror entertainment" (Wesselmann *et al.,* 2024).

Supernatural and 'weird' fiction - and their cinematic and other offshoots - are especially interesting in the way that they emulate - or try to evoke in the reader/viewer - real feelings of what William James called 'superstitious dread' (James, 2004, p. 64). The spooky vibe that Halloween seeks to evoke is also an expression of this - it can evoke within us a sene of the *mysterium horrendum*. There is, therefore, an interplay between real-world experiences and literary and other cultural productions, which seek to replicate or express the original human experience.

Culture and Experience

For many in Euro-American societies, Halloween is a first introduction to the world of the occult and the paranormal - to ghosts and ghouls, and things that go bump in the night - and as such it likely provides a cultural framework through which to understand the supernatural. In such a framework, the supernatural is understood as something that is to be feared - ghosts and monsters are scary. It is likely that some part of this cultural attitude towards the supernatural has an experiential source - as already noted, many extraordinary and paranormal experiences *are* frightening, and the cultural model reflects this (cf. Hufford, 1982). But there also seems to be a cultural influence on subjective experience - so that the ideas that are given to us about the nature of the paranormal (e.g. that it is frightening) influence the way that we have and interpret extraordinary experiences. I have suggested elsewhere that there is a sort of 'feedback loop' in effect

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between culture and experience (Hunter, 2021). Culture influences experience, and experience influences culture. As an interesting illustration, the horror writer Whitley Strieber is certain that his famous alien encounters were "deeply informed by the bad sci-fi B movies that he had seen […] as a kid" (Kripal, 2014, p. 905), and suggested that they provided a cultural framing for his later extraordinary experiences. Reflecting on this, the historian of religion Jeffery Kripal goes on to explain how Strieber is "asking us, as a public culture now, to search for new ways to engage sacred terror more intelligently so that this horror might "flip over" more often into something not terrible but terrific, into a kind of profound mutuality and spiritual transformation that he calls "communion"" (Kripal, 2014). To what extent does the celebration of Halloween provide a cultural scaffolding for extraordinary experiences?

This Issue

To begin our Halloween adventure, in 'The Night of Exception: Understanding Halloween through Schmitt's Political Thought,' Dr. Bruce Peabody from the Department of Social Sciences and History at Fairleigh Dickinson University, introduces the cultural history of the halloween celebration before analysing its traditions through the lens of political theory. The paper concludes with an examination of John Carpenter's 1978 slasher movie *Halloween*. Next, Drs. Andrew and Sylvia Dean present a fascinating examination of the phenomenon variously known as 'ghost lights,' 'will-o'-the-wisps' or 'corpse lights' ('canwyllion corff' in Welsh - 'corpse candles'). They trace the folkloric history of ghost lights in European tradition, and ask where they have gone today? Then, in 'Memoirs of a Halloween Enthusiast,' Dr. Kaja Franck, lecturer in English Literature at the University of Hertfordshire, reflects on her life-long fascination with all things Halloween, arguing that the tradition has become increasingly secular, and removed from earlier religious and supernatural connotations. Finally, in '"We sell Hell, so suffer well!": Exploring 'positive' pathogenic possession' Andrew Dean explores the Devil through an ethnographic study of practitioners of demonic spirit possession for the purposes of self-development and spiritual growth.

Happy Halloween!

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The Night of Exception: Understanding Halloween through Schmitt's Political Thought

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This article plumbs the meaning of the Halloween tradition through the writing of the political philosopher Carl Schmitt. Schmitt's unsettling theory emphasizes both the need to confront the 'exception,' when traditional rules and expectations about our social and political relations give way, and the importance of identifying ourselves through opposition, especially by constructing an enemy or foe who is at once alien but essential to our individual and national self-understanding. After developing an account of the enduring relevance of Schmitt's political thought for comprehending the nature and appeal of the Halloween tradition, the essay applies this framework to a cinematic case study, interpreting John Carpenter's 1978 film Halloween.

Key Words: Halloween; political philosophy; Carl Schmitt; friend and enemy; exception

This article plumbs the meaning of the Halloween tradition through a seemingly unlikely source: the political philosophy of Carl Schmitt (1888-1985). Schmitt's sometimes repugnant body of thought includes the idea that successful societies recognize both 'the exception' (circumstances when traditional rules and expectations about our social and political relations give way) and that our most important identities are formed through opposition, especially by distinguishing friends from 'enemies' at odds with our self-conception and preferred way of life.

Schmitt's wider 'positive' or constructive political project—seeking to empower an autocratic sovereign who can both identify the exception and marshal a nation against its enemies—is somewhat distant from the concerns of Halloween in its historic and contemporary forms. But Schmitt's basic claims, and his unstinting critique of the status quo, point us to dynamics that have coursed through the Halloween tradition from its early history to the present. Stated differently, his arguments about the inevitable breakdown of liberal orders help us better comprehend the anxieties at the beating heart of the holiday.

More specifically, in both its ancient cognates and contemporary forms Halloween combines two signature and closely intertwined elements that run parallel to Schmitt's approach. First, the day marks a suspension of the ordinary, exploring the end of seasons and the boundaries between the conventional and fantastic, the living and the dead.

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Many of Halloween's rituals and symbols probe this uneasy divide: we light bonfires to push back the gathering winter darkness and cold, don costumes to deter ghosts, and ask for food or other gifts in return for keeping the peace. While these observances are often celebratory, they are also inflected with a sense of dread or menace.

Halloween's recognition of the 'exception' leads us to Schmitt's second tenet: the centrality of the friend and enemy distinction for our politics and national identity. Viewed in this light, we can describe the Halloween holiday as an annual reflection on (dis)embodied threats and potential adversaries, especially via representatives of the dead and the monstrous. The deep roots of Halloween include lighting candles and sacrificing animals to ward off dangerous spirits. Similarly, the enduring masking tradition is both a way to trick or drive away malevolent forces and, more recently, an exercise in playing with (and perhaps symbolically defanging) sinister figures like devils, ghosts, and vampires.

The remainder of this article explores the interplay between these aspects of our Halloween celebrations and the central beliefs in Carl Schmitt's political thought. I do not claim that the Halloween tradition is somehow systematically modelled upon Schmitt's philosophy. The holiday's complex history and diverse forms do not support such a position. Indeed, as discussed further below, in a number of ways our Halloween celebrations depart from and even cut against elements of Schmitt's thinking. But Schmitt's account provides a framework for understanding the longstanding power and distinctive features of our most protean holiday, helping us identify a basic through line that connects ancient celebrations with the popularity of Halloween in the twenty-first century.

After setting out the broad strokes of Schmitt's theory, I link his ideas to an encompassing 'Halloween tradition,' understood to include a 'colorful patchwork' of folk beliefs, autumnal and religious celebrations, and cultural practices that eventually became a 'a new, quintessentially American celebration' (Bannatyne, 1990, p. 47). I then test my claims about the links between Schmitt and Halloween with a case study based on John Carpenter's now-classic horror film, *Halloween* (1978). Finally, I conclude this essay by discussing the broader implications of my argument and what it teaches us about the ongoing, dark allure of October 31st.

The Wolf at the Door: The Exception and Liberalism's 'Anarchy and Chaos'

Schmitt's political theory begins with a series of critiques about the supposed shortcomings of constitutional liberalism, the political tradition that seeks to protect the

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'individual's autonomy and dignity against coercion, whatever the source' through a simultaneous embrace of individual liberty and the rule of law (Zakaria 1997, pp. 25-26). According to Schmitt, these precepts are irreconcilable and misconstrue the true basis of politics and what binds communities together. Among other deficiencies, constitutional liberalism is bedevilled by irreconcilable tensions between its commitments to political tolerance and pluralism, the consistent application of the rule of law, and 'its need to defeat its enemies' (Brown, 2022).

All organized states have the ultimate responsibility 'in assuring total peace,' that is, to 'create tranquility, security, and order' within and between regimes (Schmitt 1996, p. 46). Modern states, especially liberal ones, try to maintain this order and defuse national differences by developing and applying legal norms—general rules and laws that apply to everyone. Liberals claim that politics takes place within (and is therefore subsumed by) neutral and fairly administered constitutions, statutes, and public policy guidelines, which deliver benefits to all parties and constrains leaders and subjects alike from acting solely through caprice.

But, as Schmitt sees it, this approach is both philosophically unsound and dangerous in practice. In tethering a regime's legitimacy to the promise that stable and fairly administered rules will both regulate conflicts between diverse groups and address the dynamic needs of a polity, the rule of law constantly threatens to collapse. Our legal and political system can operate sufficiently well during normal times and in facing routine or 'tame problems' (Rittel and Webber, 1973, p. 169), but they founder amidst the idiosyncrasies and urgency of crises, jeopardizing Schmitt's preeminent values: 'tranquility, security, and order.' As he puts it, 'there exists no norm that is applicable to chaos. For a legal order to make sense, a normal situation must exist' (Schmitt 1985, p. 13). Abnormal circumstances such as emergencies contain unforeseen variables and dangers that existing laws cannot anticipate or address.

Thus, the rule of law and our established institutions serve us up to a point. But in a world beset with economic and social upheaval, and frequent and sometimes violent conflict between political parties, citizens, and nations, the promise of the rule of law is subordinate to confronting what Schmitt calls 'the exception:' phenomena 'which is not codified in the existing legal order, can at best be characterized as a case of extreme peril, a danger to the existence of the state, or the like. But it cannot be circumscribed factually and made to conform to a preformed law' (Schmitt, 1985, p. 6).

Schmitt's solution to the problem of the exception is the 'sovereign'—a figure who is personally empowered to decide when the rule of law and normal politics has given way, when it can be restored, and how the state should respond to 'abnormal' conditions to restore public order and security. In order to forestall 'anarchy and chaos' the sovereign

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must have 'principally unlimited authority, which means the suspension of the entire existing order' (Schmitt, 1985, p. 10). Schmitt's sovereign exists as a kind of 'borderland' figure —straddling between the normal and the exception—since he both 'stands outside the normally valid legal system, [but] nevertheless belongs to it' insofar as he must decide if the rule of law is operating effectively or 'needs to be suspended in its entirety.'

With respect to *who* is the sovereign, Schmitt looks to whomever can engage in effective political action when the normal order falters. As George Schwab puts it, the 'one who has authority can demand obedience—and it is not always the legitimate sovereign who possesses this authority' (Schmitt, 1985, p. xii). Whoever is sovereign has the 'monopoly to decide' that the exception is at hand and what path we should chart through the crisis (Schmitt, 1985, pp. 6-7).

Friends, Enemies, and Community

In determining whether we are experiencing 'the exception' or whether the 'normal situation actually exists,' the sovereign must decide whether our collective conception of 'public order and security' has been disrupted. This, in turn, requires a judgment about 'what constitutes the public interest' and, consequently, whose conception of the good is included in the polity and whose are opposed.[1]

This leads us to a second idea critical to Schmitt's philosophy. He contends that what demarcates politics from other endeavors is a distinction 'to which political actions and motives can be reduced…that between friend and enemy' (Schmitt, 1996, p. 26). A political community is formed and maintained through its recognition of an enemy, understood as 'the *other*, the stranger'—someone whose nature 'is existentially different and foreign in a particularly intense way, so that in extreme cases conflicts with him are possible' if not unavoidable (Schmitt, 2020, p. 63).

We identify our enemies through emotional, cultural, or anthropological impressions rather than sober analyses of military or commercial threats: 'the political enemy need not be morally evil; he need not be aesthetically ugly; he need not be an economic competitor — it may even seem advantageous to do business with him (Schmitt, 2020, p. 63). But these foes reflect or give vent to 'the most intense and extreme antagonism' in a community and are, therefore, essential to our identity (Schmitt, 1996, pp. 37-8). This, in turn, makes the friend and enemy distinction the root of political life, social cohesion, and leadership. As Roberta Adams puts it, 'Maintaining the distinction between the people on our side—friends—and those on the other side—enemies—is the

[1] As Schmitt puts it, the sovereign 'decides in a situation of conflict what constitutes the public interest or interest of the state, public safety and order' (1985, p. 6).

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primary function of the state on which all other functions either rely or depend according to Schmitt' (Adams, 2024).

More ominously, since 'the enemy' is perceived to be an existential threat to a community, its leaders can wield 'enormous power' against this group, trying to expel them and even directing its people to destroy these foes.[2] Indeed, the ultimate test of whether we have properly identified our enemy is whether we are willing to die against them. Explicit or latent violence is, therefore, an essential part of our relationship with the enemy: 'The friend, enemy, and combat concepts receive their real meaning precisely because they refer to the real possibility of physical killing' (Schmitt, 2020, p. 68).

While identifying the exception (and how to respond to it) is left to the personal authority and judgment of the sovereign, ascertaining a community's friends and enemies is a more collective, cultural, and objective process. If our leaders misidentify enemies, they will fail to capture the people's anxieties, energy, and imagination. The animus that drives the friend and enemy distinction must be decided by the political community and publicly expressed. Thus, the political enemy is necessarily a 'public enemy' and can't be determined by 'the judgment of a disinterested and neutral party.' And once we have fixed upon our foe, we tend to foist a whole range of negative associations upon them: 'Emotionally the enemy is easily treated as being evil and ugly, because every distinction, most of all the political, as the strongest and most intense of the distinctions and categorizations, draws upon other distinctions for support' (Schmitt, 2020, p. 68).

The friend and enemy opposition is the most important part of political life because it is fundamental to our self-conception. As Schmitt elaborates, 'the entire life of a human being is a struggle [against our foes] and every human being symbolically a combatant' (Schmitt 2020, p. 68). Finding our enemies is not only about survival but articulating what values or way of life is most important to us as people. The opposition and even enmity at the heart of a community's life is not to be lamented or suppressed. Vibrant, healthy political orders persist because of the potentially violent hostility at their core; this gives a nation energy, cohesion, and a clear path to protecting itself. States that fail to confront their foes, ideologically and physically, are vulnerable.

Just as the exception undermines constitutional liberalism's faith in the rule of law, so the friend-enemy distinction serves as a kind of reproach to liberal pluralism—the belief that nations with diverse populations and divergent conceptions of the good can

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[2] In Schmitt's words

> The state as the authoritative political entity contains an enormous power concentrated in itself: the possibility of waging war and thus openly having human lives at its disposal. The *jus belli* contains such a disposition; it indicates a double possibility: that of demanding from members of one's own people readiness to kill and die, and that of killing people standing on the enemy side. (2020, p. 81).

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flourish harmoniously through their commitment to agreed upon procedures, compromises that balance competing interests, and what Schmitt calls a "ventilating system" of representative institutions that allegedly express our differing identities (Schmitt, 1996, p. 70). In this view, we subordinate our dislike or mistrust of others to common norms and rules that protect everyone.

But Schmitt counters that this is a kind of fiction that only superficially covers the rivalries, fear, and even hatred core to our politics and humanity. According to Peter Gratton, for Schmitt the 'state is not simply a facilitator of open discussions among disparate groups or an administrator of economic goods for society; it is primarily a means for internal order such that a proper relation of enmity with other people is constituted' (2012, p. 14). Schmitt insists that humanity will never be at true peace; even in periods of seeming harmony or détente, communities have a simmering animosity at their core. As an alternative to the liberal vision of achieving liberty through diversity, tolerance, and shared institutions and norms, Schmitt insists that the only way communities can achieve meaningful solidarity is by owning up to their deep-seated divisions and fears.

Schmitt and the Halloween Tradition

How does Schmitt's unsettling political philosophy shed light on our most unsettling holiday? We might first note that there are, of course, *many* Halloweens, making it difficult to identify the core characteristics of All Hallows' Eve, at least as a historical matter. As Nicholas Rogers notes, 'Some folklorists have detected its origins in the Roman feast of Pomona, the goddess of fruits and seeds, or in the festival of the dead called Parentalia' (2003, p. 23). More often, scholars anchor the holiday to the Celtic Samhain, a harvest festival that helped communities brace for the cold months to come and coincided with a period when the 'ancestral dead' supposedly drew closer to the world of the living (Bannatyne, 1990, p. 58; Santino 1983). The celebrations of All Saints' and All Souls' Days offered Christian variations of this latter idea, emphasizing a religious directive to honor departed souls. In the nineteenth century United States, Halloween practices drew heavily on Irish immigrant traditions including 'divination games' and the use of lanterns and 'corpse candles… thought to be the souls of the dead, wandering interminably and leading men astray' (Bannatyne, 1990, p. 78). In the early twentieth century, the holiday became more closely associated with themed costumed celebrations and tricks and pranks (Skal, 2002, pp. 42-44).

Thus, Halloween is undoubtedly a 'patchwork holiday…stitched together quite recently from a number of traditions' and there is, consequently, 'little consensus as to

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what it means' (Skal, 2002, p. 20), especially in its amalgamated, broadly accessible, contemporary form.

Recognizing Threats to the Status Quo

Nevertheless, Schmitt's theory captures three recurring ideas that help bridge the ancient foundations of the holiday with its most important manifestations today. First, both Schmitt's account and Halloween's venerable traditions are premised on teasing out threats to the status quo—unresolved tensions and persistent fears allegedly underlying 'normal' conditions.

For Schmitt, this challenge takes the form of liberalism's purported dysfunctions coursing just under society's surface, ready to erupt during constitutional crises or when a liberal regime fails to recognize its true ideological enemies. Halloween's suggestion of social and political fragility is expressed more indirectly, but is still a persistent current transmitted through the holiday's evolving forms. For example, Samhain's celebrations occurred at the end of summer, drawing the community's attention to the encroaching winter, a season linked to privation and even mortality. As Lesley Bannatyne puts it, 'Samhain marked the start of the season that rightly belonged to evil spirits—a time when nights were long and dark fell early. It was a frightening time for a people who were entirely subject to the forces of nature, and who were superstitious about the unknown' (Bannatyne, 1990, p. 4). These natural forces, and the dark spirits accompanying them, threatened crops, children, and the elderly, serving as an implicit reminder of the fragility of life and the social order that makes it possible.

More generally, David Skal contends that the holiday, throughout its history, has been a touchstone for fears about contemporaneous social and political dangers, leading to the conclusion that it is 'an intrinsically dangerous holiday' (2002, p. 149). Rogers, too, notes that our Halloween celebrations have come to reflect the 'shifting social and political anxieties of late twentieth-century America' (2003, p. 21). Thus, the holiday has periodically triggered the attention of religious groups who object to its pagan sources and association with dark forces (Poole, 2019). In the 1970s and 1980s worries about childhood safety and lapsing national morality ushered in an era where the holiday was inflected with fears about candy that had been weaponized with razor blades, poison, or drugs (Bannatyne, 1990, p. 145). In a similar vein, Skal documents how the city of Detroit's 'Devil's Night' tradition (occurring on Oct. 30) was a 'perversely destructive variation on ancient Halloween bonfire rituals' involving vandalism and arson, and again linking the holiday to underlying social maladies and mayhem (2002, p. 151). At times,

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Halloween costumes give direct expression to symbols of disorder or injustice—consider the popularity of O.J. Simpson masks during Halloween in 1994 or the appearance of zombie bankers at the height of the Occupy Wall Street protests in 2011.

Moreover, the decentralized and "liminal" (Turner, 1975) aspects of Halloween contribute to its 'essential unruliness' (Skal, 2002, 150). Unlike other national holidays, Halloween is not officially recognized (through time off from school or work or in the rhetoric of elected officials). It is, instead, the byproduct of millions of uncoordinated private actions. As Rogers puts it, 'Halloween grew outside the canon of state-sanctioned commemorative holidays. It was a rite without a patron, eluding institutional or corporate appropriation, a holiday of transgression whose subversive laughter struck against the orthodoxies of the day' (2003, p. 212).

As a result, Halloween's core traditions (bonfires, parades, and in more recent years trick or treating, home décor, and haunted houses) regularly rupture the boundaries between public and private spaces and resist an orderly chronology, a predictable starting and ending time. In contrast, other holidays are centered around essentially private locations such as the home (Thanksgiving) or religious sites (Christmas and Easter), or occur in circumscribed public venues with discrete locations and relatively fixed periods of celebration (Fourth of July fireworks and parades).

Halloween also invites unconventional and even lawless behavior through costumes, pranks, and vandalism, and depends upon symbols and rituals in which 'death and life are related to each other' (Santino, 1994, p. xii). These aspects of the holiday represent at least an implied challenge to the prevailing social order, especially in cultures where the populace is 'terrified…[of its] own mortality' and where death and dying are taboo (Doughty, 2014, p. 224).

The Night of Exception

In recognizing (and arguably celebrating) these threats to the status quo, Halloween and Schmitt share a second common thread: they both fix our attention on the dangerous moment where we own up to our social fragility. For Schmitt, this is the exception—those periods when the existing constitutional and political order breaks down and leaves us uncertain how to proceed, that is, what rules should govern our behavior.

With respect to Halloween, its practices and rituals have long been based on marking transitions and acknowledging a point of disequilibrium or rupture with respect to normal routines. As noted, Samhain commemorated the end of summer and the harvest season, and the start of a long span of shorter days and harsher weather. This made Samhain a 'borderline festival' that 'marked the boundary between summer and winter,

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light and darkness' (Rogers, 2003, p. 21). According to Rogers it 'was a moment of ritual transition and altered states. It represented a time out of time, a brief interval "when the normal order of the universe is suspended" and "charged with a peculiar preternatural energy,'" qualities that endured when Halloween coalesced into its own holiday (Rogers, 2003, p. 34; see also Cana, 1970, p. 127).

While the claim is disputed (see, e.g., Hutton, 1996), Mike Nichols associates the holiday with the Celtic new year, and says it therefore 'represents a point outside of time, when the natural order of the universe dissolves back into primordial chaos, preparatory to reestablishing itself in a new order. Thus, Samhain is a night that exists outside of time.' (Nichols, 2024).

Halloween is also a celebration of the exception insofar as it eases the normal divide between the familiar and the fantastic, the living and the dead. As Bannatyne tells us the first Halloweens were tied:

> […] to the quickening dark, to seasonal change, to death, to the movement of mythical beings—fairies, witches, dead souls—through the night. Halloween was once imagined as a rift in reality where time slipped by without the traveler knowing he'd gone missing (2004, p. 15).

Over the years, in literature and poetry about Halloween 'the otherworld is always and uniquely present' (Bannatyne, 2004, p. 15). At the end of the nineteenth century, *Harper's Weekly* concluded that 'Halloween was the one night of the year when the dead trafficked with the living' (Bannatyne, 1990, p. 58). This association has continued as the holiday assumed its more modern forms.

Halloween's ontological disruption, its blending of the living and the dead, the fantastic and the ordinary, carries with it sense that ordinary natural and positive laws do not fully apply. As Skal puts it, 'Halloween is a holiday that refuses to play by anyone's rules' (2002, p. 153). The holiday is 'when all is overturned, when the natural order reverses itself…The dead walk…the ordinary become extraordinary. Children rebel' (Bannatyne, 1990, p. 158).

We can point to numerous examples that reflect this idea of Halloween as a distinctive day of norm-shattering. The Celtic and medieval customs of impersonating the dead through masks and costumes was a way to trick or ward off evil spirits but could also be used to harness their powers. Anthropologist Margaret Mead contended that in early American communities the folk belief was 'that Halloween was the one occasion when people could safely evoke the help of the devil in some enterprise' (1975, p. 31).

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Samhain and its offshoots encouraged festive consumption on the cusp of a period of food scarcity. Historian W. Scott Poole concludes that today 'Americans, of all ages, see Halloween as an opportunity to celebrate excess, a kind of a dark Mardi Gras' (Poole, 2019).

The tradition of Halloween mischief and pranks, which Skal associates with Irish and Scottish immigrants who modeled the practices on the 'antics of pixies and hobgoblins' also captures this idea that the normal civic rules are suspended or at least relaxed (2002, p. 33). Bannatyne goes so far as to say by the late nineteenth century, 'Halloween, being the night the spirits were out, was a time for anarchy' (Bannatyne, 2004) and celebratory mischief. Johnathan Zimmerman contends that by the early twentieth century, Halloween in the U.S. 'had become an occasion for young men—of every ethnicity—to flout the rules of polite society' (2013).

Finally, Halloween's status as a day of exception, where conventional norms lapse and community decorum is challenged, can be found in the variety of ways the holiday permits and even revels in experimental new social roles. For as long as the Halloween tradition has been associated with death and a spirit world hovering close at hand, it has allowed for 'a degree of license and liberty unimaginable—or simply unattainable—the rest of the year' (Skal 2002, 17). Victor Turner argues that during Halloween children 'exercise ritual authority over their superiors' (Turner, 1975, p. 167) by demanding relative independence from parents and 'treats' from adult neighbors. Moreover, in wearing masks, they enjoy anonymity 'for purposes of aggression,' endowing them 'with the powers of feral, criminal autochthonous and supernatural beings' (Turner, 1975, p. 172). Author Randy Shilts (among others) makes a related point with respect to how gay men in San Francisco were awarded ritual freedom during Halloween by law enforcement authorities, even as they were treated as socially inferior and legally compromised at all other times. 'One evening a year, like a chapter from a Cinderella story, the police would bestow a free night' when gay men and lesbians were safe from the usual harassment and prosecution (Shilts, 1982, p. 54).

Finding Friends and Enemies In the Dark

Schmitt contends that our political identity comes most alive when we recognize a foe as an existential threat to our values and way of life. This relationship is so charged and adversarial that it carries an undercurrent of violence. At the same time, our identification of the enemy, the other, reinforces our political 'friendships' and our status as a member of a unified, ongoing political community.

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Some of these ideas about the nature of social solidarity course through our Halloween traditions as well. In focusing on the dead, 'Samhain was ultimately for the living, who needed plenty of help of their own when transitioning to the new year… Everyone came together for one last bash to break bread, share stories and stand tall against the dead, strengthening community ties at the time they were needed most' (Owens, 2022). Bannatyne reports that during Samhain, **'**Tribes gathered at the central seats of Ireland: at Tara, warriors convened to fend off annual attacks from the Otherworld' (Bannatyne, 2004, p. 18). Skal concludes, more generally, that 'Halloween has its essential roots in the terrors of the primitive mind' which identified both the coming winter and the proximity of dead spirits as threatening the 'potential extinction of the self' (Skal, 2002, p. 17). To the extent Halloween festivities in the United Kingdom and American colonies incorporated the celebrations of Guy Fawkes Day, they reflected lingering anxieties about both religious schisms and political schemers who threatened, quite literally, to destroy a nation's longstanding governing institutions (Skal, 2004, pp. 23-4). The actual Fawkes, who sought to destroy Parliament by igniting thirty-six barrels of gunpowder, is still ritually burned in public celebrations to this day.

As the American Halloween started to assume its own, distinctive form, it became associated with a wider array of monstrous threats, sweeping in the witches and devils that preoccupied Puritan New England as well as a wider array of monstrous figures from folklore, literature, and, eventually, a wider vein of popular culture. Over time, the holiday increasingly abandoned the solemn, respectful, and spiritual recognition of the dead captured in Christian traditions such as All Soul's Day, in favor of exploring terror. As Rogers explains, 'Halloween is interested in the afterlife only…as a means of probing and coming to terms with modern-day fears and anxieties' about 'the repressed Other, our collective nightmares' (2003, p. 204).

The contemporary Halloween masking tradition also highlights our interest in identifying enemies. To begin with, it offers a kind of rogue's gallery, showcasing the range of spooky entities that prick a community's collective conscience. In addition to perennial favorites like vampires and ghosts, the 1970s saw the deployment of Richard Nixon masks as the Watergate scandal unfolded and revealed the commander in chief as a national menace (Skal, 2002, pp. 140-1). In presenting these figures in dramatic, often exaggerated fashion, the holiday perpetuates the idea that our foes can be readily found. As Carolyn Jabs put it, Halloween satisfies our 'fantasy that evil is obvious and monsters are easily recognized' (2001, p. 14). Paradoxically, however, masking also makes it *harder* to identify friends and foes, an idea reflected in both the ancient notion that disguises help trick the dead into bypassing the living, and the separate tradition through which

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pranksters, sometimes with destructive and dangerous intentions, conceal themselves from the public.

A Cinematic Case Study: Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978)

In this next section, I evaluate the interplay between Schmitt's philosophy and the Halloween tradition through a case study of the iconic film *Halloween* (1978). In general, cinematic horror is an apt medium for evaluating this essay's theory for a number of reasons: it has a longstanding association with implicit political themes, is likely to tap into specifically adult interest in the holiday, and, like other popular genres, it serves an especially revealing vehicle for 'mass sentiments and mass desires' including the persistent 'rebellion against human existence as it has been given' (Arendt, 1958, pp. 2-3). Studying films intended for mature audiences helps us tap into adult anxieties as opposed to focusing on the holiday as an occasion for identity exploration or consumption. In addition, horror has a long tradition of criticizing and challenging social norms, and making audiences reconsider their ideological commitments. As Noël Carroll has argued, monsters and other horrific entities 'breach the norms of ontological propriety presumed by the positive human characters in the story' and thereby 'challenge the foundations of a culture's way of thinking,' including our assumptions about rationality, organized politics, and our potential for orderly flourishing under the rule of law (Carroll, 1990, pp. 16, 34).

Carpenter's *Halloween*, specifically, is a seminal reference point for Halloween films for a variety of reasons. Murray Leeder and others attribute it with being the 'key element in reclaiming the holiday for adults' given its dark themes, explicit violence, and overt depictions of (teenage) sexuality (2015, p. 69; see also Morton, 2012, p. 97). This influence was, undoubtedly, creative, but also economic: some analyses conclude it was the most profitable independent film ever produced, 'grossing $70 million against a $300,000-$325,000 budget' and producing not only a dozen subsequent franchise films, but comic books, novels, and a video game, not to mention countless commercially (if not always critically) successful slasher imitations (CIMA Law Group, 2022).

The film opens with the murder of a teenage girl by her six-year-old brother Michael Myers (played, in different scenes, by Will Sandin, Nick Castle, and Tony Moran). Myers is confined to a mental institution, but escapes fifteen years later, returning to his hometown of Haddonfield, Illinois, where he sets on murdering Laurie Strode (Jamie Lee Curtis) for unknown reasons (in *Halloween II* we discover that Laurie is his sister, but this revelation does not really explain his bloodlust). With his psychiatrist, Dr. Samuel Loomis (Donald Pleasence) in pursuit, Myers terrorizes Haddonfield on Halloween night, killing

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two of Laurie's friends, along with one of their boyfriends. As Michael closes in on Laurie, she locks herself in a house with two children she is babysitting, fighting back with homemade weapons and the sociopath's own knife after she temporarily disarms him. As "The Shape" (as the script calls the costumed Myers) closes in on Laurie, Loomis suddenly appears, firing six shots into the homicidal monster, who tumbles off a roof deck and then promptly disappears.

What themes in *Halloween* follow the threads of Carl Schmitt's account of political life and its overriding concerns? To begin with, the film sounds a number of implicit critiques of the status quo. Overall, it conveys the sense that even our prosaic, orderly, familiar spaces are unsafe. As Leeder puts it, within Carpenter's middle class suburbia populated with loquacious teenagers and gleeful trick or treaters, 'danger lurks within the everyday' (2022, p. 22). Indeed, the film constantly plays with the idea that on Halloween night our symbolic and imagined dangers are hopelessly mixed up with real and terrifying ones. In this regard, the film tapped into several of the fears of the age in which it was made, including a contemporaneous preoccupation with the stranger or outsider who was a 'sexual predator, who lurked in every school, summer camp, rural town, and suburban subdivision' (Hume, 2019).

Michael Myers himself represents an arguably broader challenge to society. He is 'an inexplicable threat' (Leeder, 2022, p. 20) whose interests are unfathomable and whose behavior is opposed to a liberal paradigm which assumes that humans can be regulated within a network of laws based on our presumptive rationality. Like the threat of winter, respectfully feared in Samhain and other harvest festivals, Michael is an implacable, non-rational force, whose power must be resisted if not overcome. According to Darryl Jones, unlike the ordinary subject in liberal communities, 'Michael Myers is utterly anonymous. He has no personality at all, and no motivation. He is not, in any way that we recognize, an individual' (Jones, 2021, p. 92). It is not clear why he selects his victims, and why he spares other innocents.

Halloween presents other signs of an unstable social order through its representations of Haddonfield's authority figures. Parents are mostly absent from the film, leaving teenagers to watch after children, and those children relatively free (as befits Halloween). The most important adult figures portrayed in the film are official representatives of the state, but their performance is somewhat ineffective, if not feckless. In continuously sounding the alarm about Michael, Dr. Loomis comes closest to embodying Schmitt's sovereign. But he cannot prevent his charge from escaping from the Smith's Grove Sanitarium, and he only catches up with Michael after his murder spree. Loomis does save Laurie from certain death, but only after she repeatedly fights back on her own, and, during a final struggle, she unmasks the killer, giving the psychiatrist a clear

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shot. And, of course, the discovery that Michael's body has disappeared raises the likelihood that he will continue to terrorize the community.

Laurie's father Sherriff Leigh Brackett (Charles Cyphers) is even less helpful in responding to Michael's mayhem. When Loomis warns the sheriff about Michael's encroaching threat, Brackett simply dismisses his fears: 'Nothing's going on. Just kids playing pranks, trick or treating, parking, getting high.' But his assessment that Haddonfield is still in a normal state is disastrously wrong, an error that leads to tragedy when Michael kills the sheriff's daughter Annie (Nancy Kyes). The compromised nature of the state is further conveyed by Michael seizing Loomis's state-issued station wagon and using it to cruise for prey. At one point, after Michael enters the vehicle, the camera pauses, ironically, on the state seal and 'for official use only' warning embossed on the door.

Beyond these suggestions that *Halloween's* suburban life is under duress, the film also plays with the idea of the exception—that the holiday ushers in a suspension of society's normal rules. The film's bloody exposition and its subsequent violent action fifteen years later both take place on Oct. 31st, suggesting that the date itself connotes a threat of violence and disorder. The movie is also dense with the signature elements of the holiday: the energy (and borderline lawlessness) of children roaming the streets, illuminated pumpkins, costumes representing monsters and the dead, and even trick or treating that 'carries with it a threat' (Paul, 2004, p. 322). In one scene a boy named Tommy (Brian Andrews) is harassed by three boys who surround him, push him to the ground (crushing a pumpkin he is carrying) and warn him that Halloween is a special night when "the boogeyman" will be coming to get him. This threat is immediately confirmed: after the bullies disperse, Michael surreptitiously follows Tommy home.

These elements and scenes remind us that we are in a distinctive, idiosyncratic state, a sense reinforced by the absence of parents, the mysterious status of Michael (who is almost intangible—sometimes spotted by the Haddonfield residents and sometimes missed), and the overall odd vibes of the town. While set in Illinois, the movie was filmed in southern California, which means that palm trees are visible in some scenes and the neighborhood plants are both flowering and remarkably green—odd conditions for the fall in a supposedly midwestern state. As Kim Newman notes, despite its surface normality, '*Halloween* seems to be set…in a poetic fantasy world, somewhere between the B picture and the fairy tale, where different natural laws obtain' (Newman, 2011, p. 201).

Indeed, the film suggests several ways in which Michael's power is uniquely tied to the holiday. Michael seems to kill only on Halloween, and he is able to travel easily through Haddonfield wearing gas station coveralls and an unusual white mask, attire that would surely raise questions on an ordinary night. But the holiday 'facilitates Myers's elusiveness and the vulnerability of his victims by virtue of the fact that it is a night for masks and pranks' (Rogers, 2003, p. 144).

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The killer's association with the holiday is so strong that when Laurie wrests the mask from his face, he pauses his murderous assault to put it back on, giving Loomis a chance to open fire. Michael seems to need an 'alternative persona tied to the mythic space of Halloween' and is 'dependent on the holiday for his power' (Leeder, 2022, p. 69). The connection between Michael and Oct. 31 is also unintentionally captured by Laurie, who tells Tommy, one of the children she is babysitting, that the 'boogeyman can only come out on Halloween.' Her intended reassurance only serves to underscore the terrible peril they all face.

Schmitt tells us that establishing an enemy is the foundation of our political identity and a community's cohesion. In *Halloween,* we know from the film's first scenes that Michael Myers is an existential threat after he murders his sister. As Leeder notes, in contrast with other horror slashers with 'whodunit elements… [in *Halloween*,] beyond the opening sequence, the identity of the killer is never in doubt' (Leeder, 2022, p. 15). But even though Michael's specific identity and name is known, Loomis, Sherriff Brackett, Laurie, and the other residents of Haddonfield struggle to locate and neutralize him, underscoring the importance of the friend and foe distinction, and the terrible consequences if a community forsakes or mishandles this responsibility.

In this regard, Michael is an especially vexing foe for several reasons. To begin with, the relaxed norms of Halloween make it harder to discern malevolence from more innocent pranks. When the headstone of Michael's sister goes missing the cemetery caretaker blames it on 'Goddamn kids. They'll do anything on Halloween.' But in fact, Michael has uprooted the grave and eventually uses the tombstone as a kind of ritualistic calling card at the scene of a double murder.

Moreover, as noted, as a masked figure on Halloween, Michael's menace is both normalized and misunderstood. At the start of the film, a six-year-old Michael dresses up as a clown. This move simultaneously obscures his threat (to his sister), and alerts the audience to his terrible purpose as we observe Michael's movements from his rapacious point of view, with 'a masking effect over the camera' (Leeder, 2022, p. 7). Fifteen years later, he dons his ominous white mask and stolen garage coverall outfit, 'a familiar enough disguise to allow Myers to elude detection' (Rogers, 2003, p. 113). His true nature as a serial killer is concealed, and he blends in with the innocent trick or treaters. When Sherriff Brackett suggests that they should warn 'the radio and TV stations' to report on Michael's escape and likely threat to Haddonfield, Loomis pragmatically dismisses the suggestion: 'If you do they'll be seeing him everywhere, on every street corner, in every house.'

In one scene, Michael further confuses his status as an enemy by donning a sheet with eyeholes, an impromptu ghost costume that allows him to get physically close to Laurie's friend Lynda, who mistakes the killer for her boyfriend. Her confusion, prompted

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by Michael's double disguise, leads to her murder. The monster hides within another monster, concealing his threat and our true foe.

Even when Laurie discerns Michael, she has difficulty judging whether he is real or a kind of phantasm. In one sequence she briefly sees him peering at her from behind a set of sheets flapping on a clothesline. But when she looks again, he has vanished. 'Laurie is unsure what she is seeing, or even if she is seeing anything' (Leeder, 2022, p. 45). This theme is also captured when Tommy repeatedly expresses his fears about the 'boogeyman,' a threat dismissed by Laurie ('There's nobody out there') and mocked by his classmates. The audience is aware of the relentless menace headed to Haddonfield, but the community itself doesn't discern the danger until it is too late. Schmitt tells us that the 'high points of politics are…the moments in which the enemy is, in concrete clarity, recognized as the enemy' (1996, p. 67). The climax of *Halloween* occurs when Laurie unmasks Michael, revealing his human form, and temporarily leaving him exposed and vulnerable.

In summary, *Halloween* reflects several elements of Schmitt's diagnosis of liberal states that believe themselves to be politically robust but are actually failing. Such political communities have neglected the true calling of politics—a focus on the friend and enemy distinction and a recognition that the exception is at hand (and must be addressed). Just beyond Haddonfield's groomed lawns, Michael Myers lurks. The state's failure to contain him as a dangerous juvenile has come back to haunt the community when he returns, years later, as an even more dangerous adult. But the Illinois suburb cannot even find Michael Myers, never mind prevent his rampage. Simultaneously, the film's characters mistake the ominous nature of the Halloween holiday as something more banal.

Within this context, the community's official agents are largely impotent against Michael's havoc, and even Laurie's improvised self-defense seems to be inadequate, highlighting the ongoing vulnerability of political orders that do not face up to their core responsibilities. The film's closing montage shows us a sequence of the (now empty) locations Michael has previously "haunted" with his steady breaths filling our ears and enveloping each shot. The effect is to suggest both that Michael is still alive and that he could be anywhere within the community. As Carpenter explains in the commentary accompanying a 2003 release of the film 'he's not only gone, he's everywhere' (Smith, 2003). The enemy cannot be wholly divorced from the community that fears him. As Leeder elaborates, 'Irrespective of his embodied physicality, [Michael] has undergone a ghostlike diffusion into the very atmosphere of Haddonfield, his town, and perhaps Halloween itself . . . his holiday' (Leeder, 2022, p. 54).

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Finally, *Halloween* reflects Schmitt's ideas insofar as the particulars of the friend and enemy distinction are primal, emotional, and empirical, rather than logical or strategic. Clearly, Michael is a genuine existential threat to many of the residents of Haddonfield. Nevertheless, his motives and targets are somewhat unfathomable. For Schmitt, our enemy is simply 'the *other*, the stranger' an entity who 'is existentially different and foreign in a particularly intense way' and whose nature drives us into conflict. When Brackett insists that Myers wouldn't mutilate a dog ('A man wouldn't do that…'), Loomis bluntly responds 'He isn't a man.' At the same time Reynold Humphries interprets Michael's insistence on masking as his refusal 'to become the object of the other's look, to recognize the other [his foes] as having the same rights and desires as himself' (Humphries, 2002, p. 140; see also Heller-Nichols, 2019, p. 116).

Analysis

This essay has drawn on the political philosophy of Carl Schmitt to make the case that the Halloween holiday uniquely explores our historic fears about the breakdown of political communities, especially by considering whether our social cohesion is dependent upon the presence of a discernible enemy. Ernest Mathjis captures these ideas when he notes that

> Halloween tests the boundaries of a community's sense of togetherness and its ability to recognize strangers and predators. Through dressing up we check our capacity to tell true danger from fake scares, and to signal both our friendliness and test that of others—if we can be recognized as friendly even when we wear a mask we must be in good company (2009).

While this essay traces these concepts through a single case study, we can find them recurring in other cinematic depictions of our Halloween traditions. Thus, Stan Winston's *Pumpkinhead* (1988) follows the narrative arc of Ed Harley (Lance Henriksen), who summons a monstrous creature to enact vengeance on a group of teenagers who negligently kill his young son. While not explicitly set on Halloween, the film features a title scene set amidst bonfire flames, an agricultural setting, omnipresent burning candles, an 'old pumpkin patch graveyard,' and a spell-casting witch. *Pumpkinhead's* central action occurs during a single night in which conventions are set aside (instead of burying his deceased son, Harley seeks supernatural revenge) and the line between the living and dead is erased (as the 'demon' Pumpkinhead is summoned from the grave to destroy the offending teens). The film returns to the centrality of the friend and enemy distinction

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insofar as it pits the murderous 'city folks' against the rural 'hill people,' who summon the titular monster to destroy their foes.[3] Ultimately it becomes clear that under the terms of the black magic Harley has invoked, he can only survive if the teens perish, and vice versa. We find similar themes (and Halloween imagery) in *Pet Sematary* (1989), and the *Scream* franchise (especially *Scream VI* which takes place explicitly on Halloween).

Interpreting Halloween as a night of exception when we reflect upon our relationship with existential enemies offers up several intellectual returns. First, it helps us find continuity across the varied traditions that make up the holiday across two millennia: from Samhain to Guy Fawkes Day to colonial America to the present. Of course, Halloween 'has managed to survive for nearly 2,000 years' because of its adaptability to 'people's constantly changing' social and psychological needs (Bannatyne, 1990, p. 16). As indicated, there are many Halloweens, and Schmitt's framework does not capture any number of important historical currents and cultural influences that make up today's practices and beliefs. For example, while some Halloween costumes convey our interest in probing social and political anxieties, others merely transmit the cultural zeitgeist, often with a wink and a nod. Dressing up as a ballerina, a hobo, or a rock star is more about playing with identity or (perhaps ironic) aspiration than delineating friends and enemies.[4]

But over the years, Halloween's darker and more threatening elements have been consistently imprinted by two ideas: the holiday is limited to a single day or festive span, which is distinctively charged by the presence of dangerous spirits or forces that oppose a community and its way of life. In this way, thinking about the links between Halloween and Schmitt's philosophical critique of liberalism offer us a more specific approach than merely attributing the holiday's power and popularity to our 'shifting social and political anxieties' (Rogers, 2003, p. 21).

Second, my argument helps us decipher the puzzle of our ongoing fascination with a holiday that celebrates darkness, death, and horror. Halloween is not merely a $12 billion commercial celebration, but a cultural expression of our fears, and specifically our worry that our social order conceals a barely suppressed enmity between groups, and a yearning for what Schmitt called 'the existential negation of the enemy.' Christine Hume argues that the film *Halloween* gave birth to the popularity of 'slashers'—movies focused on the victimization of 'sexually active teenagers, and especially young women'—as a response to 'frantic anxieties about an ostensibly real danger: the sexual predator' who lurks unseen in our neighborhood and preys on our children (Hume, 2019). As she puts it,

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[3] The creature's distinctive power in rooting out the community's foes is captured by a children's folk song which warns us to 'Keep away from Pumpkinhead unless you're tired of living/His enemies are mostly dead, he's mean and unforgiving.'

[4] Traditions like Halloween block parties are more reminiscent of ancient celebrations that sought to bring a community together and joyfully celebrate the fall than anything expressed by Schmitt.

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'Halloween is, in some sense, a holiday *about* this fear, when we struggle to define our own humanity by feeling around its edges.'

Before concluding, I consider a number of objections that might be made against this project. First, one might note that Halloween is hardly the only holiday associated with a suspension of the prevailing norms. Scholars have long documented the variety of holidays, festivals, and commemorations that celebrate a departure from the normal, often with a utopian longing for something completely different in human affairs. To cite just one example, Mikhail Bakhtin identifies the pre-Lenten 'Carnival' celebrations as involving a 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order' including a 'suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions' (1984, p. 10; see also Claeys and Sargent, 1999).

But Halloween's night of exception is unusual in several ways. To begin with, the holiday is fundamentally at odds with the status quo. Thanksgiving's annual commemoration of family gatherings, national unity, and what Lincoln called the bounties and 'blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies' (1863) is designed to reinforce existing institutions and conventional practices. In contrast, Halloween is 'a celebration based on pranks, reversals, and the ritual suspension of propriety' (Skal, 2002, p. 153). As noted, some of the holiday's 'underground' and rebellious spirit comes from its diffuse, democratic, and localized roots.

Moreover, Halloween's night of exception is distinctive insofar as it explores and even celebrates fear. While a holiday like Mardi Gras 'plays with hierarchical relationships' (Clark, 2005, p. 198), and captures some of the subversive and convention-challenging aspects of Oct. 31, it emphasizes joyful, bacchanalian pleasures and performances. In contrast, during Halloween, adults expose 'young children to matters usually [considered] age inappropriate, such as death, evil, and things taboo and horrifying' (Clark, 2005, p. 186).

As a consequence, while other holidays generally urge us to extend their (perhaps exaggerated) themes and values throughout the rest of the year, Halloween's night of lurking malevolence is meant to be contained within its boundaries. Politicians, relatives, and priests are likely to urge us to prolong, respectively, the patriotism celebrated on July 4, the gratitude of Thanksgiving, and reverence of Christmas. But Halloween's end provides a kind of social relief through closure. On November 1, our day of exuberant anarchy, terror, and congress with the dead comes to an abrupt, discrete close.

Exploring the links between the political philosophy of Carl Schmitt and Halloween raises a second concern: does my argument imply that the holiday is somehow anti-liberal and, if so, what is the evidence for this proposition?

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As we have seen, Schmitt is a blunt critic of constitutional liberalism, arguing that societies built on liberal precepts suffer from political divisions and legal deficiencies that make them intellectually incoherent and ripe for collapse. He urges us to replace these regimes with a strong, unified sovereign who will focus the state's energies on protecting the nation from its domestic and foreign enemies and restoring order when the rule of law breaks down or otherwise compromises our security. Such an approach is necessarily anti-liberal in discrediting the equal political and legal worth of every citizen, evincing disdain for pluralism, and supporting a political structure in which a single decision maker is vested with nearly unlimited power.

But this essay is based on applying an analogic rather than literal reading of Schmitt as a basis for comprehending Halloween. The German philosopher's anti-liberalism does not obviously extend to a holiday that otherwise reflects some of his ideas. As indicated, Halloween, both in its antecedent and present forms, does gesture to implied critiques of the status quo, especially by recognizing our fears in the face of superordinate natural and supernatural forces. But even those elements of Halloween that celebrate its darker and more entropic elements are consistent with the basic principles of constitutional liberalism for any number of reasons.

To begin with, Halloween represents a single night of exception. Thus, even to the extent it conjures 'taboo and horrifying' elements, these expressions are necessarily cabined, with the implication that for the rest of the year, the prevailing social order and its life-affirming values will be sustained. Scholars like Ryan and Kellner note that horror is often a *conservative* genre to the extent that it aspires to a *status quo ante*, and the restoration of traditional community structures and conventional mores (1998, pp. 179, 181). Schmitt anticipates that the exception will constantly threaten to occupy our political center stage. But by limiting Halloween to a single night, society strengthens the default power of the normal. We arguably see this in the movie *Halloween* insofar as the film's closing scenes establish both the end of the holiday, and Michael Myers's failure to destroy Laurie, the film's protagonist.

Halloween is consistent with liberalism in other ways. Today's holiday invites individual expression and even pluralism through diverse (and personally chosen) costume choices. The de-centered, non-institutionalized nature of the holiday does not require an active state, or somehow imply a longing for national greatness at the expense of others. Even those cultural expressions of the holiday that depict communities under siege (such as *Halloween* or *Pumpkinhead*) do not find their solutions in the form of powerful sovereigns, but instead look to plucky and resourceful individuals such as Laurie Strode. In this sense, Halloween's night of exception is more anarchic or libertarian than statist.

In short, while Carl Schmitt offers us the sovereign as a response to the tensions and inconsistencies in contemporary liberal orders, Halloween provides, instead, a single day celebrating our contradictions: a holiday that simultaneously embraces 'the sacred

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and the profane, order and lawlessness, the mainstream and the marginalized' (Skal, 2002, p. 153).

Conclusion

Every October 31, the costumes we wear, the decorations we put up, and the entertainment we consume, reflect our persistent interest in revealing enemies who speak to our fears, at least for a night. Understood in this way, the holiday is certain to retain its power, as a commercial enterprise, a welcome escape from the routine (for children and adults alike), and a touchstone for our twenty-first century political anxieties. In our current environment of low political trust, crumbling belief in a wide range of institutions, and misgivings about basic democratic procedures, Halloween will continue to draw us in, providing a relatively unthreatening prompt to reflect on the limits of social order. As Skal elaborates, 'As American communities become more transient and impersonal, more virtual than visceral, and as civic participation wanes at all levels, the appeal of Halloween rituals may not be so mysterious after all' (Skal, 2002, p. 121). The ascendance of 'negative partisanship'—political identity based on dislike (and even hatred) of an out group—strikes a chord with Schmitt's preoccupation with the friend and enemy distinction and Halloween's explorations of the same theme. For all these reasons, we might safely conclude that Halloween is our most political of holidays, and one that rudely pulls the mask off our polite personas, revealing the horror, fear, and unease that courses through so much of today's public and private life.

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ISSN: 2057-2301

Jack-o'-lanterns, will-o'-the-wisps, and *ignis fatuus*: Making sense of ghost lights

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For several hundred years, ghost lights have been a common part of our phantasmagorical folk history and stories, appearing in various mundane and spectral forms to mischievously lead unfortunate souls towards their mortal ends. Curiously though, and over the last century, ghost light sightings have practically disappeared throughout Europe and North America, leading many to question, where did all the ghost lights go? While urbanisation has altered many (super)natural habitats, and left them uninhabitable to ghost lights, the term ghost light is itself profoundly misleading, as it is far from a singular (other)worldly entity, and instead represents a variety of magical creatures and secular-material phenomena, including will-o'-the-wisps, jack-o'-lanterns, foxfires, and *ignis fatuus* etc. Yet, while ghost lights may have been ontologically extirpated from the West, they seem to be thriving in other global regions, while increasingly pervading popular culture via Halloween rituals and common metaphors.

Key Words: Ghost light, Will-o'-the-wisp, *ignis fatuus*, marsh gas, secular-material, hallucination.

The world is full of terrifying tall tales, whether real or imagined, often warning weary travellers to be careful while traversing nocturnal, gloomy and unholy environments, lest they meet their unfortunate ends. While no doubt wise words well followed, there are serious philosophical questions that must be asked about whether such strange stories are the veridical accounts of peculiar phantasmagorical pests, or the mental musings of fabulist minds misconstructing risky mundane matter as malevolent spectral phenomena. One group of entities that continues to attract intense attention is the ghost light, which refers to malicious nocturnal luminary phenomena (Trevelyan, 2010), believed to actively lure individuals into suffering or their demise (Briggs, 1976). Rather curiously, ghost lights are a pantheon of (im)material entities with different sizes, features, capabilities, and personalities, albeit with a seeming preference for perpetuating mischief and suffering. As Zalasiewicz, (2007, p. 20) commented, this 'fleeting apparition…has gathered more names than many a more solid creature' (Zalasiewicz, 2007, p. 20), with some of the most popular being will-o'-the-wisp, *ignis fatuus*, jack-o'-lantern, peggy with a lantern, orbs, friar's lantern, jenny lantern, spunkie, foxfire, hinkypunk and hobby lantern, amongst others (Allies, 1846; Woolford, 2006). Even our Halloween celebrations using carved jack-o'-lanterns draw on several otherworldly folk tales about ghost lights (DeWire, 2013).

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While ghost light stories have been told since at least 1340 (Sikes, 1879), it is difficult to find an area within our musical, theatrical, and literary culture that has not been haunted by these curious entities. Some of the most noteworthy mentions come from Milton (1667), Shakespeare (1597), Tolkien (1995), the BBC (Spargo, 1981), Pixar (Lasseter, 2006; Andrews & Chapman, 2012), and the Pet Shop Boys (2020), etc. As ghost lights progressively pervade modern media, we are continually invited to digitally engage with these spectral forms in movies, computer games, social media and literature (Astle, 1999; Burge, 1998). Yet, in an increasingly technoscientific age (Partridge, 2005), it is easy to sceptically relegate all such spectral sightings to misguided sensory perception, and/or the erroneous notions of a pre-scientific mind steeped in superstition rather than secular-materialism. Problematically though, should we epistemologically extirpate ghost lights in this way, we might do a profound disservice to over several hundred years of relatively common eyewitness sightings of ghost lights.

Although much ink has been spilt over the nature of ghost lights, and whether they are better positioned as mundane or supernatural phenomena, it must be said that Western ghost light sightings have all but disappeared over the past hundred years (Zalasiewicz, 2007). This is particularly strange when we consider the wide variety of natural and spectral phenomena listed as ghost lights. Consequently, we are left ruminating on a particularly thorny question, i.e., where did all the ghost lights go? By asking this troublesome question, it is of course necessary to walk over well-trodden spoilt ground, and in so doing, overview a hotch-potch of past and present beliefs. While also being mindful that the world has been very different at times, especially in relation to how we lived, illuminated the night, travelled, and just as importantly, regulated our environment.

To help us start to understand the ontological nature of ghost lights, the following section examines ‘a supernatural perspective’ drawing out several salient otherworldly depictions, emphasising that ghost lights might be better categorised as a disparate group of semi-connected entities rather than a single spectral form. Following this we will temporarily reject the supernatural and turn our attention to ‘embracing the mundane’ to consider ghost lights as nothing more than poorly understand everyday secular matter. After this, we will turn our gaze to the future and speculate on: ‘what next for ghost light scholarship?’ Finally, the ‘discussion and conclusions’ will be presented, highlighting contributions to the literature, and areas for further research.

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A Supernatural Perspective

For those willing to embrace the supernatural, the cosmos is a rich otherworldly affair, replete with devils, demons, and everything in between. Of course, what is meant by supernatural often varies in line with different ethnometaphysical cultural perspectives, but for simplicity is: 'of or relating to an order of existence beyond the visible observable universe *especially*: of or relating to God or a god, demigod, spirit, or devil' or 'departing from what is usual or normal especially so as to appear to transcend the laws of nature' (Merriam-Webster, 2024). More simply, and from a common-sense perspective, supernatural usually means ghouls and ghosts, neither measurable nor explainable by the natural sciences. More broadly, although it is frequently argued that the natural sciences are secularising the world and have thus reduced otherworldly phenomena to phantasmagorical stories (Pasulka & Kripal, 2014), we should remember that many still hold that the supernatural is real, and just as importantly, that it can explain experiences outside of our perceptual understanding (Halman, 2010). Having said this, while the supernatural is usually framed as immaterial, many still believe that we can see all types of eerie oddities from beyond the grave.

If we wish to understand ghost lights as an otherworldly phenomenon, we must consider how these ephemeral entities have been described by eyewitness accounts over the past centuries, even if we might doubt their veracity at times. Taking this approach, we can start to draw out how ghost lights look, how they behave, and just as importantly, what we can discern about their personalities. Looking explicitly at their common perceptible characteristics, they tend to be described as 'blue or bluish-yellow' orbs, typically floating near the ground, being cold in appearance, and either standing 'still for minutes at a time' or moving 'from place to place' (Zalasiewicz, 2007, p. 21). While there can be variation in colour, size, and behaviour, nearly all ghost lights are depicted as malevolent, either seeking to extinguish life, or teasing and tormenting (Blakeborough, 1898). Ontologically, though, we must reflect on whether a ghost light is just that, i.e., a luminous immaterial ghost? (Briggs, 1976). In other words, as Gritzner (2019, p. 11) asked: 'Are all unexplained luminous features ghost lights?' Problematically, if the only requirements are to be 'unexplained' and 'luminous' then any phenomena matching these loose criteria should be considered ghost lights. However, we very much doubt that this can be considered correct, as a myopic individual watching any of us rambling through an eerie evening with our illuminated phones would likely conclude that we are some sort of ghastly ghost.

Turning our attention to some of the more common types of ghost lights, we come to corpse candles, which appear to show no consciousness, and while they do not

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interact directly with humans, typically indicate impending doom by appearing around households where death is imminent (Croker, 1882). Although a corpse candle is certainly luminary, and usually yellow in colour, thus showing some perceptual similarity with ghost lights, at worst they give a warning about the future, and are probably best considered morally neutral. For the sceptical amongst us, it is interesting to note that corpse candles were often seen carried in shrouded hands, leading us to speculate on whether their bearers were just those engaged in ritualistic practices associated with infirmity, death and disease, and thus sit outside of a supernatural ontology in entirety (Walhouse, 1984).

Reflecting on more immoral forms of ghost lights, we come to spunkies which are believed to be 'the souls of unbaptized children, doomed to wander until Judgement Day' (Palmer, 1972, p. 244). In this case, we see a clear religious process by which ghost lights come into being, i.e., the failure to baptise youngsters breaching the eschatological mandate to protect children from an eternity of suffering. As is often the case with otherworldly histories, rituals and stories often bleed into each other, mixing once distinct elements, into common tales. We see this with the term 'spunkies,' which have multiple characteristics and stories, ranging from being 'the souls of unbaptized children', to ephemeral jack-o'-lanterns, i.e., will-o'-the-wisps luring unfortunate mortals into marshlands, alongside being drawn on in modern rituals to ward off evil and celebrate Halloween. With regards to will-o'-the-wisps, which may or may not be spunkies, they tend to be considered the spirits of wicked men who angered both God and the Devil and must spend eternity drifting across sullied watery parts of the Earth, outside of Heaven and Hell (Kittredge, 1900). To add another supernatural storied layer to ghost lights, we also see jack-o'-lanterns being linked to Stingy Jack, a man who spent his life committed to sinful mischief, and attempting to avoid perpetuity in the Inferno, tricked the Devil, and was thus left wandering the Earth with only a lit turnip to accompany him (Hercules, 1851).

Critically, though, not all ghost lights are believed to have a human origin, as suggestions have been made that ghost lights arise from the Devil, who shape shifts to ensnare souls (Allies, 1846). In an even more surprising non-human ghost light claim, Sikes (1879, p. 20) described a ghost light from the USA, saying:

> [It is] a hideous creature five feet in height, with goggle-eyes and huge mouth, its body covered with long hair, and which goes leaping and bounding through the air like a gigantic grasshopper. This frightful apparition is stronger than any man, and swifter than any horse, and compels its victims to follow it into the swamp, where it leaves them to die.

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As we can see, this latter monstrosity has little in common with more common variations of ghost lights, as it differs in characteristic to replace immaterial trickery with brute force. Within itself, it is difficult to see how this 'hideous creature' might be considered a ghost light, other than by inhabiting swamps and harming humans.

Finally, if we position ghost lights as supernatural entities, we should note, that like their biological counterparts, they inhabit specific habitats, which in the case of this ethereal latter are known as mythobiocenes (Beconytė, Eismontaitė, & Žemaitienė, 2014). These mundane environments appear to suit specific phantasmagorical characteristics and personalities, which in the case of ghost lights has them inhabiting contaminated marshy ground, where there is an abundance of still water and decaying matter (Zalasiewicz, 2007). Curiously, though, there is little to suggest that ghost lights have ever been found within fast moving, clean, modern, or industrialised watery areas in the West (Briggs, 1976). When we consider that much of the UK has improved its water quality and decreased the amount of marsh land over the past century, perhaps we should not be surprised that the number of ghost light sightings has rapidly decreased. If for no other reason than we have inadvertently made these spectral habitats uninhabitable for ghost lights.

Moving away from supernatural explanations of ghost lights, the following section explores more mundane reasoning, and the current tendency to embrace a hardened physicalist perspective of the world where all that matters is secular-materialist matter.

Embracing the Mundane

Although the religiously inclined still invite us to imagine ourselves within a supernatural cosmos, the natural sciences continue to undermine otherworldly thinking by providing physicalist accounts of phantasmagorical phenomena. Before going any further, it is worth giving some explanation about what is meant by physicalism, and how the natural sciences might conceptualise a physical cosmos. Simply, the physicalist perspective is that 'everything is physical' and nothing is supernatural (Hellman & Thompson, 1975, p. 552), as Preyer and Siebelt (2001, p. 1) argued:

> …the thesis that to be true in our world is to be couchable in principle by physical means. Furthermore, by means of explanatory adequacy it also implies that truths so couched are explanatory adequate as well. If all truths pertaining to our world are ultimately physical truths, physical science should be able to give us an inventory of the basic constituents of our world…Physical science would have to provide an inventory of perfectly natural properties and relations by which we can

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characterize differences and similarities of all matters of fact as we find them in our world.

Within this totalising cosmological view, physicality accounts for all that there is, including sub-atomic particles, cats, dogs, planets, galaxies, and everything else measurable or more hypothetical (Yolton, 1983). Critically though, this reductive secular-materialist stance (Mills, 2000), allows no space for any supernatural creature or force whatsoever. The aim of science is thus to relegate the supernatural to a bygone time (Saad, 2018), either through depicting eyewitness testimony as fantasies of mind, or nothing more than the simple perceptual misunderstandings of everyday physical processes. As might be expected however, with ghost light sightings having existed for at least several hundred years, dismissing the supernatural element of ghost lightings is not uncontentious, as the challenge for the natural scientist is to adequately provide robust physicalist accounts (Ramsbotham, 1981).

As a starting point, if we take the position that ghost lights are not in any way supernatural, the question quickly becomes, but what are ghost lights then? Unsurprisingly, and reflecting on the previous section, how we answer this question turns on what type of ghost light we are discussing. Just as importantly, whether we can reasonably link known physical phenomenon to historic accounts of ghost light sightings. When we work our way through numerous historic witness testimonies, we see that ghost lights appear in secluded rural environments near bodies of water replete with decaying matter (Briggs, 1976). Also, that ghost lights display a blue-yellow light that lasts between seconds and an hour, and that movement can be several hundred feet horizontally, while staying several feet above the ground (Allies, 1846). Drawing on these descriptions and locations, physicalist explanations have focussed on ghost lights being ball lightning, St Elmo's fire, glow-worms, marsh gas, fireflies, bacteria, and owls (foxfires) (Chambers, 1980; Silcock, 1997). As might be expected, any attempt to provide a natural explanation necessitates testable experiments capable of detailing how a ghost light is a physicalist process at work (Edwards, 2014).

When we consider the rapid advancements in the natural sciences over the past few hundred years, we should not be surprised that our general understanding of the natural world has also increased. In turn, this has led to the pervasive belief that ghost lights are likely to be *ignis fatuus* and thus arise from the spontaneous combustion of decaying organic matter within swamps and marshes (Parker, 1972). Interestingly, this explanation has a relatively long history dating back to the sixteenth century (Ludwig, 1596). While such gases can indeed burn with a blue-yellow flame, therefore matching the general look of a ghost light, this theorisation is troublesome, as these natural floating

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flames should disappear almost instantly, and not float horizontally for minutes, and certainly not up to an hour (Owens, 1891). Having said this, we should show extreme caution in dismissing swamp gasses entirely as a naturalised candidate for ghost lights, as the chemical foundation certainly has merit related to the environment, albeit with more testing still required. When reflecting on the mismatched elements, we do wonder whether tall tales, hallucinations, alcohol consumption, and general desires for perceptive experiences of the supernatural led to some eyewitnesses (un)intentionally embellishing the lifespan and movement of ghost lights.

Turning our attention to whether these otherworldly sightings might have been a consequence of aberrant perception, it seems curious that this issue has received so little attention, particularly when we consider that otherworldly experiences can commonly result from excessive imagination, hallucinations, and visions (Gadit, 2011). For example, should you rub your eyes, it is likely that you will temporarily 'see' bright orbs (phosphenes) (Hartland, Greg & Major, 1902), which might lead you to believe you are seeing ghost lights. Unfortunately, while we find it easy to believe that anyone may fantasise, tell tall tales, or rub their eyes, there is simply no reason for so many individuals to narrate highly similar accounts of ghost light sightings. Also, should we argue that ghost light sightings were likely due to hallucinations and visions, is it not peculiar that these stories were almost always in the same environments and of the same visual nature? Arguably, they should not have been. This is not to say that we are discounting phosphenes, hallucinations, or the use of drugs etc, but more that these explanations seem to be relatively weak for accounting for the totality of ghost light sightings.

Looking at other naturalised explanations for ghost lights, it has been suggested that bioluminescent microorganisms, fungi, and fireflies might be interesting candidates due to their ability to emanate light at night (Ramesh & Meyer-Rochow, 2021). It is hardly a stretch of the imagination to imagine insects emitting light near a swamp, and unintentionally confusing wayward wanderers, who erroneously retell such encounters as a run-in with the supernatural. Following this same line of reasoning, that winged creatures such as owls had brushed against some bioluminescent microbes and had again unintentionally misled those nearby. It must be said that while bioluminescence can produce the blue-yellow colours commonly seen with ghost lights, that there is little to suggest that any of what has so far been described is in anyway a common occurrence to water sources, polluted or otherwise. Furthermore, we would have to wonder why such bioluminescent activity was linked to sullied waters, suddenly stopped, and why erroneous ghost light sightings were not reported in other locations where these insects and creatures tended to more commonly inhabit.

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Although ghost light sightings were prolific until the nineteenth century, current sightings are few and far between, with it seeming that ghost lights have been ontologically extirpated from areas such as the UK, as DeWire (2013, p. 36) argued:

> What possibly was commonplace in the days of yore is uncommon today… Urbanization and artificial light intrudes on the night, and we spend less time in total darkness. So, too, the marshes and fens of old mostly have been drained, for health and agricultural reasons, eliminating much of the sodden muck that breeds wisps [ghost lights]...The chance encounter with fun phantom lights is rare these days.

Consequently, even though there is ongoing interest in scientifically analysing ghost lights, it seems fair to say that scientists have been left without a subject matter to study (Mills, 1980, 2000; Talman, 1932; Zalasiewicz, 2007). This is profoundly unfortunate, as with rapid advancements in portable scientific equipment, much could be learnt by 'capturing' a ghost light, should it have a physical status that would allow such measurements. It is worth saying, however, that we do not believe that all ghost lights could be examined scientifically. For example, the 'goggle eye[d]… gigantic grasshopper' described by Sikes (1879, p. 20) is either a real physical creature, and thus measurable, or is otherwise a fiction of mind, or ethereal entity existing beyond of scientific measurement. As a final point, if physical explanations can be provided for ghost lights, it will fundamentally overhaul how we view ghost lights as immoral entities. This is not to suggest that people have not faced calamity interacting with natural phenomena erroneously positioned as ghost lights, but rather that this would be better considered misfortune rather than conscious malevolence.

Drawing this section to a close, we will now look at how ghost lights still pervade our cultures and are continually reimagined to meet shifting socio-cultural needs.

What Next for Ghost Light Scholarship?

Throughout the previous sections we saw that irrespective of whether ghost lights are natural or supernatural, that they are best considered part of our industrialised Western history rather than present. Or to put it another way, that while ghost lights have disappeared from our natural landscapes, that they have been transformed through popular modern culture, and in this reimagining, no longer pose any meaningful threat near sullied waters or anywhere else. Reminding ourselves that we are story telling apes (Fisher, 1984), committed to swimming the depths of materialism and magic, perhaps we

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should not be surprised that we have created new ghost light stories greatly varying in how much they resemble more historic eyewitness accounts of malevolent otherworldly entities. As we will come to see in this section, this is most noticeable with regards to modern ghost light iterations typically being secular in nature, usually expunged of evil, and if anything, satisfying our desire for linguistic nuance and fabular ritualised play.

Looking first at the relatively minor adoption of ghost light terminology within our common cultural lexicon, it is worth noting the thoughts of Zalasiewicz (2007, p. 21) who said: 'Today, as the will-o'-the-wisp [ghost light], it has evolved into metaphor, sometimes even into adjective, and so its ghost lives on.' We thus see ghost light terminology via will-o'-the wisps transitioning away from a malicious menace into multiple linguistic tools, and in so doing, embodying their elusive, older otherworldly counterparts, being difficult to catch and remaining just out of reach (Buchan, 2013; Gerrard & Kemp, 1993; O'Brien, 2006). Importantly, this linguistic reinterpretation sidesteps much of the historic ghost light immorality altogether, and if anything, suggests that ghost light terminology is almost morally neutral.

When we consider the number of spectral entities captured within the term ghost light, it seems that modern Halloween depictions generally catalyse ongoing safe secular socio-cultural innovations and creativity. While Halloween clearly has a long dendritic and evolving otherworldly history, the present iteration is that of a heavily secularised, and generally family-orientated collection of playful rituals, where diabolical actors may be comically performed, but rarely invoked. Of course, this is not to suggest that we all share a similar view of Halloween, as there are still those embracing the supernatural elements of this event, but more that literal beliefs in the supernatural are no longer a requirement. Without meaning to go over too much well-trodden ground, it must be said that while there seems to be an ever-growing variety of costumes, games, and rituals, that for ghost lights, such aspects tend to be limited to jack-o'-lanterns, which are either based on will-o'-the-wisps or Stingy Jack. Overviewing how jack-o'-lanterns are used in Halloween festivities, we increasingly see pumpkin toys, sweets, clothes, decorations, and costumes routinely being sold to adults, children, and pets. Thus, far from warding off evil entities, or being malevolent supernatural creatures, these newly imagined jack-o'-lanterns are sources of celebration, joy, and socio-cultural memory-making. Broadly speaking, looking at the trajectory of ritualised consumerism, it is difficult to see this secularisation process stopping any time soon, and not encapsulating an ever-greater number of products including Halloween movies, literature and video games. As a small side point, even though digital entertainment is rarely seen as a veridical account of the supernatural, it is worth saying that movies, video games, and even books are also an ongoing source of

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Halloween terror, inviting us all to re-embrace the darker side of years gone by, even if for fleeting frightful fantasies.

Although we have spent much of this paper discussing the disappearance of ghost lights from across Europe and North America, there is some evidence to suggest that ghost lights were not lost from across the globe. Before going any further, we must say that while we are deeply cautious about claiming any water-based spectral light must be a ghost light, we should not be too quick to dismiss potential modern-day ghost sightings in similar mythobiocenes. Such sightings include, for example, Naga fireballs, which are also known as Mekong lights and Phaya Nak lights. Interestingly, Naga fireballs are hardly reticent about showing themselves, as thousands arise from the Mekong River on specific nights of the year, visible for all to see (Biggs, 2011). Curiously though, and unlike their Western ghost light counterparts, which tend to be blueish yellow, Naga fireballs are orange, with supernatural explanations commonly suggesting that they are produced by Naga the semi-divine half snake half human. Critically, though, there is nothing to suggest that Naga fireballs in anyway try to harm humans, and if anything, simply provide a spectacular visual feast during the nighttime. Unsurprisingly, countless natural explanations have also been provided, ranging from machine gun fire to flares, and even the more usual ghost light culprit of flammable swamp gas. It could be argued that while we have lost our ghost lights in the West, that the regular presence of any type of ghost light should be viewed as an exciting opportunity to directly explore the supernatural and scientific basis of these phenomena, and perhaps, even catch a ghost light. As a final comment, we would like to suggest that exploring these alternative ghost lights might have much to offer how we understand our historic eyewitness accounts and may even shed some light on our lost ghost lights in the West.

Discussion and Conclusions

Although ghost lights have been a malevolent curio for several hundred years, it seems fair to say that there is still much to theorise about these (super)natural entities. Simply speaking, we are still very much at sea about whether to position ghost lights as nothing more than mundane physicalist phenomena, or alternatively, if it is better to reject secular-materialism and embrace a world full of immoral spectres committed to harming us all. While we live in an age of technoscientific ‘miracles’ and have increased methodological opportunities to explore the world around us, it is unfortunate that Europe and North America has lost nearly all their ghost lights. As such, it seems that we will be unable to answer key questions about the ontological status of ghost lights, how they exist in the

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world, and just as importantly, whether they are (im)moral entities, at least in the West (Edwards, 2014).

Not surprisingly, the extirpation of ghost lights from the West has raised the question: where did all the ghost lights go? How we answer this question ultimately rests on whether we consider ghost lights to be natural or supernatural phenomena. On the one hand, we may conclude that ghost lights were always natural phenomena, and that their disappearance was due to our cleaning the water ways and improving artificial lighting during the night etc. In other words, that by implementing environmental protection measures within our industrialised nations, that we have reduced the conditions conducive to generating naturalised ghost lights. Alternatively, we might argue that by changing the natural conditions of our water ways, that we unintentionally altered the mythobiocenes of supernatural ghost lights, and by destroying their traditional habitats, resulted in ghost lights retreating from the modern world into the fairy lands themselves (Briggs, 1967; Walhouse, 1984).

Finally, with few to no ghost light sightings in the West, there is only increasing scepticism that earlier accounts should be disregarded as misunderstood natural phenomena, erroneous perception, or the result of an overactive imagination. There is however the possibility of turning our attention to ghost light sightings across the globe, such as the Mekong lights in Thailand. Although we cannot be certain that these perceptual phenomena are truly ghost lights akin to what we historically found in the West, studying global variants may have much to offer in how theorise ghost lights in general. This is particularly the case when we consider that even UK-based ghost light sightings suggested profound variations in perceptible characteristics and personalities. Also, that it raised the troublesome question, about whether the term ghost light is a reasonable or particularly useful ‘catch all’ term for these (super)natural phenomena? Again, with no available ghost light subject matter in the West, it seems unlikely that this question will be answered anytime soon.

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Memoirs of a Halloween Enthusiast

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Halloween is growing in popularity in the United Kingdom. This is a personal reflection on the importance of Halloween as a tradition on both an individual and community level, based on memories of Halloween from childhood into adulthood. It proposes that in popular culture Halloween can be read as increasingly removed from the religious or the spiritual. On an individual basis that can be experienced as a secular ritual centred around performance, dress up and adopted alternative personas.

Key Words: Halloween; tradition; childhood; memories; imagination

My first memories of Halloween are not my own. They are taken from *Eerie Indiana* (1991-93), *Hocus Pocus* (1993) and other American imports, with a pinch of the animation that accompanied Modest Mussorgsky's 'St John's Night on Bald Mountain' (1867) in Disney's *Fantasia* (1940). (I am aware that St John's Eve is in June, but my younger self did not have Google). Growing up first in Kenya, then Jordan, before moving back to the United Kingdom before I had started school, I am not sure I had a clear sense of my cultural identity. For a child who vividly remembers visiting the tomb where John the Baptist was beheaded, and the guide describing the gush of gore across the walls and floor, Halloween seemed like a good tradition on which to hang my pointed hat, or devil's horns. Alongside this, I was brought up atheist, so standard festivities were not imbued with faith. I quickly grew out of Father Christmas and the Tooth Fairy, though I played along for my younger sister.

Where an element of belief seemed integral to many of my childhood traditions, either of a deity or a supernatural entity, Halloween seemed to be about make-believe and performance. It was fancy dress, face paint, glamour: houses and themed parties lit like a stage, where the shadows they created added to the make-believe atmosphere. The Halloween I saw on the screen made it clear that those who partook did not truly believe in vampires, and witches, and werewolves. The revellers might have been connecting with earlier folklore and myth, but it was at a remove; the pleasure coming from being someone else for a night, a darker and/or better version of yourself. Even when the narrative lapsed into actual instances of the supernatural, notably in *Hocus Pocus*, I still knew that witches were not real - much as I wanted them to be. Despite not believing, I was a child who took the ritual of dressing up very seriously.

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I never wanted to be a princess. Halloween was the perfect outlet for this. The appeal of Disney was in the bad guys – Ursula, the Wicked Queen and, beyond compare, Maleficent. On a family holiday in Wales, I met a girl who had been to the Disney shop and bought the official fancy dress. My first question was if they stocked Maleficent's outfit. They did not. Disappointed, I asked to see my new friend's Jasmine costume. Lovely as I thought she looked, I complained to my mum later that the quality was shocking – nylon and polyester? Where was the silk, the satin, the velvet? What was the point of dressing up if you could not get as close to the real thing as possible? The verisimilitude disintegrated up close, the illusion broken. The spell of Halloween demanded commitment and attention to detail. And I was committed. Cheap plastic fangs appeased me for one year only, before I realised that individual ones gave a far better effect. My capes were velvet. My dresses lace. I was not to be fobbed off with cheap face paint, squeezed into paper wrapped tubes, that was offered to children at fancy dress shops. Later, my mum started face painting, and she took me to a professional theatrical make-up shop to buy supplies. Here I learnt how to apply the pale glow of the vampire without looking chalky and caked-on. (Years before the Cullens taught us to sparkle [Spooner, 2013, pp. 146-64].)

Unfortunately, rural Lincolnshire in the nineties was not the destination for trick-or-treating. The knocks at the door were few and far between, and the container of sweets I insisted my parents kept in the porch were mainly eaten by my sister and me. During primary school, I persuaded my best friend and her brother to dress up and join in. After dark, we walked around our town, knocking on doors where we were met with confusion, grumpiness and the odd beneficence of candy. As an adult, I'm more sympathetic to not wanting strange children banging on my door, but at the time I was disappointed that people would not play along. In my mind, I overlayed the scene with a fantastical version of the streets I walked - here every house had a shining pumpkin-beacon outside, and lawns were littered with fake gravestones; ghosts hung from the trees and cobwebs entwined the bushes. My friends in the USA and Australia still send me pictures of the decorations around their community.

Even at a young age, I sensed that the resistance to Halloween practices such as trick-or-treating were due to the perception that they were American imports and watered down British cultural practices. More recently, there seems to be a growing sense that Halloween, or Samhain or All Hallow's Eve, is a practice that is making an uncanny return – or perhaps revival – to British Shores. There are multiple articles on academic and popular news sites that trace the history of both the celebration itself and the traditions

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associated with it.[1] I am conscious that for many people Halloween has a significant religious or spiritual element. However, my engagement with Halloween does not exist in the religious or research paradigm. Instead, it lies with the modern, lived experience of this tradition – the thing I do. Although the pictures of carved turnips are far creepier than vibrant pumpkin, I prefer not to look too closely in case the whole conceit falls apart; I leave my academic robes at the door in preference for a satin cape. I tend to believe, from an unscholarly position, that rituals are kept alive through action. Debating historical semantics or the writings of the Venerable Bede gets in the way of applying eyeliner and mixing a suitably themed drink. As a literature scholar, fictional narratives appeal and if the storyline is compelling, I am happy to play along. Though I admit I remain a purist in one area only: for all the wonderful things that American Halloween has spawned, I believe that Halloween fancy dress must be spooky – superheroes are not suitable Halloween costumes, except for Batman and Catwoman (the Michelle Pfeiffer version). Traditions, it appears, makes pedants of us all.

From thwarted childhood spookiness, my university experience allowed my love of Halloween to flourish on multiple levels. In the early noughties, university students revelled in a chance to dress up and get drunk. Here also, my annual tradition could translate into my research. From BA to doctorate research, monsters crawled from my computer screen in the essays I typed. Years, and a few depressive episodes later, my therapist asked me why I was interested in vampires, werewolves and other monsters. I had given this a lot of thought. As someone who still has a childlike idealism, being good and kind matters to me. Monsters were a way of exploring what evil means without the jarring presence of reality. Just as evil spirits, devils and demons reinforce the morality and goodness of religious faith, creatures of the night gave me a blueprint of what not to be. However, since I did not believe in them, I could more easily explore and dismiss the out-of-date morality that surrounded them. Historical anxieties surrounding sexuality could be identified, contextualised and rejected.

At the same time, there was a vicarious thrill in reading about monstrous acts committed without guilt. Halloween is a time to play with this possibility. For one night a year, I can imagine what it would be like to embrace darkness. To not give a damn, and robe myself with the carefree cool that it brings – a modern-day Bacchanalia with a dollop of Bakhtinian carnivalesque. And in the morning, I can wipe away the fake blood and know that none of it was real. As I've got older, and my celebrations more muted, Halloween offers other ways to play against type and enjoy myself guilt-free. I am, in

[1] The popularity can be seen through a quick glance at *The Conversation* where academia and journalism come together. Articles range from those looking at 'How was Halloween invented?' (Owens, 2022) to wondering about the copyright implications of dressing up as your favourite character (Potter, 2023).

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general, a millennial mother against plastic. But as spooky season approaches, like a child, I am entranced by the decorations offered even though I know they'll only be seen for less than a month and many will end up in the bin. A small rebellion against decency and decorum it may be, but I am a middle-class, nearly middle-aged suburbanite far removed from the decadence of youth. (This is the one time of the year where I will not be drawn into discussions about consumerism and capitalism. My love for this season is too visceral and vulnerable; I'm scared the magic will be stripped away).

The Halloweens of my twenties and early thirties were more easily filled with spooktacular fun. In the background I heard the murmurs of bubbling enthusiasm. Beyond myself, new traditions were (re)formed and (re)created. I started a family and bought a Dracula-themed counting book. My twin sons are four years old now. They know that monsters are not real, but they also know it is fun to pretend. They like the bad guys, and their bookshelf is lined with stories of bats, vampires, werewolves, and ghosts. From the 1st of October to 31st December, they can watch *A Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) every day. This year, I might even show them *The Addams Family* (1991). Since they've been born, I have been able to relive the Halloween of my childhood, but this time I am not alone. My children are caught up in the magic, and for all of us, it is reflected in the shop window dressings, and the overflowing containers of pumpkins in the supermarket, and the cornucopia of ghostly activities taking place throughout October. It seems the spirit of Halloween has returned from the dead.

Last year, on the way to nursery, we counted pumpkins outside houses and watched as oversized spiders crawled up houses alongside ghostly window decorations. On the night itself, my partner was put on trick-or-treater duty, handing out candy in my mini cauldron. The twins and I donned our outfits and ventured into the night. It was the first time they had been old enough to trick-or-treat, and the first time I had done so since being a child. I steeled myself for childhood disappointment. Instead, around a corner, near the park, were streets filled with witches, pumpkins, fairies and myriad supernatural beings. Candles and twinkling lights beckoned us to doorways where our cries of 'Trick or Treat?' were greeted with enthusiasm and, most importantly, sweeties. The adults smiled and chatted and agreed what fun this had been, and how nice it was to see the children having a lovely time. But, if you will allow my imagination to wander, I think I saw just as much joy in their eyes. And for me, overreaction it may be, but oh! I was a child again. Bad memories exorcised as I delighted in sharing a ritual I love with so many other people. The magic of tradition is amplified in community. Buckets overflowing with treats, we returned to find the cauldron in our house was empty. Even Lincolnshire has embraced this tradition with giant inflatable monsters decorating the cathedral city of Lincoln (Coyle, 2023). I don't believe in the supernatural, but I do believe in the

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enchantment of fancy dress, face paint and glamour, the closest thing to fey magic. And if you believe hard enough, perhaps dreams – or should that be nightmares – really do come true.

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ISSN: 2057-2301

"We sell Hell, so suffer well!": Exploring 'positive' pathogenic possession

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For the diabolical and righteous alike, the Devil has spent an eternity corrupting Creation and tempting the world into eternal damnation. While terrifying tales are often told about the Dark Lord forcefully possessing the minds and bodies of unfortunate souls, little is known about those who willingly embrace pathogenic possession to achieve 'positive' outcomes in this life and the next. As such, this unholy ethnography explicates how several demonic acolytes use the Devil as a malevolent self-making 'catalyst', and in so doing, attempt to thrive in evil, while maintaining their personal agency. Although pathogenic possession is frequently linked to misfortune and malady, key findings show that a union with the Devil can be immorally liberating, empowering the wicked to proselytise profane cosmological views. Importantly, however, with little global demand for eternal damnation, this sacrilegious practice appears relatively unmarketable, and likely to remain at the periphery of more wholesome religious offerings.

Key Words: Demonology; Devil; Evil; Ethnography; Possession

'In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth… and… saw that it was good' (Genesis, 1.1-9). Yet, paradise was fleeting, as by Adam and Eve consuming the forbidden fruit, humanity fell from grace (Milton, 1996), and evil flourished throughout the universe (Kelly, 2006), at least as far as the faithful are concerned. With the Devil frequently being positioned as the architect of humanity's downfall and an ongoing source of temptation, it is hardly surprising that stories about this nefarious supernatural being have endured throughout the ages (McCraw, 2017). One area that continues to draw acute public concern is that of demonic possession, where the Devil invades an unsuspecting victim's mind and body, either pathogenically harming the individual, or executively taking over their thoughts and bodily functions (Bourguignon, 1976; Guthrie, 2017). While possession is often the focus of religious discourse, Hollywood movies, and a frightful topic for Halloween, it is increasingly recognised that little is known about individuals seeking positive outcomes from such experiences (Cohen, 2008), never mind through welcoming a fallen angel into their lives. As such, this study asks the thorny demonological question: *how do the diabolically inclined negotiate positive pathogenic possession?* (Rashed, 2018). To help answer this question, this ethnography considers the real or imagined experiences of several unholy acolytes working through their diabolical possession (Ozanne & Appau, 2019; Thomson, Wilson & Hoek, 2012). As a

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starting point, the literature review examines the nature of the Devil as a possessing agent in 'Get thee behind me Satan: explicating the Devil' before exploring the particularly troublesome issue of 'making sense of an evil self'. Following this, the ethnographic methodology is detailed, alongside the discussion and conclusions, highlighting contributions to the literature, and suggestions for further research.

Get thee behind me Satan: explicating the Devil

It is difficult to find a culture that does not have a religious tale of an ancient evil (Carus, 2016), capable of possessing (un)willing humans (Frazer, 1911; Oesterreich, 1921). Within Christianity, there is no greater evil than the Devil (McCraw & Arp, 2017), who has several names including, Lucifer, Satan, Prince of Darkness, and Father of Lies (Ashley, 1986). He is '…[the] lord of this world… [displaying] a vast multitude of powers…' (Russell, 1987, p. 247) such as '…throw[ing] wicked thoughts into our minds' and influencing our behaviours (Chilcot, 2010, p. 118). Ontologically, the Devil is an incorporeal spirit (Aquinas, 1997) and fallen angel (McCraw & Arp, 2017), eschatologically working to oppose God (Kelly, 2006) through tempting us all into sin and eventually Hell (Gardiner, 1989; Matthewes, 2001). In keeping with his duplicitous nature, the Devil's tactics involve normalising evil, mimicking the divine (Beaudoin, 2007), and performing 'great signs and wonders' (Matthew 24, p. 3-5), while playing 'the loveliest trick… to persuade you that he does not exist!' (Baudelaire, 2017, p. 1). Curiously, for a pivotal religious character, the Devil receives relatively little attention within the Bible (Maxwell-Stuart, 2011), meaning that most of what we know about his personality and behaviour is more likely to come from cultural depictions (Brown, 2011; Milton, 1996) rather than Scripture (McCraw & Arp, 2016). As such, and within this historic hotchpotch of diabolical depictions, we see the Devil described as beautiful and hideous, with or without wings, timeless, shapeshifting, but in nearly all cases, having an evil intellect superior to humanity (Surin, 1986). Critically, though, not all portrayals of the Devil are negative (Kelly, 2006), with the latter part of the last millennium suggesting that the Devil might be better considered an anti-hero and rebel committed to helping humanity escape divine domination (Milton, 1996; Surin, 1986).

Being an immaterial spirit, the Devil must possess a human host to meaningfully engage with the physical world (Ferber, 2004; Oldridge, 2019; Resseguie, 2005). This has typically been through pathogenic or executive possession, with the former generally harming the individual's physical and mental wellbeing, whereas the latter takes over the host's mental and bodily functions, while often eviscerating their sense of self (Cohen, 2008; Rashed, 2020). In both cases, the possessed can be left struggling with their day-

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to-day lives, and trying to avoid sacred signs, words, and objects (Katajala-Peltomaa & Niiranen, 2014; Russell, 1986). At the heart of diabolical possession is the goal of frustrating God's plan for the cosmos by invoking cruelty, spite, and malice (Russell, 1988). While there is much debate about how the Devil possesses a human body (Lewis, 2003), the historic view is that evil spirits can be accidentally consumed (de Vitry, 2015), or that the Devil can force entry through a bodily orifice (Elliot, 1999). In both ways, the possessed have often been considered innocent victims (Katajala-Peltomaa & Niiranen, 2014), and while it is generally believed that demons cannot penetrate the soul, they debase their hosts' minds and bodies, and in so doing, lead them into spiritual darkness (Dawe, 1963; Sandu & Caras, 2014).

Although cutting against popular cultural stereotypes, there is a growing argument that demonic possession can be advantageous, at least in a minor number of cases, allowing individuals to explore who they are, while seeking preferred psychological outcomes (Cohen, 2008; Huskinson, 2010). Coupled with this, is the rarer suggestion that possessions can trigger 'heightened capacities and powers' for the hosts, with much debate about whether these experiences might be more magical or mundane in nature (Rashed, 2000, p. 365). Through a Christian lens, it is possible to view the Devil as a metaphysical opposite of the Holy Spirit, providing dark spiritual 'fruits' for those willing to commit to evil. Functionally, and as we will come to see, pathogenic possession is an opportunity for the malevolent to renegotiate their cognitive and embodied limits within an evil existence.

Finally, although many may find the notion of the Devil and demonic possession indicative of delusion or charlatanism (Frazer, 1911; Johnson, 2017), we should remember that beliefs in the Devil have been relatively constant throughout history (Baker, 2008), and that 18 % of the UK are currently convinced that the Devil is real (Jordan, 2013). Furthermore, when we consider that 1 % of the UK routinely speak to spirits (Glanville, 2018), and that supernatural experiences are increasingly common (Waldstein, 2019), and sought after (Luhrmann, 2012), it would be myopic to relegate otherworldly beings to a bygone era. As such, you are invited to suspend disbelief, or at least consider the demonic reality of the participants, who view the Devil as the literal source of evil, and rightful sinful ruler of this world (Corinthians, 2. 4:4).

Making Sense of an Evil Self

To live in the world is to know evil, either as something that befalls us or something we facilitate, and it usually occurs through natural disasters, illness, death, pain, deception, violence, or immorality (Arendt, 2006). Why evil exists within the cosmos is typically

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addressed through moral philosophy and/or theology (Surin, 1986), with ongoing debates about whether evil is the work of the Devil, disobedience to God's will, or just an unfortunate metaphysical consequence of how this less than perfect universe works (Meister & Dew, 2011). Theologically, evil arises as we move away from God's grace and goodness (Chiang, 2016), corrupting who we are and negatively skewing our sense of ourselves and the world (Augustine, 1992). Critically, the Devil is often viewed as the driving force behind much, if not all the evil in the world, and worryingly for those who spend a lifetime enacting evil, there is an afterlife in Hell awaiting them (Dante, 2012). While some struggle to believe that a good God would allow evil to exist in this universe (Kane, 1980), it can be argued that evil is a logical necessity (Russell, 1988), giving humanity the moral freedom to explore who we are in relation to God and the Devil (Augustine, 1992; Hick, 2010).

How we make sense of ourselves within a mundane or supernatural universe is of course a critical issue, negotiated through our cultural norms, what we think is possible, plausible, and just as importantly, desirable (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p.11). This process is known as identity work, where we ask ourselves who we metaphysically want, and do not want to be (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Fisher, 1989; Snell, 2002; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). As Messeri (2021, p. 340) argued, even fantasy can be 'incorporated into [our] knowledge systems' and become a cornerstone for what we believe. Consequently, what we say, think, and listen to are crucial parts of how we understand ourselves and our place in the cosmos (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Mikkelsen, 2013). For the religiously devout, what is real is often a matter of faith (Lewis, 1964), with preferred personal and doctrinal views holding more epistemological weight than sensory ways of knowing (Ellis & Hopkinson, 2010, p. 414). It is not uncommon, however, for secular-materialist perspectives to jostle with supernatural beliefs, and for both to undermine each other (Curry, 1999; Lindeman & Aarnio, 2007; Macy, 2005). Importantly, though, within this ongoing journey of self, we have variable degrees of agency (Watson, 2008; Wright, Nyberg & Grant, 2012), which oscillate in relation to the people we meet, and cultures we exist within (Essers & Benschop, 2007; Pratt, 1998). As might be expected, who we claim to be tends to be critical, particularly within religious life (Coşgel & Minkler, 2004), with those plausibly arguing that they can access esoteric knowledge, speak to spirits, and transform themselves being able to exert considerable power over those who cannot (Luhrmann et al., 2010; Purchase et al., 2018). Finally, the religious choices we make about ourselves are not necessarily free from public critique, as worshipping the Devil, for example, is likely to invite stigmatisation and othering (McCraw & Arp, 2017).

Methodology

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This six-month hybrid ethnography (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) arose from my having spent over a decade engaging in supernatural communities, where I became aware that demonic acolytes were trying to transform their identities via communing with the Devil to spread a personalised doctrine of sin. Importantly, such proselytising was not through formalised church structures or doctrines, but rather through the participants acting as lone 'preachers'. With little known about this issue, this study was undertaken to answer the research question: *how do the diabolically inclined negotiate positive pathogenic possession*? Drawing on my contacts from within these communities, I was able to position myself as a seasoned and trusted insider (Layton, 1988; McCracken, 1998), which brought me into contact with seven UK-based individuals claiming to be positively possessed by the Devil. Table 1 shows the pragmatic, purposeful and anonymised sample that this study was built around (Wengraf, 2004).

Participant characteristics	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Gender:		
Male	5	71
Female	2	29
Age (years):		
18-30	2	29
31-40	2	29
41-50	3	42
Education		
School	1	14
Bachelor's degree	4	57
Master's and above	2	29
Religion		
Devil worship	7	100
Satanist	0	0
Previous religion		
Christianity	7	100
Other	0	0
Cultural Christian		
Yes	7	100
No	0	0
Motivation		
Rejection of God	7	100
Moral freedom	7	100
Supernatural power	7	100
Mundane power	7	100
To embrace evil	7	100

Table 1 – Participant information.

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Examining Table 1 we see the sample fitting reasonably well with the average profile of being well educated religious evangelists (Margalit, 2004). Intriguingly, though, while this sample is predominantly male, it must be noted that women are more likely to claim to be possessed by spirits, which contradicts this sample's demographic (Cohen, 2007). Importantly, while no participant overtly identified as a priest, there was an ongoing discussion about whether this identity might be embraced in the future.

With this sample growing up in the UK, all participants were considered cultural Christians, having received this form of instruction within their schools and churches (Bialecki, Haynes & Robbins, 2008; Moffat & Yoo, 2019). While this might seem a strange stance for those who worship the Devil, we should remember that knowledge of the supernatural tends to be constrained and shaped by the cultures individuals exist within (Luhrmann et al., 2010), which typically influences the sense made and identities claimed (Dean, 2019). Finally, and while popular culture may erroneously depict Satanists as Devil worshippers (Hill, 2007), this sample is not Satanic, as Satanists rarely believe the Devil is real (Harvey, 1995), and instead, tend to be secular atheists (Taub & Nelson, 1993).

Fieldwork and Data Collection

After securing access to this sample, I spent approximately six months interacting with these seven individuals via a hybrid ethnography, using participant observation, including semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and participant storytelling (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; McCracken, 1988; Schouten, McAlexander & Koenig, 2007). Importantly, these individuals did not know each other, meaning that most of my time was spent interacting with this sample on a one-to-one basis throughout their daily lives, including diabolical prayer, worship, and religious marketing. To help answer the research question, data was also collected by a VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) ethnography, using Skype, WhatsApp, e-mail, text, and phone (Fetterman, 2010; Iacono, Symonds & Brown, 2016), to allow the participants to speak whenever they felt inclined to do so. Although I attended ritualistic worship, prayer, and celebrations, I was not required to worship the Devil. While this might have created distance and hindered the research findings, this appeared not to be the case, as having a background in demonology, I was granted a high-level of access and welcome.

The variety of data collection approaches was considered critical for being able to explore the fine-grain processes of positive possession (Reissman, 2008). This led to over 800 pages of field notes, alongside over 1,000 pages of transcripts, based on 85 direct interviews, and 332 informal conversations. The mean number of words recorded per participant was just over 11,000, split between all forms of data collection. While the

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primary focus of data collection was on utterances, attention was also paid to recording intonations, body language, and the context of interactions, alongside potential meanings in relation to my experiences with the participants and the extant literature. Finally, all participants only spoke as themselves, and rejected that the Devil spoke through them.

Working the Data

After the data was collected, it was read several times before being transcribed, with further comments added from memory where appropriate (Lindlof, 1995). To aid the robustness of this process and my sensitisation to emerging themes (Goodier & Eisenberg, 2006), the data was analysed immediately after collection, again after three months, and then finally after seven months (Spiggle, 1994). The first stage of analysis sought to categorise units of meaning via content analysis, with codes changed, added, or removed as necessary (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Spiggle, 1994), supported by my emic and etic experiences (Kottak, 2006). Following this, discourse analysis was undertaken (Wood & Kroger, 2000), which allowed a greater focus on abstraction, to elucidate the participant's discursive resources to erode or concretise notions of reality, particularly in relation to sense and self (Foucault, 1974). Throughout this time, I remained acutely aware of the need to engage in 'reflexive pragmatism' (Alvesson, 2003, p.14), which was carried out by using written vignettes to explore competing religious interpretations (Humphreys, 2005). Findings were validated using within method triangulation (Denzin, 1970), and were also shown to the participants via a summary report, followed by face-to-face meetings to discuss research outcomes (Aitken & Campelo, 2011). Finally, peer debriefing was undertaken to help the participants become stakeholders within knowledge generation and management (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

Although the Devil is an infamous religious character, relatively little is known about those who seek to embrace His Infernal Majesty through positive pathogenic possession. As such, this ethnography attempted to address this issue by examining the participant motivations for 'being called into evil', before exploring the thornier issues of 'developing a diabolical identity: being demonically possessed'. Finally, attention is paid to the challenge of 'proselytising an unholy religion' within a hyper competitive religious marketplace.

Being Called into Evil

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When we consider that both popular culture and the Bible depict an eternity of suffering for those who follow the Devil's profane teachings, we might wonder what motivated these participants to consciously walk a path of evil. Within itself, this is an intriguing moral and eschatological question, particularly when we see that the participants had not sought evil in the abstract but rather through a direct embodied union with the Devil, i.e., via positive pathogenic possession. Helping us start to understand this damnable attraction to the Devil, David said:

> I hated being Christian as a boy. For years, I had to learn about God in church and school. I mean I always believed in God and still do, but I don't think God should be worshipped. Have you ever read the Bible? How can anyone want to follow those teachings? Be poor. Give up power. No lust. How can anyone want to live like that? Think about it, what life does a Christian really have? They are slaves to God, impoverished for life. Trying to be good. Humanity should reject this. [Pause]. Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit liberated us. The Devil freed us from divine slavery. Made us think. Gave us choices. [Pause]. Even as a child I recognised the value in lies and cheating. This is how you move forward in life. I've always been hungry for money and power. Mmm, a fast car, big house, and perfect health. D'you hear me on this? Sin equals freedom. Our gift from Adam and Eve. [Pause]. Ah, but I didn't just want physical stuff. I wanted to be smarter. Have true power, and you get this from evil. [Pause]. Being good would only get in my way. Having been a Christian, I knew the Devil was my route to everything I wanted. [Pause]. The Devil is my saviour.

Although the presence of evil is well known for undermining beliefs in the existence of God, this sample appeared to have little doubt that God is real. Having said this, no participant sought to worship God, or bind themselves to the Christian doctrine, and instead, argued that God's law is oppressive, and removes humanity's freedom to enjoy the (im)moral pleasures of the mind and flesh. This was particularly noticeable from all participants malevolently seeking to enhance their power, intellect, and social status through the Devil. As such, this sample's desires for evil were hardly a 'motiveless malignity' (Coleridge, 1987, p. 315), but rather, an attempt to step beyond the perceived limitations of goodness and embrace new diabolic ways of being in this world and beyond. Critically, however, this sample remained culturally Christian, selectively mixing Scriptural knowledge with popular cultural resources to support their preferred views of the Devil, and themselves. Most striking, was the belief that the Devil should be reframed

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as a malevolent anti-hero working to liberate the cosmos. Intriguingly, though, when we consider that Divine eternal punishment supposedly awaits those willing to stray from the light, we might question if there was any fear of retribution in the afterlife. Commenting on this matter Stuart argued:

> Most people say that worshipping the Devil leads to an eternity in Hell. [Pause]. The big question is, do I think I'm going to Hell? [Laughs]. Absolutely yes! [Exclaims]. I know I'm going to Hell. But I won't be tortured. [Pause]. Mmm, I don't want to go to Heaven. Why would I? Spend forever bowing and scraping to God. Have you thought about what happens if you go to Heaven? No freedom there at all. If you read The Divine Comedy [Dante, 2012], you will see there are many layers of Hell. And one of them is pretty good. Kind of like here actually. [Earth]. And do you know what? I get to be me forever. If I go to Heaven, I'd be transformed, changed, forced to abandon my hatred, pain, and sexuality. This bad stuff is what makes me who I am. So, I want the Devil to increase my mortal pleasure and give me a dark paradise in Hell. [Pause]. I'd always dreamt of the Devil. [Pause]. It was like he was beckoning me. Wanting me to join with him. Thoughts kept popping in my head that if I let him into my life, he'd give me power and riches forever, like in that play. [Possible reference to Marlowe's Faustus (2010)]. I'd always believed in the Devil. Had prayed to him. Begged him to appear. [Pause]. Then one day Lucifer said: "What I promised Jesus, I now promise you. All this I will give you…if you will bow down and worship me" [a partial rephrasing of the Devil's temptation of Christ in the desert (Matthew 4. 1-11)]. Hearing this, I welcomed him. My unwavering faith and desire helped me believe all of this was true.

While claiming to be called into a religious life by a spirit is not uncommon, such otherworldly experiences tend to orientate individuals towards Heaven rather than Hell. Even though Hell is certainly an unusual eschatological preference, it was clear that all participants feared God's forgiveness and the subsequent loss of their dearly held malign natures should they go to Heaven. At the heart of this issue was the intense belief that the Devil is willing to negotiate various aspects of this life and the next, whereas God's laws for humanity are absolute. Examining why the participants thought this way revealed a rich variety of 'cherry picked' theological and cultural beliefs used to support preferred views that parts of Hell are akin to life on Earth, allowing the potential for social elevation and intense immoral pleasure. Finally, although religious beliefs and experiences can easily create a knot of epistemological tensions about what is real in this world and the

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next, this sample seemed to sidestep this issue by embracing fideism, and in so doing, proceeded to develop their diabolical notions of self.

Developing a Diabolical Identity: Being Demonically Possessed

The idea that humans and spirits can interact on this material plane spans at least several thousand years, with the common suggestion being that the Devil can occupy our bodies and minds, and as such, corrupt how we view ourselves and the world around us. With a poverty of understanding about the process of positive pathogenic possession, this section explores how the participants negotiated this unholy form of identity work. Detailing the salient parts of her experience, Daisy said:

> There are some things that everyone knows. Spirits aren't physical and you can't really see them in this world. The Devil is the same. Everyone knows he needs a body to live here. Lots of people say this online. I read it all. [Pause]. Having felt his dark presence my entire life, I knew I wanted to join with him properly. Mmm, I was nervous though. As the last thing I wanted was to be hollowed out, and to lose self-control of myself. [Reference to executive possession]. I've watched the movies; seen how he can rip a human apart. Use them as a puppet and destroy their life. Make them sick. [Reference to negative pathogenic possession]. I've also seen how he can empower, give spectacular powers and gifts. You know, the Bible talks about the transformative power of God. I did the other version with the Devil. [Pause]. I can't explain this very well, but it felt like a darkness spreading over me as the months passed by. It was incredible. I'd never felt so free. Every day was an opportunity to re-examine who I was. Not many people get to be who they want to be and see the world through new fallen eyes. So, I've been burning away the last bits of goodness in me ever since. Don't get me wrong, I never sold my soul to him. It's more a partnership. I wear him like an evil cloak. He is like a wicked liquid flowing through me. We both get what we want.

Such statements show how this sample had sought to move beyond wishful supernatural thinking to committing themselves to experiencing the Devil's presence within their minds and bodies, albeit in a personally controlled way. Importantly, there was no complex epistemological negotiation of diabolical fact from fiction within any of their possessions, only an unshakeable faith in what the participants wanted to be true. Furthermore, with so much of the possessive process taking place within the participants, it was almost impossible to validate any otherworldly claim, which was compounded by the participants

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often struggling to meaningfully articulate the philosophical basis of their otherworldly experiences. Yet, this seemed to suit the participants well, as a limited understanding of the universe was frequently linked to the Devil's powers being backgrounded within their lives, in turn seemingly leaving the participants with greater control over their minds and bodies. Intriguingly, though, this self-regulated form of possession continually provided opportunities to explore this sample's malevolent identity work, as Sam commented:

> In a way, I've been born again. Am becoming who I want to be. From what I've seen and feel so far, this will continue forever. As far as I see it, we live our lives, between God and the Devil. Every act we take, every thought we make connects us to one and disconnects us from the other. And eventually takes us to Heaven or Hell. [Pause]. To maintain that spiritual link to the Devil, I have rejected goodness, God, and Heaven. The thing is, good and evil are fundamental forces, changing our bodies and minds. [Pause]. Even a drop of good can damage my link to the Devil. Might remove him from my life altogether if I'm not careful. [Pause]. So, I started small, rejecting anything I saw as good or Godly. Always reminding myself that being human is a fall from grace. Rejecting God at every stage. Serving my own needs above all others. Slowly, I started to feel different. Felt evil in me. I'd never felt like this before. It was like I was developing a new way of looking at everything. I am coming home to my true nature as a human being. Sin is power. I want to be smarter, better in every way. Without being controlled by him. [The Devil].

We thus come to see human nature oscillating between God and the Devil, driven by ongoing acts of (im)morality, with diabolical identity work continually orientating the spiritually fallen further towards Hell. Through this lens, goodness is a stumbling block to better embracing the darkness within, and to further joining with the Devil. Consequently, it was hardly surprising that the participants sought to annihilate all types of goodness within their lives, frequently fearing further contamination from this undesirable state of being. Trying to better understand how the participants nurtured their evil selves, there was little to suggest that any individual engaged in any wicked behaviours beyond condemning the notion of goodness and trying to subvert the wider world to reject God in favour of the Devil. While certainly a classical theodic perspective, the participants often struggled with how they could achieve greater diabolical power without ceding more of their self-control to the Devil. Problematically, this issue was rarely helped by limited cultural discourses on the mechanics of how to meaningfully negotiate positive pathogenic possession.

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Drawing this area to a close, the following section examines how the participants felt compelled to serve the Devil as a condition of their positive pathogenic possession.

Proselytising an Unholy Religion

Reminding ourselves that the Devil is a much-maligned cultural character, typically dismissed as a mere metaphor, or the actual source of all evil in the universe, it is hardly surprising that there continues to be little religious interest in worshipping this real or imagined fallen angel. Intriguingly though, even against this troublesome cultural backdrop, this sample attempted to act as diabolical 'evangelists', promising unholy rewards and an eternity in Hell for all those willing to bow to their Dark Lord. Commenting on the desire to engage in this profane proselytising process, David said:

> All true believers like me must spread their faith. [Pause]. God's churches are everywhere, but none for the big guy in red [the Devil]. Satanists don't count as they don't even believe in Lucifer. [Pause]. I don't have a church. One day perhaps. [Pause]. In the meantime, I'm happy to be a fisher of men [paraphrasing the Gospel of Matthew 4:19]. [Pause]. The reality is that this is all part of my deal with Lucifer. Collect souls. Fill Hell up. Prove God is wrong by any means. Prove people love the flesh more than God's love. Demonstrate that we are all beyond God's salvation. But more than anything, show who Lucifer really is. Our saviour. Helping us live our lives sinfully as proper humans. Throwing away God's restrictive plan. No small challenge though. Mmm, should I fail, Lucifer will abandon me, and torture me for all time. Get on the wrong side of him and things end very badly. Problem is, nobody wants him. Not when they hear they will end up in Hell.

Listening to the sample speak, positive pathogenic possession kept the participants beholden to the Devil, particularly his wish for the sample to 'harvest enough souls'. As might be expected, this was an acute issue, especially when we consider that raising the ire of the Devil could leave this sample suffering within the bowels of Hell for all eternity. Having said this, each participant seemed to understand that selling the Devil as a method of acquiring souls was likely to remain a Sisyphean task, due to His Infernal Majesty's pervasive negative publicity. More bluntly, that few would seek an afterlife in the Inferno, irrespective of how 'temptingly' it was framed. Taking a broader demonological approach however, the participants showed little sign of being myopic malevolent marketers, and reflexively shifted their proselytising to duplicitously selling evil rather than the Devil. Although we might therefore view the participants as inadequate diabolical

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marketers, this change in strategy seems to fit well with the Devil being the Father of Lies, and covertly seducing humanity into satisfying debased needs, as Steve discussed:

> Preaching about the Devil is tricky. Let me be honest. [Laughs]. If I do this, everyone calls me mad, a liar, or a fraud. Half the people think I'm completely bananas. [Pause]. Everyone demands solid proof. To see my magic. To see what riches the Devil gave me. And I can't show them, as I can't do these things yet. I'm sure I'll do it soon but not yet. [Pause]. I used to think it would be easier if the Devil would take over my body and speak for me. But then I wouldn't be me, would I? [Pause]. In the end I came to see that I don't need to sell him. People are afraid of him. Don't trust him. They've watched too many movies and think Hell is a bad place. Better to sell his beliefs, which is far easier. [Pause]. The Devil gets what he wants by me turning people away from God. Let me explain. I can tempt people into evil all day long if I don't use the words Devil or evil. People love to be evil, love to do evil, just don't want to admit it. We lack the courage to do it openly. Ah, but sneakily, now there is something. [Pause]. Virtually nobody wants to worship the Devil. Most can't grasp that the Devil is here to free us from God's plan. Wants to help us live freely, outside of morality. Under his rulership. Anyway, as long as I damage faith in God, and entice people to sin, the Devil gets them anyway, and I get what I want forever.

While there appeared to be little public interest in the Devil as a source of dark salvation or personal transformation, the participants frequently argued that they experienced much greater success in tactically turning the public away from God towards a broader path of evil. Having said this, while sin may be pleasurable, few wished to advertise their evil proclivities, fearing social ostracisation and stigmatisation, especially if linked to the Devil. It is worth reflecting, therefore, that although backgrounding the Devil within day-to-day preaching might increase the number of 'converts' to evil in an abstract sense, it seems unlikely to expand this age-old demonic religion's congregation size. As such, we should ruminate at length on the sustainability of Devil worship as a religious practice, particularly when it is rejected and mocked by nearly all members of the public.

Discussion and Conclusions

For thousands of years, the religiously inclined have sought to embed the otherworldly into their daily mundane lives, leaving ongoing debates about whether we might better consider such supernatural experiences fact or fiction. While intense scrutiny has been

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paid to a myriad of phantasmagorical phenomena, there is still a poverty of understanding about human-spirit interactions (Cohen, 2007; Luhrmann, 2012), particularly those involving diabolical possession. This is a critical issue when we consider that possession has been the main vehicle for incorporeal demons to interact with humanity, either executively taking control of a host's body or pathogenically inducing negative embodied states, i.e., disease and misfortune (Cohen, 2007). Yet, more recent thinking suggest that possession can facilitate new 'positive' ways of being. Consequently, this unholy ethnography embraced the profane, and asked: *how do the diabolically inclined negotiate positive pathogenic possession?* It is worth saying, however, that while it is possible to dismiss the Devil as nothing more than a religious tall tale (Thomson, Wilson & Hoek, 2012), that beliefs in the Dark Lord still pervade the religious mind, irrespective of whether they are real or imagined (Jordan, 2013).

Although being called into a new religious life is not uncommon, such experiences tend to be driven more by the Divine than the Devil (Nel & Scholtz, 2016). While there is little extant data underpinning why this is the case, it seems likely that the Devil tends to be considered cruel, untrustworthy, and committed to hurting humanity, thus making him a dubious eschatological choice (Dante, 2012; Marlowe, 2010; McCraw & Arp, 2016). How the participants consequently came to crave this fallen angel was of course an acute issue, particularly when we consider that the Devil is ubiquitously regarded as a supernatural being best avoided. Yet, for the participants, the overarching goal was to reject God in favour of the Devil, and in so doing, achieve vast diabolical pleasures throughout this life and the next (Chiang, 2016; Hick, 2010). For this sample, this was hardly an unmet ethereal aspiration, as all claimed to have heard the Devil's wicked voice within their minds, promising an eternity of dark rewards providing they would host His Infernal Majesty via possession (Gardiner, 1989). However, without a defined demonic doctrine, the participants were left navigating a relatively unknown religious form of evil, trying to scaffold new beliefs from ancient Christian teachings of the Devil (Bialecki, Haynes & Robbins, 2008; Moffat & Yoo, 2019), reimagined through personal preferences for what might be true. Critically, therefore, while Christianity is viewed as 'an expansive science of the cosmos', where 'everything is explained in Christ's person' (Florovsky**,** 1978, p. 216-217), the participants reversed this model to make sense of all Creation and themselves through the Devil.

In keeping with popular culture and Scriptural depictions, the Devil was ontologically positioned as an immaterial fallen angel (Ramm, 1959), and while argued as having remarkable otherworldly powers (Russell, 1986), the participants seemed unable to meaningfully draw on any of them during this study. For the participants this was a thorny issue, as while all had sought positive pathogenic possession as a means of personal

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empowerment, they were aware of the dangers of possession (Cohen, 2008), and consequently sought to limit the Devil's power over their agency and (im)material selves. Having said this, all participants remained committed to achieving their preferred evil identities (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), by rejecting God, and embracing the Devil as an evil catalyst to further concretise their evil sense and self-making (McCraw & Arp, 2017). With no evidence to suggest any meaningful wrongdoing on the part of the participants beyond frustrating God's plan for humanity, it is possible to embed this sample's notion of evil within a quasi-Augustinian perspective where evil is simply the privation of God's goodness (Matthewes, 2001).

Finally, emphasising that Devil worship has commonly been viewed as eschatologically problematic for thousands of years, it seems fair to say that spreading this ancient form of religion was always likely to be a fraught and generally unsuccessful act (Jordan, 2013). As might be expected, the participants found it almost impossible for their diabolical proselytising to be taken seriously by a public that considers the Dark Lord as unreal, or the cause of all humanity's suffering (Ashley, 1986; Marlowe, 2010). Thus, while frequent attempts were made to rebrand the Devil as a salvific figure (Milton, 1996; Surin, 1986), such claims typically lacked cultural and religious plausibility, triggering widescale public rejection. This was further impeded by the sample failing to demonstrate any personal diabolical powers (McCraw & Arp, 2016), which usually led to the participants being labelled as delusional and charlatans (Frazer, 1911; Johnson, 2017). Yet, while marketing failures surrounding Devil worship were constant, the participants came to thrive in adopting 'false representations' of self (Hewlin, 2003, p. 634) and in duplicitously backgrounding their own faith to covertly seduce the public into committing Hell worthy thoughts and deeds (Beaudoin, 2007; Chilcot, 2010). Against this backdrop, a variety of demonic discursive tactics were operationalised, with the participants even denying the existence of the Devil, just to undermine faith in God as a supernatural being (Baudelaire, 2017). Not surprisingly, this shift in diabolical marketing was much more successful, as it turned on being able to induce doubt in the Divine, rather than the more troublesome task of signing up an unholy congregation. Problematically though, even if an efficacious approach for acquiring souls, it is hard to envisage how the participants could ever overcome the challenge of competing with more 'utopian' religious offerings. As such, it seems unlikely that this diabolical religion will move beyond being an underground practice of normalising sin.

Further Research

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As this ethnography progressed, it became increasingly clear that the participants were keen to develop a deeper metaphysical understanding of their diabolical experiences, and just as importantly, their longer-term religious goals. Consequently, with an invitation to extend this work, further research will explore three salient research gaps from this study. The first area to be considered is the communicative interaction between the participants and the Devil, i.e., how what is said influences the nature of positive pathogenic possession, if at all. While it is recognised that developing a mind capable of 'speaking' and 'listening' to spirits can take time, further research will attempt to capture this longitudinal linguistic and mental process in relation to shifts in participant agency, consciousness, behaviour, and desired eschatological outcomes (Luhrmann, 2012). The second area will move beyond the participants to explore the public experience of unholy marketing, explicitly examining why individuals adopt or reject the Devil or evil in the abstract or concrete (Rogers, 2003). Within itself, this line of investigation is likely to offer key insights into how individuals attempt to metaphysically negotiate malevolent evangelising against their extant cultural norms and beliefs. Finally, attention will be paid to how the participants increasingly attempt to systematise their religious beliefs and practices, and potentially renegotiate core aspects of their diabolical selves. This latter aspect may be critical if the participants fail to achieve their heavily desired (super)natural powers, and social stigmatisation continues.

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Kaja Franck, PhD., is a lecturer in English Literature at the University of Hertfordshire. Her thesis, part-funded through a studentship through the research project 'Open Graves, Open Minds', focused on the literary werewolf as an ecogothic monster. She has published on the depiction of wolves and werewolves in *Dracula* and Young Adult fiction. Most recently writing about werewolves, gender and race in *Ginger Snaps Back* for the *Gothic Studies* journal, on the wilderness in *Modern Gothic* (ed. Clive Bloom) and co-authoring a chapter on contemporary werewolves for *Twenty-First-Century Gothic* (eds Maisha Wester and Xavier Aldana Reyes). She is currently working on chapters looking at werewolf fiction and hybridity, and trolls, religion and ecohorror.

Jack Hunter, PhD., is an anthropologist exploring the borderlands of consciousness, religion, ecology and the paranormal. He is an Honorary Research Fellow with the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, and a tutor with the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, where he is lead tutor on the MA in Ecology and Spirituality and teaches on the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology. He is also a lecturer on the Alef Trust's MSc in Consciousness, Spirituality and Transpersonal Psychology. He is a Research Fellow with the Parapsychology Foundation, and a Professional Member of the Parapsychological Association. In 2010 he founded *Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal*. He is the author of *Ecology and Spirituality: A Brief Introduction* (2023), *Spirits, Gods and Magic* (2020) and *Manifesting Spirits* (2020), and is the editor of *Sacred Geography: Conversations with Place* (2024), *Deep Weird* (2023), *Folklore, People and Place* (2023), *Mattering the Invisible* (2020), *Greening the Paranormal* (2019), *Damned Facts* (2016), *Strange Dimensions* (2015), and *Talking with the Spirits* (2014). He lives in the hills of Mid-Wales with his family.

Bruce Peabody, PhD., is Professor of Government and Politics at Fairleigh Dickinson University. He is an editor and contributor to five books including *Short Stories and Political Philosophy: Power, Prose, and Persuasion* (Lexington 2019), *The Politics of Judicial Independence: Courts, Politics, and the Public* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011) and *Where Have all the Heroes Gone: Changing Conceptions of American Valor* (Oxford University Press, 2017). He has published dozens of scholarly articles and book chapters, short articles, academic book reviews, and publications written for a general audience. His work has been cited by or appeared in the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and many other general audience venues. In 2016, Prof. Peabody received the Outstanding Faculty Member Award from the FDU Student Government Association (an award he also won in 2012 and 2004). In 2012 Peabody received the Distinguished Faculty Award for Research and Scholarship from FDU and in 2004 he received the Becton College Teacher of the Year award from his faculty peers. Before joining FDU in 2000, Prof. Peabody served as an arms control lobbyist in Washington, D.C. For more information on Professor Peabody please go to https://bpeabody.wixsite.com/bgpeabody

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